PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 397

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

SECOND SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FIFTY-FIRST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 2002–03

COMPRISING PERIOD
7 January—16 January 2002

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ISBN 0 215 65026 3

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OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE SECOND SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 13 JUNE 2001]

FIFTY-FIRST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 397**

FOURTH VOLUME OF SESSION 2002–2003

House of Commons

Tuesday 7 January 2003

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

The Secretary of State was asked—

Scottish Boundary Commission

1. **Mr. Brian H. Donohoe** (Cunninghame, South): When she expects to announce the results of the Scottish boundary commission. [89136]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mrs. Helen Liddell): The commission is required to submit its report on the current parliamentary constituencies review before December 2006. It is a matter for the commission when, within that time scale, it does so.

Mr. Donohoe: May I take this opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to wish you and the whole House a peaceful and good new year? I have a specific, simple question for my right hon. Friend: does she expect to fight the next general election on the new boundaries?

Mrs. Liddell: The boundary commission has a long period in which to prepare its report—December 2006 is quite a long way off. That is largely because the old way of working meant that its task was a scissors-and-paste job, and putting together all the maps took considerable time, but nowadays, with modern software, that need not be the case. My guess is as good as my hon. Friend's. I anticipate that the commission could report much sooner than December 2006, but it may find that it needs longer to conclude its deliberations.

Mr. Peter Duncan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): The suspicion persists that the Secretary of State plans to delay implementation of the new constituencies, thus not only securing her own precarious position but offering a shady deal to silence the siren voices of those Members behind her who are furious about her decision with regard to the Scottish Parliament. Perhaps it is not only the First Minister who has been stitched up during the Christmas recess. Will the commission's report and the orders necessary to implement it be laid before the House in time for any general election in 2005 or 2006—yes or no?

Mrs. Liddell: The hon. Gentleman should listen; I just explained that the boundary commission does not have to report until 2006. He may choose to address his questions to that independent body. I should have thought that anyone on the Conservative Benches should be wary of talking about people being in a precarious position.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): I am sure that the Secretary of State's colleagues were looking for a great deal more comfort than she was able to provide in her reply. It sounds the death knell for many of her hon. Friends. Let me put the question a different way: does she believe that we will be contesting the next election on the new boundaries? Does she agree that the Scottish public will be appalled by her colleagues' cynical

behaviour and the naked self-interest that they are prepared to demonstrate to try to preserve their seats? The scramble for seats begins ahead of the next election.

Mrs. Liddell: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question and especially for his remarks during the recess, when he expressed anxiety that I may be campaigning for the return of a Labour-led Scottish Executive in Edinburgh. I confirm that I will be doing so.

In response to the hon. Gentleman's question, the boundary commission is completely independent, and it is up to the commission to decide when it reports. However, I make the point to the hon. Gentleman and other Members that at present the average size of a Scottish constituency is 55,000 electors, and the average size of an English constituency is 70,000, so there is clearly an imbalance.

National Minimum Wage

2. **Mrs. Irene Adams** (Paisley, North): How many people in Scotland benefit from the national minimum wage. [89137]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mrs. Anne McGuire): Some 110,000 people in Scotland have benefited from the national minimum wage since it was introduced in 1999.

Mrs. Adams: What further action is being taken by the Government to ensure that there is high awareness of the national minimum wage among employers and employees? Will my hon. Friend undertake to meet the Scottish Low Pay Unit, Citizens Advice Scotland and the Inland Revenue to ensure that all that can be done is being done?

Mrs. McGuire: I thank my hon. Friend for her question. I know that the Scottish Affairs Committee, which she chairs, is looking to investigate home working and the minimum wage. Both the Department for Trade and Industry and the Inland Revenue are being evangelical about the minimum wage. My hon. Friend will be delighted, as I hope will the House, to hear that at the end of this month a pilot project will be launched in Scotland, in partnership with Citizens Advice Scotland, the Scottish Low Pay Unit and the Inland Revenue, to make sure not only that there is compliance but that individual workers know what their rights are.

John Thurso (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): Is the Minister aware that one in 15 Scots workers who benefit from the minimum wage are under 21 and consequently on a lower rate? Given the success of the minimum wage, is it not now time to end that discrimination and give those 7,000 young Scots workers equal pay for an equal job?

Mrs. McGuire: If I recollect the Liberal Democrats' position on the national minimum wage correctly, they were not particularly in favour of it at the time. I welcome their conversion. On younger workers, as the hon. Gentleman is aware, there is a clear direction that they should be looking at training and educational opportunities. We have gone along with the widely held view that to introduce an adult rate before the age of 21 would be counter-productive, given the other priorities that young people have to pursue.

Mr. Frank Roy (Motherwell and Wishaw): While I recognise that the national minimum wage has done enormous good for Scottish workers, is the Minister aware that a report published this week says that those same workers have faced assaults and threats in a third of Scottish work places? When she next meets trade unions and employers, will she undertake to bring up that very serious subject? Surely it is not right that people should feel threatened and intimidated while they strive to earn a living.

Mrs. McGuire: I thank my hon. Friend for making that particularly important point. He is quite right—no worker should feel threatened and intimidated either going to work or while at work. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I will seek to raise the matter when we next meet the Scottish Trades Union Congress and employers' organisations.

Scotland Act

3. **Mr. Desmond Swayne** (New Forest, West): When she proposes to bring forward legislation to amend the Scotland Act 1998 in respect of the size of the Scottish Parliament. [89138]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mrs. Helen Liddell): I shall seek agreement to introduce legislation as soon as parliamentary time allows.

Mr. Swayne: How many indications of support has the Secretary of State had for her proposals from Labour Back Benchers?

Mrs. Liddell: Of the replies to the consultation exercise that I undertook, there were 18 responses from hon. Members, six of which opposed the proposals—it was basically 2:1. Indeed, let me point out that the Labour party, the Co-operative party and the Scottish trade union movement all agree with my position. Only the Scottish Conservative party has stood against the proposals.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): Does the Secretary of State agree that it is ludicrous that the House should determine the size of the Scottish Parliament? Will she undertake that, in the Bill on the matter, there will be provision to transfer that power to the Scottish Parliament so that in future it can determine its appropriate size?

Mrs. Liddell: No.

Fishing Industry

4. **Sir Archy Kirkwood** (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): What plans she has to provide financial support for coastal communities affected by the reduction of fishing effort in the North sea. [89139]

8. **Mr. Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland): If she will make a statement on the Scottish fishing industry. [89143]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mrs. Helen Liddell): The Government are committed to protecting the interests of the UK fishing industry. A large part of the industry has depended on fish species whose stocks have been in decline, and this has necessitated some difficult decisions on future fishing effort. The decisions taken by the European Union's Agriculture and Fisheries Council in Brussels last month will be reported to the House shortly by the fisheries Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley).

The Government and the Scottish Executive are considering what help the industry may need to adjust to the new limits on fishing effort, and what additional help may be needed by fishing-dependent communities. As the hon. Gentlemen know, such decisions in Scotland are for the Scottish Executive.

Sir Archy Kirkwood: I am grateful for that important answer. Will the Secretary of State personally support an approach to Treasury Ministers to try to secure a new emergency package of short-term relief on the grounds that, over the next three to six months—the cuts will be introduced in February—trying to maintain some kind of stability in the fishing industry will be difficult until a package of decommissioning can be negotiated with it?

Mrs. Liddell: Before I reply to the hon. Gentleman, may I take the opportunity on behalf, I am sure, of the whole House, to congratulate him on his recent knighthood. All of us who have benefited from his interest in parliamentary matters have much to be grateful for. He has also comprehensively upstaged everybody who had a 30th wedding anniversary last year.

To return to the substantive point, the hon. Gentleman should be aware that at the highest levels of Government there is considerable discussion about the kind of assistance that can be given to fishing communities and how we should deal with the next six months. The new arrangements will be introduced on 1 February, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman shares my view that it is essential that there is no posturing on these matters. There must be a serious effort to address the fishing communties' difficulties to ensure their long-term viability and to safeguard the industry for the future.

Mr. Carmichael: May I welcome everything that the right hon. Lady said about Government support for the fishing industry? I hope that she will impress on her right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer the need to put money where the Government's mouth is. That money needs to go from the UK Treasury to the Scottish Executive, who can spend it in conjunction with the Scottish fishing industry not just on decommissioning, if that is considered necessary, but on other options including funded tie-up schemes.

Mrs. Liddell: On the final point, there is considerable debate about funded tie-up schemes. It is anticipated that restoring stocks to the North sea will take a considerable time. There must be serious analysis of decommissioning *v.* funded tie-ups, but I can assure the hon. Gentleman and his constituents that at the highest levels of government, considerable attention is being devoted to those matters. The situation is serious and there are no simple answers. The Government are determined to do what we can to assist the fishing communities.

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen, South): Does my right hon. Friend agree with the statement in *The Scotsman* today by George MacRae, secretary of the Scottish White Fish Producers Association? He said:

"The industry has to deal with the stark reality of the result of the Brussels talks, be pragmatic and continue to work with government to improve the lot of the fishermen".

Does my hon. Friend also agree that the finger-pointing and name-calling must stop? The only way that we will achieve a future for Scottish fishermen and the fish processors in my constituency is if the Government, the industry and the Scottish Executive all work together to make sure that there is a future for fishermen in Scotland.

Mrs. Liddell: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I read with great interest the comments of Mr. George MacRae this morning. He also said that while arguments about blame are inevitable to enable politicians to score points off each other, particularly in the lead-up to the 2003 elections, they will achieve nothing to help the industry. That is an extremely important point. There is a real need for people to work together to protect the fishing communities. I draw to my hon. Friend's attention the comments of Hamish Morrison, who said:

"The Archangel Gabriel could not have negotiated a better deal"

for the fishing industry.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): My right hon. Friend is well aware of the deep concern in the fishing industry, among both catchers and processors, and in their dependent communities. Will she seek urgent talks with the Prime Minister and the First Minister to consider what practical assistance can be given?

Mrs. Liddell: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Discussions are already planned not just with the Prime Minister and the First Minister, but with representatives of the fishing communities. We share Mr. MacRae's view that it is important that we all pull together to ensure the best possible outcome for the future.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I am glad that the Secretary of State supports the views of the Scottish White Fish Producers Association, which just two days ago called for the resignation of the UK fisheries Minister. Can the Secretary of State explain how the fisheries Minister could have signed a deal that allows a fleet—the most conservation-minded fleet, fishing with 120mm mesh—nine days fishing, according to the Council regulation, while the Danish industrial fleet, fishing exactly the same waters, is allowed 23 days' fishing with hairnet mesh that destroys everything in its path? Will the proposed aid package try to protect and

preserve the fishing fleet and the fishing communities that depend on it, or will it merely try to run down the industry even further than it has been run down already?

Mrs. Liddell: The hon. Gentleman does not help the cause of the fishermen. He is the man who called the European Fisheries Commissioner a thug and an ignoramus. Is that supposed to help us in our negotiations? The Danish fishing community has also been badly affected by the measures. We are well aware of the difficulties that all the North sea fishing communities face. *[Interruption.]* I wish the hon. Gentleman would stop posturing. It is important that we deal with the facts. All the decommissioning efforts being undertaken by the fishing communities in the north-east of Scotland have been taken into account in the negotiations. I remind the hon. Gentleman that we started off from a position where, come 1 January, we would have seen a total ban on fisheries in the North sea. *[Interruption.]* The proposal then was seven days of fishing per month—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman asked a question. The Secretary of State is entitled to reply.

Mrs. Liddell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The initial proposals were that fishing in the North sea would have been stopped as of now. The next proposal was for seven days of fishing per month. Now we have managed to negotiate 15 days. All that is a considerable improvement, but all the posturing in the world from the hon. Gentleman will not put one more fish into the North sea.

Jim Sheridan (West Renfrewshire): My right hon. Friend will be aware of the recent announcement by Fullerton, a computer manufacturer in Inverclyde, of its intention to close its manufacturing base, with the loss of some 500 jobs and the consequential effect of that not only on my constituency, but on that of my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (David Cairns), who is at this moment speaking to the unions and the management at that plant. Can my right hon. Friend give me an assurance that those manufacturing communities that suffer job losses, such as those in Port Glasgow and Greenock, will receive the same financial support and resources afforded to those in the fishing communities?

Mrs. Liddell: My hon. Friend makes an important point. My hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (David Cairns) is already meeting the management of another employer in the community. The Scottish Executive have announced that they will put in place the procedures that are normal in such circumstances. I share my hon. Friend's view that we should ensure that every community that is affected by unemployment is treated fairly and in a way that is sustainable for the long-term. I understand that another announcement is expected this afternoon. Commercial confidentiality prevents me from speaking about that, but I hope that the situation might prove much less bleak than people have been anticipating.

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Beckenham): May I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Sir Archy Kirkwood) on his knighthood? We look forward to his continuing contribution in this House.

The fishing tie-up starts in approximately three weeks. Will the right hon. Lady give us some indication as to whether she believes that sufficient resources will be put into the fishing industry by the beginning of February to ensure minimum disruption to the communities? Are the Government backing the call made by Scottish Conservative MEP Struan Stevenson for compensation of £100 million from the European Community?

Mrs. Liddell: Since the conclusion of the discussions in Brussels, the Government have been very much engaged with the debate about what we can do to ensure the continuity of the fishing communities. The First Minister has met representatives of the fishing communities on a number of occasions and the Prime Minister is to meet representatives before the end of the month. I met the fisheries Minister this morning to discuss what sort of package can be made available to ensure the continuation of the fishing industry and to provide some help in the transition that is required because of these rather unfortunate times.

Mrs. Lait: There was clearly no guarantee in that answer that an arrangement will be in place by the beginning of February. However, at the end of March, there will be discussions on long-term proposals for the North sea. What part, if any, will the right hon. Lady play in those discussions? Will the Government advocate that the UK fishery should be managed nationally?

Mrs. Liddell: On the second point, no, there is no prospect of repatriating fisheries policy. Fish do not carry passports. The most important way forward for the fishing community is a common fisheries policy. Indeed, in all the debate about the fisheries industries, the successes that this Government have achieved in relation to the common fisheries policy have been completely overlooked. On the discussions that must take place in March in respect of the new system, and discussions post July, I have been in discussions with the fisheries Minister as recently as this morning on the line that the British Government should take.

Cross-Border Economic Issues

5. **Mr. John McFall** (Dumbarton): What action she is taking to consult Scottish business and trade union interests on cross-border economic issues. [89140]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mrs. Anne McGuire): In conjunction with the Treasury, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State recently held a seminar involving the main Scottish business organisations and the Scottish Trades Union Congress to discuss the macro-economic policy directions set out in the Chancellor's pre-Budget report. My right hon. Friend plans to hold another seminar

with those organisations and other key stakeholders in the Scottish economy to provide input to the Chancellor's Budget preparations.

Mr. McFall: As a result of the Chancellor's macro-economic policies, we now have the highest employment in Scotland for more than a generation. Despite that, for every one job created in disadvantaged areas, three are created in the more prosperous and advantaged areas. Will the Minister ensure that Scottish business and trade unions take advantage of the initiatives for enterprise set out in the Budget, so that those in the disadvantaged areas that I and many of my colleagues represent can get the job increases into their areas?

Mrs. McGuire: I recognise the picture that my hon. Friend paints. He will be aware that the Government aim to promote the productivity agenda in Scotland. Key to that promotion is the fact that we work together hand in hand, as both a UK Government and a Scottish Executive, to deliver improvements for the communities that have suffered historic weaknesses in terms of economic development.

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest): Does the Minister agree that most people in Scotland would prefer taxpayers' money to be spent on job creation, as two of her hon. Friends just said in their questions? As everyone has said in respect of the fishing communities, taxpayers' money would be better spent on helping people than on employing more politicians and bureaucrats and building more buildings for more and more government in Edinburgh.

Mrs. McGuire: I am pleased to advise the hon. Lady that the Scottish people are happy to recognise that we have the highest recorded level of employment in Scotland, and the lowest unemployment count, for 27 years. That stands in stark contrast with some of the issues that we had to deal with during 18 years under her party's Government.

Employment

6. **Mr. Eric Joyce** (Falkirk, West): When she last met the Scottish Trades Union Congress to discuss employment issues. [89141]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mrs. Helen Liddell): I have regular contact with representatives of the STUC to discuss a wide range of issues. I last met the STUC general council on 2 December 2002.

Mr. Joyce: My right hon. Friend will be aware that the great majority of jobs in the North sea are in the oil and gas industries. Does she agree that we can never take those jobs for granted, and will she commit herself to maintaining strong relationships with the STUC and the trade unions, and with employers?

Mrs. Liddell: I spend a considerable amount of time talking to the trade unions about the North sea—of course, as a former energy Minister I have a substantial number of contacts there—but I also maintain close contact with the STUC. The North sea is going through a period of change—it faces great opportunities, as well great challenges—and we must ensure that the Scottish economy benefits from that. Indeed, the Chancellor's introduction of 100 per cent. capital allowances for investment in the North sea is very much to be welcomed.

ADVOCATE-GENERAL

The Advocate-General was asked—

Devolution

16. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): What devolution issues she has considered since 26 November 2002. [89151]

17. **Mr. John Robertson** (Glasgow, Anniesland): What devolution issues she has considered since 26 November 2002. [89152]

The Advocate-General for Scotland (Dr. Lynda Clark): Since 26 November, 34 devolution issue cases have been intimated to me, all but one of which related to criminal law. All of them concerned human rights issues, and a substantial number concerned undue delay in criminal proceedings. Others included cases on the law on rape; the fixing of the punishment part of the sentence of a life prisoner, to replace the old system of serving an indeterminate length of sentence; and the powers of the Crown to use surveillance tapes from prison visiting rooms. The one civil case involved delay in an appeal from the application of a children's panel reporter to the sheriff for an interim exclusion order.

Miss McIntosh: The hon. and learned Lady was very helpful in answering my question of a month ago, saying that a procedure exists under the Scotland Act 1998, but can she explain what that procedure is? In the event that a Scottish airport sought to expand, who would take the final decision: the Secretary of State for Scotland, the Scottish Executive, or the Secretary of State for Transport?

The Advocate-General: As I have tried to explain to the hon. Lady—I am more than happy to discuss the matter with her—the answer depends entirely on the circumstances of the particular case. We cannot speculate about a case in isolation. The Scotland Act 1998 makes provision for reserved matters and the rest are devolved, but every single case must be looked at entirely in the context of its particular circumstances. The answer to her speculative question is therefore very difficult to give, because I do not know the context in which she puts forward her request for information. However, as I said, I am more than happy to discuss the matter with her at length, at her convenience.

John Robertson: I thank my hon. and learned Friend for her earlier answer. How many delay cases are currently outstanding, and are safeguards in place in Scotland to prevent any undue delay in trial?

The Advocate-General: There are approximately 700 delay cases outstanding, albeit that the Appeal Court has doubtless dealt with some of them already.

However, that number must be seen in the context of the thousands of cases that proceed through the Scottish courts. I am pleased to advise my hon. Friend that a number of different procedures exist in Scots law that prevent undue delay in trial. Perhaps the most famous one is the so-called "110 day rule", which means that, in general terms, a person who is in custody in Scotland must be brought for trial within 110 days. In many ways, that piece of Scots jurisprudence has been the envy of many other jurisdictions.

Human Rights

19. **Mr. Alan Reid** (Argyll and Bute): What human rights issues she has dealt with since 26 November 2002. [89154]

The Advocate-General: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer that I gave a few moments ago to the hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh). All of the devolution cases to which I referred in that answer involved human rights issues.

Mr. Reid: I thank the Advocate-General for that answer. May I draw her attention to some of the recent actions of the state-owned Caledonian MacBrayne shipping company, which have deprived many people with disabilities of their human rights? For example, the catamaran that runs between Gourock and Dunoon is not accessible to people with disabilities. The ticketing arrangements on some vessels also discriminate against disabled people. What actions can the Government take to prevent Caledonian MacBrayne from depriving disabled people of their human rights?

The Advocate-General: As far as my responsibility is concerned, the Government have given citizens a right of challenge if they think that their human rights under the European convention have been breached. Clearly, hon. Members would have to advise constituents as to whether legal advice was appropriate in any given case to determine whether that right of challenge should be invoked. The more general policy issue is not my responsibility, but the Government have a good record in respect of introducing protection and rights for members of the public who are disabled.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

The Parliamentary Secretary was asked—

Criminal Courts System

23. **Mr. David Kidney** (Stafford): If she will make a statement on the Lord Chancellor's proposals for a unified criminal courts system and the representations that he has received in response. [89158]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Yvette Cooper): The Auld review proposed that there should be a unified courts administration to improve the effectiveness of the courts and of the justice system. We are taking that recommendation forward, but with some modifications. Those modifications include the introduction of local courts administration councils, which go further than the Auld recommendations. We have received a wide range of representations and continue to work closely with stakeholders on the design of the new organisation.

Mr. Kidney: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Does she agree that there needs to be a good degree of sensitivity in ensuring that the new unified courts system has a good strong local connection for management and accountability purposes? Magistrates and magistrates clerks in Stafford have a constructive attitude towards the change, provided that they are involved properly with other local stakeholders. Will my hon. Friend ensure that there will be consultation at every stage in the future, so that people feel involved in the decision-making process as well as in the system that we eventually get?

Yvette Cooper: I welcome what my hon. Friend has said, and the response from the magistrates and clerks in Stafford. He is right to say that we are keen to involve in the design of the new system all stakeholders in the criminal justice system and the courts service. The new design must learn from and build on their experience. In particular, it must have a local aspect, which is why we have introduced the courts administration councils. For the first time, magistrates, judges and local people will be able to have a say in how all courts in an area are run.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Does the Lord Chancellor ever listen to the representations made to him? Will the Parliamentary Secretary confirm that the experimental night sittings will not be taken forward in the new system and that they have been abandoned after costing £5.4 million and an average of £4,000 per case? Will she confirm that all informed opinion told the Lord Chancellor that the experiment would not work—with the exception of No. 10 Downing street? What is the point of consultation if responses are not listened to?

Yvette Cooper: The Lord Chancellor of course takes very seriously all the responses to consultation. It was right to set up the pilot programmes in Manchester and in one magistrates court in London. The final report on those programmes is yet to be published. It is true that the night courts proved disproportionately expensive, but the early-morning sittings were useful. The final conclusions have yet to be drawn, and the final decisions have yet to be taken.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): Will the Parliamentary Secretary say how she and the Lord Chancellor intend to satisfy the profound concerns of the Central Council of Magistrates Courts Committees? The role of courts councils under the proposed model is inconsistent with clear principles of local management and accountability. As she knows, that and the weak and ineffectual consultative councils are unacceptable to the magistrates courts committees. How can she deny that the uniform court system is driven by the political objective of reducing public resources for political purposes, rather than of improving justice? The Lord Chancellor's unacceptable comments—addressed to judges and magistrates in the present and future unified

courts—that many first-time burglars should be sent to prison only as a last resort are driven by the political objective of reducing the prison population, rather—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Parliamentary Secretary should answer part of that question.

Yvette Cooper: What a lot of nonsense. There were about eight different attempts to ask questions. The hon. Gentleman started by making a point about the Central Council of Magistrates Courts Committees. I understand its views and have had many meetings with it, but I completely disagree with it. It wants the new courts organisation to mirror the current structure of the magistrates courts committees, where 43 different organisations run the courts. That is contrary to the recommendation of Sir Robin Auld, who pointed out that having 43 different organisations running the courts led to fragmentation, division, complication and duplication of procedures.

It is right that there should be considerable local decision making. That is why we have set up the courts administration councils, which will increase the voice of the local community for the Crown courts and county courts for the first time and extend the voice of the local community for magistrates courts, which are currently covered in the main by magistrates, not by other members of the local community.

Voting System

24. **Ms Meg Munn** (Sheffield, Heeley): What recent representations the Lord Chancellor has received on changes to the voting system. [89159]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Yvette Cooper): The Lord Chancellor's Department receives a small but steady stream of representations from organisations on changes to the voting system. In addition, we have received jointly with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister a wide range of recent responses to the consultation paper on the 2004 elections and weekend voting.

Ms Munn: I thank my hon. Friend for her reply. Has the Lord Chancellor's Department formed a view on all-postal ballots? Is there an intention to have more pilot exercises in the next lot of local elections?

Yvette Cooper: There will indeed be more pilot exercises for all-postal voting, and they are being taken forward by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. The Electoral Commission considered the previous round of pilot exercises and concluded that they had had a significant impact on raising turnout, which is an extremely important factor, but equally that more pilot exercises were needed to ensure that people could have full confidence and that there was proper security against fraud.

Domestic Violence

26. **Mr. Chris Mole** (Ipswich): What steps the Lord Chancellor is taking to strengthen his Department's support for victims of domestic violence. [89161]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Ms Rosie Winterton): My Department is committed to tackling domestic violence and is leading work on improving links between the civil, family and criminal law. We are taking action to give survivors of domestic violence swift and effective protection, to bring perpetrators to justice and to make sure that children's contact with their parents is safe for all family members. We are working closely with the Home Office on its recently announced consultation paper on domestic violence.

Mr. Mole: Does the Minister agree that it is important to make people aware that allegations should be brought to the courts as soon as possible and to ensure that victims are aware of the support that the police and other agencies can give them?

Ms Winterton: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise that issue. That is why we recently amended the Children Act 1998, so that the courts must take into account the effects of domestic violence when considering cases involving contact with children. However, we also want to go further, so we will ensure through secondary legislation that the courts know about and investigate any allegations of domestic violence at the start of any child contact proceedings. The court will have to decide whether domestic violence took place before considering any contact or evidence issues. If the court decides that domestic violence has taken place but still orders contact between the parent and child, reasons will have to be given as to why contact was allowed.

Transsexual People

27. **Hugh Bayley** (City of York): If she will make a statement about the Government's policy towards birth certificates for transsexual people. [89162]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Ms Rosie Winterton): On 13 December, I issued a statement, published in *Hansard* on 16 December, that set out our plans to give transsexual people recognition in their acquired gender, including our intention to legislate for registrars general to create a new record in relation to transsexual people.

Hugh Bayley: I speak on behalf of three constituents who are transsexuals who have approached me because they have all had problems in relation to official documents that record their gender inappropriately. The Government have no choice but to change the law because the European Court of Human Rights has said that we must, but transsexuals, such as my constituents, still face problems. The question on their lips is not whether the Government will legislate, but when the Government will legislate.

Ms Winterton: I fully accept the points that my hon. Friend has made. He eloquently sets out the difficult

position in which many transsexual people find themselves. We propose to publish a draft Bill, which will be available for pre-legislative scrutiny. I hope that my hon. Friend will understand that I cannot say exactly when that draft Bill will be published but my officials are currently actively engaged in bringing the work forward. Clearly, the timing of substantive legislation after the draft Bill is a matter for the Legislative Programme Committee and parliamentary business managers. It is difficult to secure time within busy legislative programmes, but I assure him that we are committed to legislating as soon as possible.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): Further to the Minister's answer, is she aware of cases such as that of a constituent of mine who has been a woman for 40 years but cannot claim a woman's pension because she is shown as a man on her birth certificate? Although such people welcome the Government's overall approach, a real sense of urgency exists in relation to some of these cases. Will she bear that in mind in trying to expedite the legislation?

Ms Winterton: The hon. Gentleman is right to draw attention to that particular issue. I hope that he will appreciate that many issues need to be considered when drafting legislation on this matter. It is therefore important that the legislation addresses all the different aspects that are likely to arise, which is why we want to make sure that we get the legislation right.

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen, South): Will my hon. Friend make sure that, under any legislation that comes forward, the new certificate that will be issued to show the new gender and new name of the person will allow that person to be issued with a passport in their new gender and new name. That is an issue about which one of my constituents is most concerned.

Ms Winterton: That will certainly be possible. At the moment, I believe that people can be issued with a different certificate, and it is more an issue of explaining why the birth certificate is different from the passport application. That is certainly one of the issues that will be addressed in the legislation.

Voting System

28. **Ms Dari Taylor** (Stockton, South): What responses the Lord Chancellor has received on the document "Same day elections and weekend voting". [89163]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Yvette Cooper): Responses to the consultation paper have to be sent to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, with whom we are jointly conducting the consultation, by the end of January 2003. By mid-December, around 100 responses had been received from local authorities, councillors, MPs and members of the public. We will consider the responses before coming to conclusions.

Ms Taylor: I thank my hon. Friend for her response. Many hon. Members, across the House, are very concerned about low turnouts, and we work hard to legitimise politics and to make politics seem real within our communities. We are therefore very concerned when people choose not to vote. In relation to changing the system, has her Department received evidence indicating that voting at the weekend would increase participation?

Yvette Cooper: Interestingly, very little research has been done on weekend voting, and only a small number of experiments have been done in that regard. That is why we are interested in responses to the consultation in relation to whether more trials should be conducted. For people who go to work and have kids, finding time to vote on a busy Thursday can be a real hassle. Exercising one's democratic rights and going out to vote should not be a hassle. It is therefore right that we consider ways of making it easier for people to vote, without kidding ourselves that changing the voting system will solve all the problems of turnout.

Licensing Magistrates Courts

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): Happy new year, Mr. Speaker—*[Interruption.]* Let us start as we want to go on.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should ask Question 29.

Mr. Cousins On how many occasions hearings in licensing magistrates courts have had to be adjourned because of lack of space to hear objectors in each of the last three years. [89164]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Yvette Cooper): The Lord Chancellor's Department collects nationally only the details of the number of licensing sessions held and has no detail in relation to adjourned licensing hearings or the reasons for any adjournments.

Mr. Cousins: Happy new year again, Mr. Speaker. The season had got to me.

May I draw to my hon. Friend's attention a most unfortunate incident that occurred in Gosforth magistrates court just before Christmas when I and more than 120 of my constituents turned up to make representations against the granting of an additional pub licence in Osborne road, Newcastle, which is becoming a kind of Blackpool of the north-east? Sufficient provision had not been made to hear the volume of objections from local people to the granting of the licence and the hearing had to be adjourned to 20 or 21 January. During the discussions on the matter, the barrister for the applicants suggested that the volume of objections was a display of mob rule. Will my hon. Friend therefore look into the incident to ensure that very important and sensitive licensing applications are properly heard and dealt with in licensing courts?

Yvette Cooper: I shall certainly look into the case that my hon. Friend has raised. He will be aware that the Government have proposed transferring licensing responsibilities to local authorities as part of the work

being taken forward by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. In the long term, these are the issues that local authorities will need to address.

PRIVY COUNCIL

The President of the Council was asked—

Private Members' Bills

32. **Mr. Mark Lazarowicz** (Edinburgh, North and Leith): To ask the President of the Council if he will bring forward proposals to allow for private Members' Bills to be debated on a day other than Friday. [89167]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): The Procedure Committee has already announced an inquiry that will include the procedures for private Members' Bills and the time made available for debates on them. My right hon. Friend the President of the Council looks forward very much to its report.

Mr. Lazarowicz: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. May I urge him and his colleagues to support positively the idea that private Members' Bills should be debated on a mid-week evening to take advantage of the time available under the new timetabling arrangements? If that were to be done, it would encourage a much bigger attendance by Members at private Members' business and it would make it easier for Members from further afield to take part in such business. If the business were properly programmed, it could also allow more private Members' Bills to be discussed and dealt with. That would therefore allow more hon. Members to enjoy the success that I had last Session when I took a private Member's Bill through the House.

Mr. Bradshaw: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his success. He and I belong to the small and privileged club of those Members who have managed to get a private Member's Bill on to the statute book. I urge him and other Members who feel strongly about the issue to make their representations to the Procedure Committee whose deadline for evidence is at the end of this week.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I commiserate with the Minister, who seems to have had an accident during the recess. I ask him to be totally even-handed on this matter when he considers the Government's interests and those of Back Benchers. He will recognise—and I hope that the President of the Council will too—that, since the Jopling reforms, both private Members' Bills and private Members' motions have disappeared as an effective way for Back Benchers to make their presence felt in this place. The opportunities for Back Benchers have been grossly discouraged and, to a large extent, extinguished. While the Procedure Committee is considering the specific issue of private Members' Bills, will the Minister undertake to make representations to the President of the Council that the Modernisation Committee should also be looking at the wider issue?

Mr. Bradshaw: I commiserate with the hon. Gentleman's constituents. As I understand it, he has announced that he will not be standing at the next election. He will be sorely missed by them.

The Government will certainly be even-handed. We believe strongly in the principle that Back Benchers should be allowed to initiate legislation and to get it on to the statute book. Before I came into the Chamber, I took the trouble of checking the historical record, and it is not true that there is currently an historic low in the number of private Member's Bills getting on to the statute book. The number goes up and down from year to year and from decade to decade. However, the Government adhere to the principle that Back Benchers should be allowed to initiate legislation and, when the Procedure Committee's report is published, we shall consider it very carefully, and my right hon. Friend the President of the Council will take the hon. Gentleman's comments on board.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): Does my hon. Friend agree that many hon. Members are effectively barred from attending Friday debates on private Member's Bills because that is the only day of the week in which they can undertake constituency duties when offices, factories and schools are open? It is essential that we have that right on a Friday for 52 weeks of the year, other than when we are on our annual holiday.

Mr. Bradshaw: I do take that point on board and I urge my hon. Friend to make it to the Procedure Committee in any evidence that he may care to give to it.

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire): I first wish the Minister a full and speedy recovery. I presume his injuries are a lesson to us all about the dangers of cycling.

Does the deputy Leader of the House agree that if a Member of Parliament wishes to change the law on a subject about which he or she feels strongly, that Member should be prepared to come here on a Friday? Is not the issue part of a wider campaign by some Labour Members to get yet more time off so that they have to work only a four-day week? Does he accept that the requests for change have little to do with modernisation and are more about malingering?

Mr. Bradshaw: No, and by the look on the faces of some of the right hon. Gentleman's Back-Bench colleagues it is clear that a number of them certainly like to take time off to do second jobs. It is worth reminding the House and, perhaps, the outside world that this Westminster House of Commons sits for more days than virtually any other legislature in the developed world. In fact, according to a survey on the number of days that legislatures in Commonwealth countries sat in 2001, this House sat on more days than any other with the exception of the legislature of the state of Borno in Nigeria.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): Will the review look wider than the day on which we deal with private Member's Bills to consider the procedure as

well? If we are to make the most effective use of our time, should not we look at all the rules governing private Members' Bills because in my experience most of the time is sadly abortive?

Mr. Bradshaw: That, I imagine, is why the Procedure Committee decided to have not a narrow, but a very broad review into the system of private Members' Bills, including their procedure and when they are debated.

House of Lords Reform

33. **Hugh Bayley** (City of York): To ask the President of the Council if he will make a statement about further reform of the House of Lords. [89169]

37. **Joyce Quin** (Gateshead, East and Washington, West): To ask the President of the Council if he will make a statement about progress with Government plans for House of Lords Reform. [89174]

The President of the Council (Mr. Robin Cook): The Government welcome the report from the Joint Committee on House of Lords Reform and are grateful for the work it has done. We look forward to the debates which are to be held later this month in both Houses of Parliament. The way forward on reform will be considered in the light of the outcome of the votes on the options put forward by the Joint Committee and will provide a remit to that Committee to work up a more detailed set of recommendations.

Hugh Bayley: When I speak to Members of Parliament in central and eastern Europe, Africa and developing countries about the merits of democracy, I find it extremely difficult to explain why a Chamber of our Parliament is archaic, only partly reformed and unelected. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the worst possible option is to fail to reach agreement in this House and with the other place, and to fail to complete reform, because the status quo is untenable?

Mr. Cook: I can understand my hon. Friend's difficulties. The House of Lords is about to have a by-election in which the sole qualification for candidates and electors is to be a hereditary peer. That is a rather eccentric version of democracy and reinforces the case for bringing real democracy to the second Chamber. I agree that the worst possible outcome would be the one that we have had too often in the past, in which we end up with no reform because the great majority who want it cannot agree among themselves on what reform to go for.

Joyce Quin: Although I personally have strong views in favour of an elected second Chamber, as a member of the Joint Committee may I stress that its report contains a number of matters on which there is consensus and on which we can build and make rapid progress, not least on the widespread agreement about the powers of the second Chamber? Despite strongly held views, it is possible to agree even on the difficult issues of composition, as the excellent report by our Public Administration Committee showed.

Mr. Cook: Yes, as I have observed to the House before, the Public Administration Committee report was unanimous and showed that it was possible to find a centre of gravity among Members in favour of reform. I agree with my right hon. Friend that the report from the Joint Committee spells out the wide degree of consensus that exists on the remit, powers and scope of a second Chamber. It is now necessary to find that centre of gravity for the options for the composition of a reformed Chamber so that we can proceed with the reforms that so many in this Chamber want.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Does the Leader of the House expect to introduce legislation before 17 July this year?

Mr. Cook: I would not expect to introduce legislation in this Session because, as I indicated to the House when I made the announcement committing us to a Joint Committee, the longer the final report of the Joint Committee took to be produced, the more difficult it would be to introduce such legislation in the current Session. I hope that we will make good speed with the debate on the Joint Committee report and with the votes and the options put forward. It is then for the Joint Committee to come forward with a report providing a detailed scheme based on whatever is the majority wish of this House and the other place. I hope that we see that report well before 17 July and that it will enable us to take forward legislation in this Parliament.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Did the right hon. Gentleman hear the Lord Chancellor say this morning on the "Today" programme that the argument was really polarised between a wholly appointed and a wholly elected second Chamber? May I ask whether that represents Government policy? If so, does the right hon. Gentleman understand that the majority of us will go for the wholly elected option?

Mr. Cook: I arose especially early and completed my breakfast in order that I might give the Lord Chancellor my full and undivided attention. *[Laughter.]* May I say to the right hon. and learned Gentleman that the Government's policy is as stated by both the Lord Chancellor and myself, and that both Houses will have a free vote? There will be seven options open to both Houses to vote on—all Members will have a free vote on those seven options, which include an all-appointed and an all-elected House and five variants in between of a mixed House. It is for the House, not the Government, to decide where the settled will is, but I very much hope that those votes will produce a commanding, convincing majority for one option that will restore momentum to reform.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Is not the importance of the Lord Chancellor's broadcast at 7 o'clock this morning the fact that it showed that there is some division in the Government on the issue? Labour Members of Parliament and other radicals in this place want the Leader of the House to tell the Lord Chancellor in unequivocal terms that we wish to see the completion of the upper House reform in this Parliament. It should not be kicked into touch by the

Lord Chancellor or by anyone else in that place, as they have done with other legislation that we were committed to when we were elected in 1997.

Mr. Cook: I shall reflect on the precise terms in which I might convey that message to the Lord Chancellor. I put it to my hon. Friend that we have said that this matter must be resolved by Parliament. It is a parliamentary matter; the second Chamber of this Parliament is being reformed. It is therefore right for this House that the other House should have a free vote. That being the case, it would be wrong for the Government to express one single united view among the seven options available. However, it is important that we find a settled will—a centre of gravity—for reform and then all coalesce around that option for reform and make sure that this time we actually carry through the reform that has evaded Parliament for 100 years.

Parliamentary Timetable

34. **Helen Jackson** (Sheffield, Hillsborough): To ask the President of the Council what further changes to the standard timetable of the House he is proposing during this year. [89170]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): The House has recently agreed significant changes which begin today. These include, for the first time, having an annual parliamentary calendar which will give some predictability to our timetable, a change that has been warmly welcomed by Members on both sides of the House. There are no current plans for further changes but the Modernisation Committee will, of course, monitor and assess the impact of the recent reforms.

Helen Jackson: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. He will know that I welcome the new year and the new timetable, and hope that they will both be happy for all of us. However, as we settle into the new regime, can my hon. Friend assure us that proper practices of political scheming—much loved by Members of this House—and the valuable work undertaken by the usual channels will continue and thrive under the new regime?

Mr. Bradshaw: It is certainly beyond my powers and, I suspect, beyond the powers of any Member here to put an end to what my hon. Friend describes as political scheming.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, was asked—

Select Committee Hearings

35. **Mr. David Kidney** (Stafford): What proportion of public hearings of Select Committees in this Session could be viewed by internet users in real time? [89171]

Sir Archy Kirkwood (on behalf of the House of Commons Commission): Up to this morning, there have been 110 public meetings of Select Committees in the current Session of which 28—some 25 per cent.—were webcast.

Mr. Kidney: How long will it be until that figure is 100 per cent?

Sir Archy Kirkwood: It may be some time. The hon. Gentleman takes a genuine interest in those matters, and I thank him for that. He will know that a webcast experiment was conducted in 2002 through joint offices in both Houses. It involved four channels covering "gavel to gavel" proceedings in the House of Commons, the House of Lords, Westminster Hall and one Select Committee at any given time. That experiment is being reviewed. We hope to have options that flow from the review, and I hope that the Board of Management will take some decisions later this year.

PRIVY COUNCIL

The President of the Council was asked—

University Visitor

36. **Mr. John Bercow** (Buckingham): Will the President of the Council make a statement on the exercise of his responsibilities as Visitor in respect of universities? [89173]

The President of the Council (Mr. Robin Cook): As President of the Council, I exercise the role of Visitor in respect of 17 universities and colleges. In that capacity, I determine petitions from students and, occasionally, from staff who have exhausted all internal complaints and appeals procedures. I received 35 such petitions last year. None required a visit to the university concerned.

Mr. Bercow: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. Without casting any aspersions on his academic credentials as a product of Aberdeen grammar school and Edinburgh university, does he agree that his role as Visitor in respect of a number of universities is, following Bagehot, a dignified rather than an efficient part of our constitution? Dare I say that it might be a suitable subject for consideration for reform by the Modernisation Committee?

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for not calling into question my academic qualifications for the post, but I can assure him—I think this will bring him some relief—that we have reached agreement with the universities on the appointment of an independent adjudicator for students. It is our intention and that of the universities that the adjudicator will be up and running for the next university session. From then on, those cases referred to me and to the other Visitors will be referred to that independent adjudicator. That simple solution will ensure that we have a proper mechanism, but one that we have negotiated in agreement with the universities themselves.

Iraq: Contingency Preparations Update

3.32 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a statement on Iraq.

In a written statement to the House earlier today, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary set out the Government's policy objectives for Iraq. Those objectives make clear our commitment to the disarmament of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and to the United Nations process. They set out our vision that Iraq should become a

"stable, united and law abiding state, within its present borders, co-operating with the international community, no longer posing a threat to its neighbours or to international security, abiding by all its international obligations and providing effective and representative government for its own people."

I am confident that this is a vision which is shared by all Members of the House.

Furthermore, the statement puts our policy on Iraq in the context of the Government's wider agenda: our efforts to resolve related issues, including the middle east peace process; wider political engagement with Arab countries and the Islamic world; efforts to counter the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; and the elimination of terrorism as a force in international affairs.

Those objectives restate the Government's absolute commitment to act in conformity with international law, including the UN charter and international humanitarian law. I commend them to the House.

In publishing those objectives, the Government are restating their full and active support for UNMOVIC and the International Atomic Energy Agency. Together, those organisations have about 110 inspectors working in Iraq and have already completed more than 200 inspections. We are now looking to them to investigate urgently the gaps in Iraq's declaration of its weapons of mass destruction programmes, which, as my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made clear on 19 December, fails to give a satisfactory account of Iraq's activities in this area.

UNMOVIC and the IAEA will next report formally to the Security Council on 27 January. That is not necessarily a decision point on Iraqi compliance. In fact, under resolution 1441, UNMOVIC and the IAEA are required to report immediately to the Security Council any Iraqi interference or non-compliance. The council would then meet urgently to consider the situation. It follows that non-compliance could be declared at any time, either before or after 27 January, as a result of Iraqi failures.

While we want Iraq and Saddam Hussein to disarm voluntarily, it is evident that we will not achieve that unless we continue to present him with a clear and credible threat of force, so the policy objectives also make it clear that we must continue with military planning and preparations. Before the recess, I described to the House the contingency planning and preparatory activity that we had set in hand for that purpose. I now set out two further specific steps that we are taking.

The first step relates to reserves. On 25 November and 18 December, I explained the preparatory work that we were undertaking to identify the potential requirement for reserves. Reservists play key enabling roles in support of all three services. Reservists, however, cannot be brought into active service instantly. They require notice in order to be able to set their affairs in order and to go through a mobilisation process that includes medical checks, the issuing of equipment, and any necessary training and preparation for the tasks that may be required of them.

Against that background, and to keep open a range of military options, I have today made an order under section 54(1) of the Reserve Forces Act 1996 to enable the call-out of reservists for possible operations against Iraq. That does not mean that a decision has been taken to commit British forces to such operations, but it is an essential enabling measure to ensure that if such operations become necessary they will be properly supported with the skills and expertise that our reserve forces provide.

Following the making of the order, the armed forces will issue call-out notices as required in order to mobilise those individuals who may be needed. That process is likely to be incremental. The overall scale of mobilisation will depend on the continuing evolution of our contingency planning. It should also be borne in mind that experience shows that the number of call-out notices issued needs to be significantly larger than the number of individual reservists likely to be required. It would therefore be misleading, as well as undesirable for reasons of operational security, for me to give specific numbers or details at this stage. However, we envisage initially sending out sufficient call-out notices to secure about 1,500 reservists, and we will issue further notices as appropriate. The Government take seriously their duty to call out reservists only when it is absolutely necessary. We understand the impact of call-out both on reservists and on their employers. I pay tribute to the valuable contribution they make to the overall strength of our armed forces.

Secondly, in my statement on 18 December, I described the long-planned deployment of naval task group 2003 to the Gulf and Asia-Pacific regions, and said that we were also considering the deployment of additional maritime forces early in the new year. I have now authorised the deployment of a number of additional vessels and units later this month, which will represent a significant amphibious capability. The group will conduct training in the Mediterranean with a view to proceeding to the Gulf region if and as required.

The objective is to ensure the readiness of a broad range of military capabilities. Preparatory steps of this nature are necessary in order to keep military options open. It is likely that we will want to make further deployments in the coming weeks for the same purpose. We are taking steps to ensure the readiness of units and equipment, and the availability of appropriate chartered shipping and air transport in which to deploy them.

The planned deployments in the next few weeks will now include the aircraft carrier HMS Ark Royal; the helicopter carrier HMS Ocean; the destroyers HMS Liverpool, HMS Edinburgh and HMS York; the frigate HMS Marlborough; the Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessels Argus, Fort Victoria, Fort Rosalie and Fort Austin; the landing ships logistic Sir Galahad, Sir Tristram and Sir Percivale; a mine countermeasures group initially comprising HMS Grimsby and HMS Ledbury; and a submarine, as originally planned for naval task group

2003. We plan to deploy amphibious forces in HMS Ark Royal, HMS Ocean and associated shipping, including headquarters 3 Commando Brigade, 40 Commando Royal Marines and 42 Commando Royal Marines with all supporting elements.

None of that means that the use of force is inevitable. Despite the speculation that will arise as a result of these announcements today, it remains the case that no decision has been taken to commit those forces to action. But, as I said on 18 December, as long as Saddam's compliance with UN Security Council resolution 1441 is in doubt, as it continues to be at present, the threat of force must remain and it must be a real one.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving me the opportunity to see his statement in advance. The House will acknowledge that such decisions as he has made today will have a dramatic effect on the lives of individuals and their families, and that those individuals might ultimately be asked to put their lives at risk. Servicemen and their families have had to endure a long period of uncertainty, fuelled by intense media speculation about the Government's policy. The whole House respects and admires our armed forces; the Government should be careful not to take them for granted.

The Opposition continue broadly to support the Government's policy towards Iraq, as set out by the Foreign Secretary. War is not inevitable, and everything should be done to try to avoid it. Even without further United Nations endorsement, British and US policy must continue to comply with international law. Moreover, if war becomes unavoidable, no effort should be spared to persuade our partners and allies in the UN Security Council to support the policy to which President Bush and the Prime Minister are so profoundly committed. Today, the Prime Minister has reiterated:

"Unless the world takes a stand on this issue of weapons of mass destruction, we will rue the consequences of our weakness."

We wholly support this stated resolve and welcome the Secretary of State's statement today, so far as it goes.

On reservists, will the Secretary of State make it clear that he is referring only to members of the Territorial Army, and not to those on the civilian regular reserve list? Will he also tell us how long those who are called up may be required to serve? What discussions has he had with their employers to mitigate the effects of their call-up on their continued employment and their career prospects? What effect will the call up of medical staff have on the national health service? Will the Government support measures to ensure that the burden is fairly spread across the whole of the NHS and not concentrated on particular hospitals? On the subject of HMS Ark Royal and the naval task group, how many service men and women does this commitment involve? What is the new total of British service men and women now committed to operations or exercises associated with possible military operations against Iraq?

For the House to have confidence that the Government can demonstrate what the Secretary of State refers to as the

"clear and credible threat of force",

the House is surely entitled to greater clarity from the Government on the preparations for possible military action against Iraq. Will the Secretary of State explain why the Government will not announce clearer decisions about all the forces that they intend to make available, to demonstrate how they will back the Prime Minister's words? Why, instead, do they appear to be delaying decisions about deployments and playing down our military commitment? The Secretary of State has just announced what I believe to be the largest call-out of reserves since 1991. He has announced the commitment of possibly 5,000 additional service men and women to operations. Why will he not say that? Why are these figures not included in his statement? Is it the policy of the Government to have British tanks and armoured vehicles available at the outset of possible military operations? If so, I am sure that the Secretary of State is aware that the hour is already very late for such decisions.

To make a fuller announcement would not betray tactics, compromise security or set limitations on later commitments, as the Secretary of State tries to suggest. Why will the Government not explain that HMS Ark Royal and the amphibious task group are being deployed to put pressure on Saddam? That would assert the Government's resolve and commitment, and increase the pressure on Saddam to comply. In the interests of those in our armed forces who may be in the front line of military operations—some already are—will the Secretary of State assure the House that none of this present uncertainty is due to differences on the Government Benches? Are the Government truly united behind the Prime Minister's policy?

The publication in September of the Government's dossier on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction demonstrated that the Government, and the Prime Minister in particular, clearly believe that Saddam Hussein is in breach of his UN obligations. It now seems unlikely that the UN inspectors will find any weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Saddam Hussein has had too much time to conceal them and to destroy the evidence. If the weapons inspectors find nothing and the United States decides to go ahead with military action in any case, what will be the Government's policy?

Mr. Hoon: I welcome what the hon. Gentleman described as his broad support for the Government's position. I will endeavour to answer his questions as best I can, given the obvious reasons why some of those points should not be addressed on the Floor of the House.

I have dealt with the question of reservists on a number of previous occasions, and I am confident that the procedures that we have set out provide an appropriate balance between the needs of our national health service, which the hon. Gentleman rightly recognised, and the need to ensure proper medical assistance to our armed forces should that become necessary. I shall not give the hon. Gentleman the undertaking that he asked for about dividing responsibility between hospitals. Clearly we have to

[Mr. Hoon]

have those people who are available and who have the appropriate expertise. We are in continuing discussions with colleagues from the Department of Health with a view to ensuring that there is an appropriate division of the responsibility for meeting our needs.

I shall not set out numbers at this stage because it would simply not be appropriate. Nor would it be appropriate at this stage, as the hon. Gentleman will realise if he gives the matter a moment's thought, to indicate the kinds of capabilities that we would seek to deploy. I have previously given the House, in response to a number of questions, indications of preparations concerning main battle tanks, for example, but at this stage we have made no specific decisions as to the kinds of forces that will be deployed because none has been taken by any nation. It is important that the House realises that. It would simply not be sensible to make such decisions. I am sure that if the hon. Gentleman thinks the issue through, he will appreciate why that is the case.

On the point about pressure on Saddam Hussein, that was an important part of my statement today and of my previous statements to the House. It is clearly necessary that we demonstrate to Saddam Hussein and his regime that we mean business. I should have thought that my statement clearly indicated that. At this stage, it is important that we approach these matters—I hope that this is consistent with the hon. Gentleman's remarks about our armed forces—with absolute regard to the men and women who serve in Her Majesty's armed forces. They are doing a vital job on behalf of this country, and they will continue to do so. No one takes that service for granted.

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): I also thank the Secretary of State for the advance copy of his statement and for keeping the House informed.

Our thoughts should go out to the men and women who are preparing themselves for the possibility of going into battle. That cannot be easy for them, or indeed for their families, in this new year. The news of British troops readying themselves for potential conflict sends a clear political message to Saddam Hussein, but does the Secretary of State agree that we need to tread a very careful line? Saddam Hussein must comply with the United Nations, and the threat of force is an important part of a diplomatic effort, but if Saddam Hussein thinks that war is inevitable, is it not the case that he will have no incentive to comply?

What discussions has the Secretary of State had with our other allies concerning their preparations? Will only Britain and the US send troops to the Gulf, and if so, why? While there is still time, I impress once more on the Secretary of State the importance placed by this party and, I believe, many outside the House on a substantive vote in the House of Commons before troops go into action.

On equipment, the Secretary of State will be aware that the Gulf war and Exercise Saif Sareea gave rise to a range of problems associated with desert preparations. The link between the vaccine and Gulf war illness has been an issue. Are the Government confident that vaccines issued to servicemen today will not make them ill in the future? The National Audit Office report on Saif Sareea said that the Clansman radio was unstable, so how will our soldiers communicate on the ground? Friendly fire continues to be a worry for our forces. What lessons have been learned from the past? If the Ark Royal is to be deployed, will her Sea Harriers be able to operate in the Gulf?

Finally, I stress that I am asking these questions because we believe that the Ministry of Defence must provide the best for our armed forces. Regardless of any political differences that we may have, our thoughts in the House should be with the men and women of our armed forces who are going into the unknown.

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, particularly for his final observations, which I strongly support and endorse. He is certainly right—I set out in my statement the fact that Saddam Hussein's compliance is much more likely if he realises that we are prepared to use military force to support the United Nations Security Council's decisions. It is certainly important that that is communicated to him—he can be in no doubt about that, given the military preparations that we, the United States and, indeed, other countries have embarked on. The United States made a request to 50 countries for military assistance, and obviously each country is considering its position. My right hon. Friends the Foreign Secretary and the Leader of the House have made clear the Government's position on any substantive resolution of the House, and there has been no change in it.

As for vaccination, a key lesson learned from the Gulf conflict was the importance of ensuring that members of the armed forces should not undergo in a short time a series of different vaccinations. That was identified as a particular cause of difficulty, and the lesson has been learned and acted upon, so that there is now a process whereby individual members do not receive a number of vaccinations in a short time frame.

As for the question of friendly fire, we are engaged in a process of ensuring that combat identification is dealt with satisfactorily. There is no single technological solution to that difficult problem, but we will acquire new equipment that will be available in time for any potential conflict in the Gulf. Obviously, I cannot go into precise details, but, as for combat identification, I can assure the House that British troops will be able to work alongside American forces entirely safely and satisfactorily.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Should we not bear in mind the fact that on all previous occasions the Iraqi regime has lied and lied again about weapons of mass destruction—for example, in 1995, when two of the dictator's sons-in-law defected, and the regime admitted that the information given about such weapons was actually accurate. As for military action, which we all, not just the critics, want to avoid, is it not Saddam Hussein's responsibility to do precisely what he promised to do after the liberation of Kuwait in 1991? If he gives up the weapons of mass destruction that he continues to deny having, there will be no need for any form of war whatsoever.

Mr. Hoon: My hon. Friend is quite right—the responsibility lies with Saddam Hussein and the present

Iraqi regime, who have been given an opportunity under Security Council resolution 1441 to comply with the will of the international community. My hon. Friend is also right that their observance of UN resolutions has been less than satisfactory. Indeed, it is clear that a preliminary view of the declaration that they made before Christmas shows that it is seriously short on detail and lacks in particular any significant reference to a number of conclusions reached by UNSCOM as long ago as 1999.

Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): The Secretary of State said in his statement that the Iraqi declaration of weapons of mass destruction fails to give a satisfactory account of Iraq's activities in that area. On what basis is that assertion made?

Mr. Hoon: The detailed assessment of the declaration has yet to be completed, but as I have just indicated, on a preliminary view it is clear that there are significant gaps, not least relating to the UNSCOM report of 1999, completed after the weapons inspectors were ordered out of Iraq by Saddam Hussein. It is clear that the present declaration does not deal with significant aspects of that report from 1999.

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): The Lord Chancellor pointed out today that war could be averted if Saddam Hussein stood down or if the Iraqis voluntarily disarmed. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the sole ground for involving ourselves in military conflict with Iraq will be the material breach of United Nations resolution 1441, and that no other pretext will be used to commit British armed servicemen and women to a war that is designed to bring about regime change in Iraq through a pre-emptive strike?

Mr. Hoon: The Government's position is set out, not least in the statement that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made of the Government's objectives in relation to Iraq. They demonstrate that the key reason for continuing concern about Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi regime is their possession of weapons of mass destruction. It is crucial that they should be disarmed of those weapons. It has been made clear not only by the United States President, but by the British Prime Minister that a key aspect of that could be the removal of Saddam Hussein, and that if he left, the regime thereafter would be in a quite different position, and would be a different regime as far as the international community was concerned.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Although I welcome the readiness measures as far as they go, will the Secretary of State expand on his remarks about a wider engagement with the Arab and Islamic world? Can he say, in particular, what will happen to the Downing street initiative to extend the peace process, now that Israel has taken the decision not to allow any of the Palestinian delegates to come to this country?

Mr. Hoon: Obviously, that matter is still under discussion with Israel, but I hope the hon. Gentleman will join me and all other Members of the House in welcoming the Government's initiative as a determined effort to get the middle east peace process back on track.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): After his last statement, my right hon. Friend agreed with me that if Saddam formed the impression that war was probable or inevitable, that would be a strong disincentive to disarm. Does my right hon. Friend see any risk that we might be increasing that impression and thus the chances of conflict? Does my right hon. Friend recognise that if there is an unnecessary war, any alleged additional British influence on the Bush Administration would be poor compensation for lost lives?

Mr. Hoon: I can assure my hon. Friend that if it is necessary, ultimately, to resort to military action, that then will be necessary because every other avenue has been exhausted and the opportunities given to Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi regime have been spurned by the Government in Iraq. It is important that we demonstrate our absolute commitment to the enforcement of Security Council resolution 1441 through the kinds of military planning and preparation that I set out to the House today.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): The Secretary of State told us of the formidable naval deployment that is to take place, and he has mentioned in the House on a number of occasions the work that is being done to make the tanks suitable for desert or semi-desert warfare. Will he therefore tell the House what he has in mind to deploy at this stage by way of armour? If he is able to reveal the extent of the naval deployment, there will be nothing to stop him speaking of the Army deployment. We know the Air Force strength. Why cannot he now confirm that a divisional headquarters and two armoured brigades will be the sort of formation that will be sent as part of Britain's formidable contribution to a war that we all hope will never have to happen?

Mr. Hoon: I am not in a position to confirm that today because that decision has yet to be taken, but I assure the hon. Gentleman that once that decision is taken, I will inform the House at the earliest possible opportunity.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): If and when American and British armour reaches Baghdad, what thinking through has there been of what happens then?

Mr. Hoon: Clearly, there is consideration, as there always is in such a prospective military operation, of what might occur thereafter. Having so recently been engaged in military operations in Afghanistan and equally in the management of the aftermath, we have some very recent experience on which to draw. I invite my hon. Friend to look carefully at the efforts that have been made by the United Kingdom, as part of the international community, to stabilise Afghanistan and provide it with very significant support as it grapples with the difficulties of rebuilding itself, its economy and ultimately, we hope, a democracy.

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): The Secretary of State was, at best, reticent in giving us details of the impact on the NHS of the call-out of reservists. Has not the decimation of the defence medical services during the past few years, with huge shortfalls in resources as many experienced clinicians have left for better careers, led to pressure on the NHS? What is he doing to address that absolutely dire situation in our defence medical services,

[Mr. David Chidgey]

which is putting pressure on the NHS while also leaving us having to contract out the provision of such services to support our armed forces?

Mr. Hoon: My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, who has both personal and ministerial expertise in the area to which the hon. Gentleman refers, very recently completed the medical manning and retention review, which he announced to the House in November last year. The review was broadly welcomed by hon. Members as a significant contribution to dealing with the historic problems that the defence medical services undoubtedly face. It is an important step towards ensuring that both full-time and reservist medical staff are available to meet the needs of our armed forces. It has always been the case that, in major deployments, we would need to call upon the services of our reserves to ensure that proper medical assistance is available.

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): There is very little support and a great deal of hostility among our constituents with regard to the possibility of sacrificing a single soldier's life in the present circumstances. Other countries in Europe are taking an independent line from that taken by the President of America. Can we have a vote in this House to express the views of those constituents and to give us a chance of escaping from our present link as a junior partner with the United States in this axis of delusion?

Mr. Hoon: May I deal specifically with my hon. Friend's observation about other European nations? To my knowledge—I have been a regular visitor in recent months to most of our partner nations in the European Union—only one country has specifically ruled out the use of military force, for well-known reasons. He needs to check a little more carefully the state of public opinion in the countries that he cites before announcing it to the House. On the question of a vote, I have set out the position and it remains as my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary indicated.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): In seeking to uphold the authority of the United Nations by military force, quite rightly if necessary, does the Secretary of State agree that it would be a hollow victory, and that there would be no victory in the fight against terrorism world wide, if no progress was made on the conflict between Israel and Palestine? Will he therefore not be pushed around by the Government of Israel and remind them that there are one or two United Nations Security Council resolutions that we expect them to follow, too?

Mr. Hoon: I indicated earlier the Government's concern to ensure that progress is made on the middle east peace process. The Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien), who has ministerial responsibility for the middle east, is present in the House and I am sure that he has heard the hon. Gentleman's remarks. The Government take the matter very seriously and continue to take action on it.

Jane Griffiths (Reading, East): My right hon. Friend referred in his statement to the preparation needed for the deployment of reservists. He knows that reservists have homes, jobs and families and cannot be deployed at the drop of a weapons inspector. Does he agree with my constituents who are reservists that the current situation, which we all hope will be resolved speedily and without bloodshed, should provoke a further look at the levels of support that need to be given to reservists in future so that they can fulfil their commitment to serve their country?

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's concern about reservists, and this is precisely why, for several weeks now, we have taken a careful, considered and cautious approach to their position. I am grateful for her interest, and I assure her that her observations will be taken fully into account.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): May I say to the Secretary of State that the formula whereby a decision has yet to be taken is beginning to wear a little thin, particularly in respect of the deployment of a reinforced armoured brigade? Informed commentators have been assuming for months that such a deployment will be Britain's main contribution to these operations. If a decision has indeed not been taken, that is wholly irresponsible, given the length of time needed properly to train and to form up those troops and to transport them to the region. It would help if the Secretary of State were rather more candid with the House.

Mr. Hoon: I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not suggesting that I am being anything other than candid with the House—but if he is, I invite him to reconsider his observation. I have already answered the question that he raises and made the position clear, and I have nothing to add to what I said earlier.

Mr. John Lyons (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): If the UN decides to take no military action against Iraq, will British troops join American troops in invading Iraq?

Mr. Hoon: The position of the United Nations has been set out by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary. The Government would clearly prefer that there should be a second Security Council resolution, and that has been our position. However, it equally follows that it is the responsibility of the Security Council to ensure that its previous resolutions are properly upheld and properly enforced.

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire): Gaps in the declaration made by Iraq before Christmas have not been satisfactorily explained away. Will that be sufficient cause for a declaration of war?

Mr. Hoon: Resolution 1441 sets out clearly not only that it is necessary that there should be a failure properly to declare Iraq's holdings of weapons of mass destruction, but that they should not co-operate effectively with the international inspection as authorised by the resolution. However, it is important that we take time to assess properly the declaration's contents and, as I have said, to compare it with our previous knowledge of the state of the WMD programme in Iraq.

Mr. Eric Joyce (Falkirk, West): A constituent of mine is a full-time member of the Scottish Ambulance

Service—an organisation with a slightly unfortunate acronym—and a part-time member of the Territorial Army infantry in Scotland. My constituent is unhappy, as am I, with the fact that the stated policy of the Scottish Ambulance Service is not to release personnel for service with the armed forces where no stated legal obligation exists. Indeed, it goes further by actively discouraging TA personnel from remaining in the TA. Will the Secretary of State support me in urging the Scottish Ambulance Service to consider changing its policy?

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that issue, which he has raised from time to time on behalf of several private sector employers that give support to their TA employees. It is important that the public sector match that, and I shall certainly take up the issue, as he suggests.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): From time to time we are told that if Saddam were to step aside, that would resolve the situation. On what basis can we have confidence in such a view, bearing in mind that he heads a non-democratic regime with its own agenda?

I also want to press the Secretary of State on the preparation of our troops. I appreciate that he gave a very good answer to Liberal Democrat spokesman, the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch), but in the light of the changes that we read about, is the Secretary of State persuaded that every solider is being properly prepared medically for the engagement?

Mr. Hoon: On the hon. Gentleman's last question, I am confident that every effort is being made and that lessons have been learned from previous conflicts, especially in respect of operations in the Gulf. We are determined to ensure that all our armed forces have the right preparation and equipment to enable them to conduct a military operation, if that becomes necessary.

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): My right hon. Friend said that the US had asked more than 50 countries for military assistance and that virtually none had ruled out military action. Will he name one other country that is taking steps similar to those that he has announced today?

Mr. Hoon: Clearly, each country must make its own response to the US. I am not aware of the responses that the US has received, but I assure my hon. Friend that a number of countries are offering assistance in different ways to the US.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Will the Secretary of State reflect on the fact that although a strategy of maintaining a close relationship with the US is necessary and right, it is not a sufficient justification for UK participation in a war against Iraq? Does he not understand that many people do not believe that the threat posed by Iraq is sufficiently imminent or grave to constitute a moral basis for war?

Mr. Hoon: The issue is not simply whether there is a moral basis for war, but whether there is a legal basis for it. The Government have consistently made it clear that we will take decisions based on the appropriate international legal position. I am absolutely confident that, as the Government have made clear on a number of occasions previously, we will go through a proper process in the UN and internationally before we take any decisions about military action.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): I am intrigued by my right hon. Friend's view that there is a need only for a legal basis for action, not a moral basis. I hope that he will expand on that. In that context, does he agree that there must be a national consensus before we can be prepared to commit the men and women serving in our armed forces and put their lives at risk? Where is the evidence that that national consensus in favour of war exists? What evidence will he bring to the House to show that it exists before we go to war? Does my right hon. Friend accept that the prevailing mood in the country remains very sceptical and that a huge number of people believe that Britain is acting not in its own interests or in the interests of middle east peace, but solely in the interests of the relationship with the US?

Mr. Hoon: I do not think that my hon. Friend should get ahead of the position that I have set out. I have repeated consistently that the Government have taken no decision about military action. As I have explained, that will depend on the legal justification and—for the avoidance of doubt—also the moral basis. I was not suggesting in any way that the legal basis excluded the moral basis. However, in respect of my hon. Friend's remarks about consensus, the House voted overwhelmingly before the Christmas recess in support of the Government's position on UN Security Council resolution 1441. I have also pointed out that the Government have said that there would be a further vote in the House at an appropriate stage when military decisions have been taken and military action decided on.

Mr. Adrian Flook (Taunton): Last October, I visited 40 Commando Royal Marines—a unit based in Taunton—when it was on a desert training exercise in the US. I spoke to a number of Marines, who all voiced concern about the quality of their equipment. They were especially worried about the reliability of the Clansman radio. By the third week of that exercise, only 22 of the 70 radios that the unit had taken were working. Will the Secretary of State assure the House that if our troops go into a theatre of war in Iraq, they will be properly equipped?

Mr. Hoon: I can give the hon. Gentleman that assurance. As I told the House before the Christmas recess, a number of urgent operational requirements are currently being procured. That will certainly cover effective communications.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): Although my right hon. Friend has said that war is not inevitable, may I press him still further on his medical contingency plans? Can he tell us what detailed plans exist for a medical plan, military hospitals and the requirements for convalescence that could be needed if this is pursued to its ultimate end?

Mr. Hoon: That point underlies the call-out of a number of our reservists. It is important that we have

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the right kind of medical support for our armed forces if military action is decided on, and I can assure my hon. Friend that her remarks will be taken fully into account before any resort is made to military action.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Is the Secretary of State seriously telling the House that he believes that there is a consensus of public opinion in this country and across Europe in favour of conflict with Iraq at present? He says that the measures that he has announced today are purely enabling, but does he appreciate the concern shared by many of us that those deployments and the vastly greater deployments by the United States carry their own momentum, making conflict almost inevitable? Does he appreciate the danger of being on a conveyor belt towards war?

Mr. Hoon: I answered the question about consensus a few moments ago. I am confident that there is an overwhelming consensus in support of the Government's policy on Iraq. At each stage, the Government have sought to set out their policy clearly to the House and, indeed, to the country, and that has been strongly supported. I do not believe that there is any inevitability about conflict, not least involving the United States, because it is in no different position from that of the United Kingdom in that it agreed to a United Nations process and it wants that process to be properly implemented and enforced.

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): I welcome what Ministers have said today about the need to broaden the agenda beyond Iraq and I join other hon. Members in urging Ministers not to be deflected from pursuing a just peace for Israel and Palestine. However, on Iraq, may I tell the Secretary of State that many of us want the weapons inspectors to succeed? Although we accept the need to keep the pressure on Saddam, we are worried about others using that as a pretext and a cover to get to 27 January and then to call time on those weapons inspections in support of adopting pre-emptive strikes, to which this House has not signed up. What reassurance can he give me on that?

Mr. Hoon: I can give my hon. Friend the reassurance that he will find in the speech made by the President of the United States at the United Nations General Assembly on 12 September, when he committed his country to a UN process, negotiated a Security Council resolution, and sought at every stage to ensure that it is properly enforced. That continues to be the policy of the United States and, indeed, of the United Kingdom.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): Notwithstanding other hon. Members' comments about public opinion from the perspective of those who oppose war, does the Secretary of State understand the concern among many of us who broadly support the Government's policy that the British public do not really understand what this is all about and that, if it does lead to war, the Government have a huge task ahead to convince the British people that they are doing the right thing? I suspect that there has not been an occasion of British deployment for many decades that has had less support from the public.

Mr. Hoon: I do not accept that, but I recognise, as I have sought to explain to the House, that this is a step-by-step process and that it is not possible to secure overwhelming public support for military action before the explanation for that military action has been given and, therefore, before the justification for that military action has been identified. We have not yet reached that point in the process, and unless and until we do I accept that we cannot explain the justification for military action.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): Will my right hon. Friend concede that it would help the moral basis for war if one of the Government's stated objectives was to form a democratic Government in Iraq? The Government's stated objective is to have a unified Iraq, but not to have an Iraq whose Government reflect the will of the people. Given that former British Governments have helped to hinder and frustrate the development of democracy in Iraq, would not it be right for the Government today to say that their objective is to form a democratic Government in Iraq? Of course, we remember the promises that were hinted at about democracy in Kuwait.

Mr. Hoon: I refer my hon. Friend to the written statement made by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary earlier today, to which I referred in my statement, in which we have set out our objectives in relation to Iraq, which include, among others, providing effective and representative Government for the people of Iraq.

Sue Doughty (Guildford): I share with other Members a deep concern for our servicemen and women who do not know what the future holds for them—and for innocent men and women in Iraq, too, who do not know what the future holds. Will the Secretary of State give an assurance that as our Government and that of the United States work with other countries to provide a peaceful solution—or, if they see it as necessary, a military solution—other benefits of war, such as Iraq's reserves, will form no part of those negotiations?

Mr. Hoon: That is the Government's position, and I make it clear to the House, as I have done already, that the basis for our concern about Saddam Hussein's regime involves his possession of weapons of mass destruction. Our objective is to remove those weapons of mass destruction from his control.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): As, I presume, it will take a defined time to prepare reservists for possible military action, was today's announcement triggered by evidence from the UN inspectors of a possible material breach, or by the United States Administration's clear belief that a successful attack against Iraq must begin in February?

Mr. Hoon: It was triggered by the need to ensure that if there is to be military action to enforce the decisions of the UN Security Council, the United Kingdom is ready and able to play its part.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): As our service personnel shape up to their duties with courage and

determination, will the Secretary of State undertake to bear that in mind when pay and conditions are next considered? Many feel that the special factors in service life are not fully reflected in pay and conditions, and that it is not reasonable, for instance, that some personnel should be paid several thousands pounds a year less than firefighters.

Mr. Hoon: That is a matter for the Armed Forces Pay Review Body, to which I gave evidence before the Christmas recess. I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's observations and I am sure that they will be taken fully into account by the body before it produces its report.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): It is a long time since I was last in Iraq—it was during the Suez crisis of 1956. Is my right hon. Friend aware that, at that time, a whole host of reservists refused to be called up? Does he feel that, in the absence of a consensus, he might face that problem again? If so, what are his contingency plans?

Mr. Hoon: Certainly, we have sought to take into account, in the careful way in which we have approached the question of reservists, their particular and individual circumstances. I certainly take my hon. Friend's observations into account, although, at the time, I was not in a position to match his service.

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): The Secretary of State omitted to mention in his statement the F/A2 Sea Harrier and its deployment. Was that omission intentional? Alternatively, does it mean that the Secretary of State is now sending our Royal Navy taskforce to sea and possibly to conflict without a single jet engine designed to provide air defence?

Mr. Hoon: As I explained to the House, the task group that will be deployed will essentially be a helicopter-carrying task group, and HMS Ark Royal will be deployed in that role.

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): My right hon. Friend will be aware that, yesterday, Saddam Hussein referred to the UN inspectors as spies. Will he assure me that as the inspectors carry out their work over the next three weeks and, if necessary, beyond 27 January, they will be given full protection and support and whatever assistance they need to find what is being hidden in Iraq?

Mr. Hoon: I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. I do not believe that the House should take notice of typical bluster by Saddam Hussein. A very determined effort has been made in the design and operation of the work being carried out by UNMOVIC to avoid some of the mistakes made in the past in relation to UNSCOM and previous inspections. I can give him the assurance that this country and other countries will fully support the efforts of the weapons inspectors.

Dr. John Pugh (Southport): Given the degree of scepticism world wide and in the House, who in the view of the Government is now the ultimate judge of whether Saddam Hussein has complied with resolution 1441? Is it or is it not the United Nations?

Mr. Hoon: It is clear from Security Council resolution 1441 that there will have to be a further discussion in the Security Council before any such determination is reached.

Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): May I probe further on the comments that the Lord Chancellor made on the "Today" programme this morning? Was he correct in saying that war could be averted by either Iraq disarming or, separately, Saddam Hussein standing down? In the latter instance, why would weapons of mass destruction not be a factor that warrants war? Why and when did regime change become a purpose of the Government's war preparations?

Mr. Hoon: The objective is the disarming of Saddam Hussein and his regime. If he were to stand down—we believe that that would enormously improve the situation in Iraq and advance regional security and stability—that would clearly produce a very different regime in Iraq. We would want to see that any succeeding régime was not a threat and did not rely on weapons of mass destruction, so the removal of weapons of mass destruction from the control of the regime remains a prerequisite. However, as the US President has made clear, Iraq without Saddam Hussein would be a very different country indeed.

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk): I noted the Secretary of State's response to my hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty) on the question of energy supplies. *The Guardian* this morning reports that the Foreign Secretary admitted yesterday in a speech to ambassadors that security of energy sources is a key element of British foreign policy and yet there is no reference at all to that in either the Secretary of State's statement or in the earlier written statement from the Foreign Secretary. Is it credible to suggest that that issue is a key priority of British foreign policy and yet plays no part in the Government's thinking on the country that has the second largest oil reserves of any country in the world?

Mr. Hoon: May I suggest to the hon. Gentleman that he reads the entirety of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary's speech? I am sure that it is available on the Foreign Office website and the hon. Gentleman can look at the whole speech rather than relying on the rather tendentious account of it in *The Guardian* this morning.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): Will my right hon. Friend explain to the House what is meant by the phrase "full and active support" for the United Nations weapons inspectors, unless it means that, without a positive report from the inspectors of breaches by Iraq, British forces will not be committed into conflict?

Mr. Hoon: We have made clear the importance of all members of the international community supporting the work of the weapons inspectors. In practical terms, for example, that has meant that the United Kingdom has made available certain equipment to the inspectors

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pending their ability to procure equipment for themselves. "Full and active support" means not only supporting their work in principle, as is consistent with Security Council resolution 1441, but providing the practical assistance that will allow their work to be completed successfully.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): Will the Secretary of State confirm the recent estimate of the Royal United Services Institute that a reasonable estimate for the cost of full British participation in a military operation in the Gulf will be about £5 million, rather than the £1 billion that the Government have set aside so far?

Mr. Hoon: I have not seen that detailed estimate. We have set aside the spending that is necessary to ensure that we have the required equipment. All military operations require some short-term urgent spending, and that has certainly been necessary for preparations for any possible operations in Iraq. However, I am not yet in a position to give the hon. Gentleman any fuller picture of the overall cost because, as yet, those costs have not arisen.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the new year exercise that you have given me this afternoon. */Interruption./* Bobbing up and down to ask a question, I mean. I see that the Secretary of State has cottoned on.

Before Christmas, I asked how many reservists were employed in the national health service as doctors and nurses. The Minister gave me a guesstimate and promised to write to me, which he did. He said:

> "I am afraid that the figures I gave you at the time were inaccurate. We hold no record of the number of Volunteer Reserve Forces or former Service personnel with a recall liability who are working within the NHS."

The Secretary of State implied today, however, that he knows the figures. Does he think that it is important for the NHS and MPs, with our local hospitals to consider, to know how many people working in the NHS have had call-out notices, and what effect that will have on the treatment of our constituents?

Mr. Hoon: I indicated that the number of reservists that we are aiming to have available—in the short-term, at any rate—is 1,500. I also indicated that we are aware that that will have an impact on our hospital services, and the Department of Health and the Ministry of Defence have discussed it for some weeks. It is not necessary for me to deal with the matter in more detail than is set out by my right hon. Friend in the correspondence.

Points of Order

4.31 pm

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It has come to my attention during the course of the afternoon that British security forces have today discovered supplies of the lethal toxic ricin in properties in Wood Green. Arrests have been made and there are obviously suspicions of links with terrorist organisations. Have you received a request from a Minister to make a statement to the House, not least so that we can congratulate the security forces on their diligence? If not, perhaps we can seek such a statement through you during the rest of today's proceedings.

Mr. Speaker: I have received no such approach from any Minister.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Under Standing Order 24, I beg to move the need for the House of Commons to debate measures announced today by the Secretary of State for Defence—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Under Standing Order 24, the hon. Gentleman must seek the Speaker's permission: he did so today and I refused. Perhaps he could try another day.

Mr. Dalyell: I did so on the understanding not that you refused my request, but that you properly and understandably said that you wished to hear the Secretary of State's statement first. It is against that background that I press my request. The fact is that he did not answer the crucial question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Lyons) about whether Britain would go ahead with the United States in the event that the United Nations did not support—

Mr. Speaker: Order. All I say to the hon. Gentleman is that the Secretary of State has made a statement. I do not give reasons why I refuse a Standing Order 24 application. The fact of the matter is that I have refused such a request. The hon. Gentleman knows that he can make such an application another day. Perhaps I will be in a better mood then.

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I do not want to tax your patience because, as you know, I have the greatest respect for you personally and for the office that you hold, but I am raising urgent matters indeed and by Saturday it will be too late. Surely the urgency of a war-and-peace situation takes precedence over health in Wales, albeit an important subject. It is terrible that the House of Commons is not able to discuss those issues on a substantive motion when we can do something about them. After all—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I must interrupt the hon. Gentleman. He knows the procedures of the House very well—indeed, he taught me a great deal about them. There is nothing to stop him making an application again tomorrow or the day after. I hope that he will not

wish to pursue the matter further because he well knows that I am bound by the rules that the House has given me.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Have you had any indication that the Minister responsible for fisheries wishes to make a statement on the outcome of the European Council meeting that took place during the recess, given that the outcome has such enormous implications for so many coastal communities, particularly in Scotland and Yorkshire? Instead, the House has had to be satisfied with one answer from the Secretary of State from Scotland. As the right hon. Lady was not even present at the Fisheries Council, her knowledge of the subject is somewhat limited.

Mr. Speaker: There will be a full debate next week.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In view of the widespread concern about flooding, has the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs indicated that she wishes to make a statement on flooding? In and close to my constituency there have been no fewer than 10 breaches of the River Stour, and I understand that another three or four inches of rain will put hundreds of houses in my constituency at risk.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Have you received any indication on whether the Government are giving serious thought to making a statement? It would be churlish not to congratulate the Environment Agency on its flood relief works, but one implication of it is that my hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) and I seem to have collected all the floodwater that has been relieved from Maidenhead and up the Thames, and we now have a very serious flooding and sewage problem in our constituencies.

Mr. Speaker: I acknowledge the great distress of many of the hon. Gentleman's constituents. There was flooding in my constituency last summer, and it is a difficult situation for everyone concerned. I hope that Ministers take note of the concerns expressed by the hon. Gentlemen.

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I have in my hand a letter to you asking whether I might catch your eye on Thursday in the debate on the Health (Wales) Bill. Perhaps you could intimate to the House whether that Bill could be put to one side in order for the Standing Order referred to by the Father of the House to take precedence.

Mr. Speaker: I have learned that we take one day at a time in this House.

Health and Safety at Work (Amendment)

4.38 pm

Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 to provide for increased penalties for offences under that Act and under the Employers' Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Act 1969.

As a trainee civil engineer more than 30 years ago, I quickly recognised the importance of health and safety at work, especially the contribution of the 1974 Act. The workplace in which I was employed before I entered Parliament in May 1997 was indeed very dangerous, combining, as it did, work in the construction and transport industries. That unlikely combination magnified the risks that I and my fellow workers faced in our environment. Any study of health and safety statistics will show that the combination of construction and transport work can be lethal. Without a doubt, that experience cultivated my personal and political interest in matters of safety in the workplace.

Sadly, in the 19 years that I worked before I entered this House, I encountered far too many accidents on site. On several occasions, I also encountered the tragedy of fatalities.

Subsequently, I had to attend funerals and present evidence to inquiries. I also met the families and friends of the deceased, long after the death in the workplace had occurred, and there were questions that simply could not be answered—questions that always started with the short word "why". Therefore, the House will recognise why I—along with, I hope, everyone in the Chamber—am passionate about safety in the workplace. The reasons are self-evident.

I believe that the 1974 legislation has served not only working people but the wider community with great success. Over the past three decades, Parliament has sat back and let the Act do its proper job, but it needs to re-engage on this important subject by revisiting the legislation and revitalising a workhorse that has served the nation and working people well for 30 years. So, through the first ten-minute Bill of the new year, I hope to ask Parliament in 2003 to help to celebrate the Act's great achievements by bringing key sections up to date to reflect the realities of today's workplaces and by strengthening the penalties for those persons who are responsible for taking unnecessary risks with safety on sites and throughout the workplaces of this nation.

My Bill would remove the cap on fines for breaches of health and safety laws, which is set at £20,000, for a range of so-called less serious offences. In my view, each offence is serious. The Bill would extend the possibility of making prison the punishment for all breaches of health and safety law, whereas currently only breaches of a few sections of the Act are punishable by imprisonment. It would also significantly increase the fine for not having employer liability insurance, as required by the Employers' Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Act 1969.

What would the Bill do to improve health and safety? I believe that these measures, which were first identified in the consultation on the revitalising health and safety strategy, launched in June 2000 by my right hon. Friend

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the Deputy Prime Minister and the Health and Safety Commission, would take the debate forward and enable Parliament to consider it.

Without doubt, the reason for proposing the changes is a prevailing concern that is shared by the TUC, the nation's insurance industry and many Members of the House—that such health and safety offences are treated less seriously than they ought to be by employers, the courts and, ultimately, the wider public, which means that there is an incentive to ignore the law. That law is not strong enough, and we must ensure that we do not simply allow a plateau to develop due to the success achieved in improving health and safety throughout British workplaces over three decades levelling off.

Indeed, statistics for 2000–01 pulled together by the Health and Safety Executive show that more than 28,000 major injuries occurred in workplaces around our nation, as did some 300 fatalities. The House should be very concerned about those statistics and I hope that this ten-minute Bill will lead to action against the terrible scandal that faces our nation.

In particular, the measures on imprisonment that I propose would bring health and safety in line with more modern legislation such as that on the environment and food safety. For example, the 1974 Act was introduced well before the development of current thinking on corporate accountability and was based on the supposition, which was correct way back in the 1970s, that employers would improve health and safety standards because of the new law. Such a message from Parliament would spur employers on to taking real measures to achieve a safer working environment for our people.

Why do I focus especially on the need to improve the situation as regards employers' liability insurance? It is because, like many Members, I am being presented with an increasing body of evidence, which has been rehearsed many times in the House during the past year, that recent rises in employers' liability insurance have persuaded some small firms that they would be far better off not taking out insurance at all.

In my constituency work, I have been concerned to find that small companies were refused insurance cover or that they faced demands for excessive increased premiums from their insurance brokers despite excellent safety records over several decades of profitable trading. If such high-quality companies were even tempted to break the law in the fashion that I described, the effect on employees would be catastrophic because if there was a serious accident the company would have no insurance cover to pay compensation. If the damages were large, the victim could be left with nothing.

Bills for damages of millions of pounds would have an impact on the wider community and the public interest. Parliament cannot sit back and wait for such accidents to happen.

I firmly believe that Parliament wants to ensure that good employers are supported and helped and that they are not undermined. The so-called cowboy employer mentality should belong in the last century—if not in the one before that. It is extremely important that bad employers are deterred from such practices and encouraged to take proper measures in their workplaces.

From my own workplace experiences, I know that, if the conditions were right, most employers would adopt good health and safety practices and their firms would become better. They would become more profitable and would make a better contribution to the prosperity of our nation. However, unless we have a legal framework that supports and encourages good behaviour, and punishes bad behaviour, Parliament will be neglecting its obvious responsibilities.

Many Members have doné much to contribute to the health and safety at work agenda. I single out my hon. Friends the Members for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) and for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Savidge) for their work in the all-party occupational safety and health group, but many Members also recognise the importance of that agenda.

I hope that the House will allow me to take my Bill forward as it will make an important contribution to improving the framework for safety at work.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Lawrie Quinn, Mr. Tony Lloyd, Mr. Michael Clapham, Mr. Roy Beggs, Mr. Frank Doran, Mr. Richard Allan, Mr. Bob Laxton, Ian Stewart, Mr. Malcolm Savidge and Rob Marris.

HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK (AMENDMENT)

Lawrie Quinn accordingly presented a Bill to amend the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 to provide for increased penalties for offences under that Act and under the Employers' Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Act 1969: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 31 January, and to be printed [Bill 37].

Local Government Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): I inform the House that Mr. Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

4.49 pm

The Minister for Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Local government performs a vital function in the life of our country. Local authorities between them account for about 25 per cent. of all public expenditure in England and Wales. Local authorities deliver a wide range of services that are vital to the well-being of local communities and individuals and are uniquely well placed to reflect and represent the concerns and aspirations of the people living and working in their areas.

Just over a year ago, in our White Paper, "Strong Local Leadership; Quality Public Services", we set out our ambitious agenda for the future of local government. Two key themes lie at the heart of that agenda. The first is the need to devolve power and responsibility to local authorities. The second is the importance of driving up standards of delivery in every local authority area. The two are inextricably linked.

The last decades of the 20th century were, sadly, characterised by excessive centralisation. Local authority powers were progressively curtailed and eroded while central Government sought to exercise ever-greater supervision and direction over the minutiae of local government activity. The Conservatives now seek to present themselves as being in favour of devolution, at least in respect of local authorities. It is always good to see sinners who have recognised the need to repent, but there are many people in local government with long memories who find the current posture of the official Opposition difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile with their entirely different behaviour when they were in power. It will take more than a few airy speeches to wash away the long record of heavy-handed centralisation and contempt for local democracy that marked the Conservative years in government.

This Government want to see local authorities succeed. We want to help councillors and council officers to deliver the strong local leadership that people expect from their council, and the quality services that everyone has the right to expect. Our White Paper set out a range of measures to help to achieve those goals, including a new performance management framework, on which the Audit Commission delivered its first comprehensive performance assessments just before Christmas, and a range of deregulatory measures designed to give local authorities more freedom to succeed and more incentives to drive up service standards. The Bill is one further important step along that road. It gives effect to all the commitments requiring legislation set out in the 2001 White Paper, and introduces measures to remove unnecessary and outdated bureaucracy and red tape, and to help those working at local level to respond to changing needs and demands.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): The right hon. Gentleman will recall that the Select Committee report commented on the amount of regulations that would be used to bring these measures into being, and recommended that most of those regulations should be made available in draft form to the Standing Committee. Will he tell us when these important regulations will be made available?

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman makes a very fair point. As I said to the Select Committee, we intend to make available to the Standing Committee, by the time it comes to consider each of the relevant passages of the Bill, the main regulations in draft that will apply to those passages, or—I make one caveat—in certain respects, particularly relating to the business improvement district programme, the guidance that we propose to issue that will inform the regulations. The reason for that is that the business improvement measures represent an innovative approach, and we intend the regulations to enable changes to be made in due course, but we do not want to be too prescriptive. That is why we are using the regulatory framework rather than putting detailed prescriptions in legislation, but we will issue guidance to illustrate how we expect the business improvement district programme to be taken forward.

The Bill covers both England and Wales. It responds to a number of requests made by the Welsh Assembly for specific Welsh provision. The Welsh Assembly supports the Bill, and has welcomed its introduction. The Bill has been the subject of extensive consultation, and, indeed, was preceded by a draft Bill published last summer and scrutinised by the Urban Affairs Sub-Committee of the then Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions. Of course, areas of concern arose from the consultation, and we have gone some way towards meeting those concerns. Most notably, we removed one of the most controversial measures, which originally proposed to merge revenue support grant and national non-domestic rates.

I turn now to the substance of the Bill. Part 1 makes a fundamental change—

Andrew Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I am grateful for some of the changes that were made as a result of the Select Committee's recommendations. Before my right hon. Friend outlines all the measures in the Bill, will he tell us more about one or two of the things that have been left out? Will he tell us also when he envisages those measures being inserted in the Bill during consideration in Committee? I have in mind especially the controversial issues that arise from section 28. Secondly, there is the registration of landlords. Local authorities would very much like that power when dealing with empty homes.

Mr. Raynsford: As my hon. Friend knows, we have given effect to all the legislative commitments in the White Paper, and that was our objective. Perfectly rightly and properly, there is concern about section 28 and other measures. The Government will support a

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suitable amendment to repeal section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988, if one is tabled. We regard section 28 as an unnecessary piece of legislation.

Kali Mountford (Colne Valley): I welcome the steer that my right hon. Friend has given the House. Is he saying that the Government would be minded to accept an amendment during consideration of the Bill?

Mr. Raynsford: Yes, I can give my hon. Friend exactly that assurance. We will support a suitable amendment to repeal section 28. As I have said, it is an unnecessary piece of legislation.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): Why will the Government not table their own amendment? Why will they say that an amendment is not appropriate in their eyes? If they are to make that judgment, the Government should table one.

Mr. Raynsford: As I have explained to my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), the Chairman of the Select Committee, we have been working extremely hard to give effect to all the legislative commitments in our White Paper. The Bill fundamentally deals with local government finance. The hon. Gentleman will fully understand—I know that he will have studied the Bill—that many measures are involved, and we have concentrated on putting them in place. We have always made it clear that if suitable amendments are introduced in respect of other measures, we shall be prepared to be sympathetic. That applies especially to section 28. I have given a clear indication to the Chairman of the Select Committee and to my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Kali Mountford) that the Government will consider an appropriately framed amendment sympathetically.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): While my right hon. Friend is displaying an open and magnanimous spirit, is he aware that the Bill offers an opportunity to tackle the issue of private landlords? Would he be similarly open-minded and magnanimous in accepting an amendment that dealt with that issue? I suspect that there will be no other opportunity, unless he can assure me otherwise, to tackle the matter.

Mr. Raynsford: Housing provisions are the subject of separate legislation that is being prepared by the Department. I know that my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister will want to say more about that in the near future. We have an important agenda in proceeding with the finance measures set out in the Bill. We do not want to overload the Bill with a large number of measures, especially when there are other options for achieving my hon. Friend's legislative objective.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): May I tell the Minister that if the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Kali Mountford) tables an amendment to secure the repeal of section 28, I shall certainly support it? Some time ago, I came to believe that section 28 is gratuitously offensive. It causes justified resentment and should, in the interests of fairness and decency, be urgently repealed.

Mr. Raynsford: I am happy to say to the hon. Gentleman that I wholly concur with his view. We see no useful purpose for section 28. Contrary to the views that are often expressed, it does not have an effect in relation to what is taught in schools. There are separate provisions to cover that. As he rightly stated, it gives considerable offence to many people whose lifestyle is stigmatised by the provision. We regard it as unnecessary and undesirable. We shall support an appropriate amendment to achieve its repeal.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): In that case, why did the right hon. Gentleman not include the provision in the Bill?

Mr. Raynsford: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman clearly was not listening when I answered precisely that question from the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey).

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): If the Government do not, on balance, like a provision, but do not have a very strong view on it, it is legitimate for them to say that they will open themselves to persuasion by a Back Bencher. However, if the Government fundamentally believe that a measure is wrong, as the Minister has just stated repeatedly in this case, it is sheer gutlessness not to try to repeal it by tabling an amendment with their names attached.

Mr. Raynsford: I have a lot of respect for the right hon. Gentleman, who has done the job that I am doing now. He will know that putting legislation together is complex. When one has many competing claims for provisions to be included and there is a White Paper with a series of important commitments that need to be implemented, it is right and proper that the Government should concentrate on those. He will know also that it is perfectly reasonable to seize opportunities for change that may be presented by amendments tabled by Back Benchers in Committee. I seem to recall, when I was in Opposition, moving amendments in Committee that were, in some cases, at least temporarily successful in changing legislation for which he was responsible. That is a proper part of the process.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Raynsford: I intend to make progress, as we have dealt with this matter at considerable length.

Part 1 makes a fundamental change to the way in which local authorities borrow to support capital investment. It ends the current consent regime that requires authorities to obtain Government approval for all borrowing. In future, local authorities will be free to borrow without Government consent if they can afford to service the debt without extra Government support. We will, of course, continue to support the major part of authorities' capital programmes, but authorities will be free to use their self-financed borrowing for any kind of capital spending—that is on buying, building and improving property and infrastructure.

There are many ways in which councils will be able to use those new freedoms. They could include, for example, major social services schemes such as improvements to residential care homes and grants to voluntary organisations for family centres. They could

involve environmental schemes to encourage household recycling. There could be an emphasis on crime prevention measures such as improving street lighting and car park security. Those are random examples. Authorities will have complete discretion as to how they apply that new freedom.

Local authorities must accept that those freedoms go hand in hand with a responsibility to act in a way that ensures high standards of financial management. That is why we have retained reserve powers and are setting out specific obligations to monitor financial performance and maintain prudent reserves.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): Forty-five local authorities already demonstrate excellent prudential management because they are debt-free, yet clause 11(2)(b) seeks to prevent them from being able to manage those assets and to decide their priorities for them. The Minister wants to sequestrate them and spend them on local authorities who have not managed their budget well. Surely that is not about devolving responsibility to local government.

Mr. Raynsford: No, I am afraid that the hon. Lady has got completely the wrong end of the stick. Some authorities happen to be debt-free because of good fortune, not good financial management. Some happen to have inherited assets. For example, a number of new towns have housing stock that they did not have to incur debt to acquire. Others may have been remiss in meeting responsibilities in their area, so they simply have not incurred debt. The suggestion that there is an absolute parallel between efficient management and debt-free status is not accurate. Also, the provision for capital receipts applies to all other local authorities where a proportion of receipts currently has to be set aside. We are ending that provision, and instead there will be a pooling mechanism. If it is right that all other authorities in the country should be part of a pooling mechanism, I can see no logical reason why debt-free authorities should not be part of it too. She does some special pleading, but she will have to do better.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): As a Member for a new town, I think that my right hon. Friend should be aware that concern about clause 11(2)(b) does not come only from Members on one side of the House. The Bill incorporates a system by which a new town is considered to have been given a wonderful windfall, which means that its borough council must pay £10 million a year back to the Treasury from its own resources by 2010. The idea that that is fair falls badly on the ears of my constituents, who live in a town that is 50 years old and whose entire fabric is falling into disarray, as the Select Committee has recognised. My right hon. Friend should be aware that these matters cause anger among Members of all parties.

Mr. Raynsford: I must tell my hon. Friend that to some extent he has misunderstood the arrangements, which will ensure that there is continued increased investment in housing—I know that that is dear to his heart. We have already increased housing capital investment by a factor of two and a half since we came to office. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister will make a further announcement when the communities plan is announced later this year.

On capital receipts, where an authority needs to spend for the reasons that my hon. Friend outlined, those needs will be taken fully into account when we determine the sums to be made available. There is no reason at all why he should be afraid about a loss of spending capacity in an area that genuinely needs to spend on housing and intends to use its capital receipts for that purpose.

There is a different issue concerning authorities that have received substantial capital receipts but not applied them to housing investment. For example, Ashford has received more than double the amount in capital receipts in the past three years that it has spent on housing investment. When there is a genuine need for housing investment, it is curious that authorities with considerable assets but no apparent enthusiasm to spend them to meet housing need can keep their council tax down by using those sums for other purposes. It is therefore right to have a mechanism to make the best use of those receipts to meet the needs that arise.

Mr. Patrick Hall (Bedford): My right hon. Friend mentioned incentives. Does he accept that a debt-free housing authority such as Bedford borough council views the prospect of the withdrawal of the local authority social housing grant as a disincentive to invest in the social housing sector? It earmarked all its capital receipts for housing on the basis that an equivalent sum would be repaid for use in the general capital account. Will he address that possible loss of incentive?

Mr. Raynsford: As I told my hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter), we have already made it clear that authorities with a genuine need to spend on housing investment can look forward to the new framework with confidence. We intend to take those needs into account when we determine the arrangements that will be announced by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister when the communities plan is introduced. However, there is no reason for local authorities to feel nervous about any reduction in housing investment. We are seeking to increase investment and make sure that assets are used for that purpose. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bedford (Mr. Hall) heard me say, we are obviously concerned about authorities that have received substantial receipts but have not used them for necessary investment.

Barbara Follett (Stevenage): I thank my right hon. Friend for assurances that new towns such as Stevenage will not lose much-needed housing money. However, does he realise the effect that delaying the announcement of the amount that they will receive in capital receipts is having both on their ability to plan ahead and his stated aim of devolving power to local authorities? It is taking power away from local authorities, and there is a lot of resentment in Stevenage about that.

Mr. Raynsford: I fully understand the concerns voiced by Stevenage—indeed, I met a delegation from there. However, I put it to my hon. Friend in the nicest possible way that perhaps she could tell her colleagues in Stevenage that, according to our records, it has received £14.4 million more in capital receipts over the past three

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years than it has applied to housing investment. Her colleagues may wish to consider that before making more representations.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): While the Minister is commenting on the redistribution of pooled housing capital receipts, will he also comment on clause 90, which redistributes the surplus from some local authorities' housing revenue accounts to local authorities that have managed their housing revenue accounts badly and are in deficit? How is that amount of redistribution justified in the Bill?

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman should remember that the current framework for housing revenue accounts was introduced by his party when it was in government and contained precisely that provision. The only difference was that the housing revenue account framework that his party put into effect included housing benefit in the housing revenue account. That has caused considerable anxiety and resentment among local authorities and we are removing the provision. We are introducing proper resource accounting, an approach that I believe the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis), who leads for the Opposition and previously chaired the Public Accounts Committee, strongly recommends. That is the purpose. We are separating benefit from the housing revenue account. I hope that the hon. Gentleman welcomes that.

The new duties imposed in part 2 are no more than any well-managed local authority would do anyway, but by making those duties statutory, we are making it clear that we will accept nothing less than sound budget setting and monitoring and prudent financial management. Although most local authorities manage their affairs scrupulously and well, and many achieve very high standards, as the Audit Commission's work testifies, it remains the case that a small number of badly managed and poorly performing local authorities tarnish the good reputation of local government. It is in everyone's interests that those authorities turn around their performance and strive to match the standard of the best. That is what the comprehensive performance assessment and follow-up process are designed to help achieve, and that is why we make no apology for including the part 2 provisions in the Bill.

Various mechanisms to make grants are provided for in part 3, including a wide-ranging power to give greater flexibility in making grants to local authorities for any purpose. The new power will allow Government to pay grants without imposing undue conditions—another way in which we are working to reduce red tape and bureaucracy.

Mr. Edward Davey: Can the right hon. Gentleman tell the House what parliamentary scrutiny of those grants there will be?

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman cannot have it both ways. If he favours local government being able to operate without unreasonable central control, he must support measures that allow greater flexibility in grant-making powers. If he wants detailed central control, he will argue for the retention of detailed parliamentary scrutiny of each individual grant, many of which are of very small sums indeed.

This measure will be subject to parliamentary scrutiny, because our departmental accounts will continue to be the subject of full parliamentary scrutiny, and it will ensure—*[Interruption.]* I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman makes light of that. Parliamentary scrutiny of departmental accounts is an important part of the responsibilities of this place. That is the proper way of doing it, rather than minute point-by-point scrutiny of every single grant, however small, to individual local authorities, which is required under the current legislation. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would welcome our approach, which tries to streamline the procedure and cut out unnecessary bureaucracy.

Mr. Andrew Turner: The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) may not have made himself entirely clear to the Minister, or perhaps the Minister did not entirely understand his point, which related not to the scrutiny of each individual grant, but to the scrutiny of the objective criteria under which the grants will be paid. Far too many grants have been paid, for example, in education without any clear objective criteria. It is notable how many of those grants have gone to Birmingham, whereas none has gone to the Isle of Wight.

Mr. Raynsford: If the hon. Gentleman gave some attention to the details of grants to local authorities, he would be aware of the extraordinary number of very small grants that go, for example, on the beacon council scheme, to which we shall refer later. The average grant is some £40,000. There are well over 100 authorities seeking beacon status next year. Not all will succeed, of course, but to require individual grant approvals in such minute detail is clearly not a sensible way to operate. Obviously, there are broad criteria. When the criteria for beacon council grants are determined, they will specify exactly the sort of broad features in which he is interested. It is right that such issues should be scrutinised, but that does not include the minute detail of individual grant payments.

Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley): The Minister will be aware of the Select Committee's concern about the subjectivity in the way in which the general grant was given. Does he agree that local authorities and anyone who is faintly suspicious will see that the new measure is an extension of subjectivity or, in other words, allocation by ministerial will?

Mr. Raynsford: If the hon. Gentleman, who was a Local Government Minister in a former Administration, had read the Local Government Association brief, he would know that it warmly welcomes the provision and believes that it is an appropriate deregulatory measure that allows greater flexibility. Indeed, it states:

> "The LGA welcomes the proposal to simplify and extend the statutory basis of grant payments to local authorities. This is particularly welcome in cases where the new power will provide for greater flexibility for councils in the use of the grants."

I attach rather more attention to the LGA's view than to his.

Part 4 provides for business improvement districts, which will allow local authorities and businesses to work together to put in place appropriate projects to improve their area. Such projects could deal with a wide variety of issues, including improvements to the quality, safety and accessibility of local shopping centres, enhancements to commercial and business centres and other similar desirable aims. There are already good examples of councils and businesses working together voluntarily to deliver benefits for their areas. That will provide a strong basis for the new bid schemes to develop once the legislation is introduced.

Part 5 contains various measures that will make changes to the non-domestic rating system. For example, small business rate relief will benefit small firms occupying single premises with a rateable value of less than £8,000. That will benefit a significant number of ratepayers. There are almost 1 million properties with rateable values of less than £8,000, and businesses qualifying for the relief will benefit, as their overheads will, in effect, be cut.

Part 6 will update council tax.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): On council tax, my right hon. Friend made a statement early in December on the new formula for local authority funding. The proposals are out for consultation and I am sure that he is receiving a substantial number of representations from members of SIGOMA—the special interest group of municipal authorities—and other authorities about the impact of gearing, which will affect the council tax level. As the Bill will be considered in Committee after the date on which the consultation is due to finish, will he address the problems that some authorities are facing in relation to gearing? There is a need to ensure fairness in council taxes under the new formula, so that no local authority faces excessive council tax problems.

Mr. Raynsford: We intend shortly to announce the start of the balance of funding review, which will consider in more detail the wider issues relating to the way in which local authority services are financed. That is the appropriate context in which to consider the issue that my hon. Friend raises. As he referred to the local government finance settlement, however, I should like to point out that we have received a number of representations, including a considerable number from hon. Members and indeed local authorities. Clearly, we are engaged in the process of consultation, so I do not want to say anything more at the moment. I believe that the settlement was a good one. It allowed above-inflation increases to every local authority in the country for the first time, and I believe that that helps local authorities to budget for the coming year.

Part 6 will allow for a 10-year cycle of revaluation and variation in the number of bands. It will help to achieve a fairer way of raising council tax in future years. Contrary to what has been said in some press coverage, revaluation will not lead to increases in the council tax yield. Revaluation is simply the process of looking again at the relative values and distribution between different areas. Local authorities will also have greater freedom on the council tax discounts and exemptions that they grant.

Mr. Pickles: The Government already have powers to vary the bands. Why is a new band preferable to variation of bands?

Mr. Raynsford: Although, as the hon. Gentleman rightly says, there is a power to vary bands, he will be aware that no power exists to increase the number of bands. It might well be felt appropriate to increase the number of bands from eight to 10 or more, but that is simply an option. At the moment, the only power available in the legislation is to vary the bands' existing widths within the existing number. We have received representations from certain parts of the north, for example, to the effect that band A covers a disproportionately large number of properties. Some 80 per cent. or more of properties in that area are entirely within band A. The occupiers of a number of very low value properties in areas with very low values feel that band A is perhaps unfair to them because it covers a very wide range, including properties that may be twice the value of their own. We have not taken decisions on these issues, but they need to be looked at, and given that we have received these sensible and logical representations, it is right that we make provision—if necessary, and if it is felt appropriate—to increase the number of bands.

Mrs. Browning: Does the Minister therefore have in mind park homes, which inevitably fall into band A, even though their owners often feel that that band is unfair so far as they are concerned?

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Lady raises a perfectly fair point. I myself have received representations from the owners of park homes whose properties fall into this category, and who feel that band A is very broad. In some cases, their homes fall rather low in the overall position in band A, and a separate band might be helpful to them. This is precisely why we are giving ourselves the power, if we decide that it is appropriate to do so, to create additional bands. However, we are not committed to doing that at this stage, because a lot will depend on the revaluation process, which, as I have said, will begin in 2005.

Sir Paul Beresford: On a constructive note, when the banding system was set up in 1991, the variation between property values in the north and in the south, for example, was not as great as it is now. Is the Minister considering establishing a regional mean variation, so that variations in the same banding system can accommodate variations in property values throughout the country?

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that some representations have been made in favour of such an option, but as I have already made clear, we have taken no decisions and have no predisposition one way or the other on this issue. We will begin the process of revaluation with a genuinely open mind, and we will be guided by the evidence. Between now and 2005, when revaluation begins, a lot could happen in terms of

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relative values. For example, at the moment a great deal of concern exists in the south of England because in the past 11 years values there have increased by a greater proportion than in the north. However, current figures tell us that the fastest growing region in terms of house prices is Yorkshire and Humberside, and if that trend were to continue for a couple of years, we could well see a very different pattern from the one that currently prevails. For all those reasons, it would not be wise for us to jump to conclusions at this stage about what is the right way to handle this issue, as and when the revaluation begins. However, we have made provision, and the powers exist to deal with this issue in a sensitive way.

Through part 7, we are aiming to complete the transition to resource accounting in the housing revenue account, thereby making it a pure landlord account. Local housing strategies will be put on a statutory basis, and authorities will have the flexibility to rationalise their housing plans. Perceived barriers to rent restructuring will be removed. Finally, part 8 contains the non-finance provisions in the Bill, which also give substantial freedoms to local authorities. For example, all best value authorities will be allowed to charge for discretionary services. Better performing councils will also be empowered to trade across a range of services that they provide.

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): I do not know whether the Minister has skipped through part 6, but on second homes and councils' ability to end discounts, how much of such discounts will local authorities be able to use without restriction?

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that, in the case of second homes, our proposal is to enable local authorities to vary the discount from the current obligatory 50 per cent. downwards to a limit of 10 per cent. There is a purpose for that. We believe that local authorities should retain the proceeds of the reduction in the discount if they choose to do so. The only way in which that can happen is if they know which properties are second homes, and they will have that information only if the owners of second homes have an incentive to record it. That is why we have set the 10 per cent. discount as the absolute minimum, and it exists for that obvious reason. The objective is that local authorities will derive the whole additional revenue that is drawn from the reduction in the discount if they choose to do so. However, it is a local discretion—one more example of the way in which the Government are devolving power and enabling local authorities to take decisions.

Dr. John Pugh (Southport): I am sure that the Minister will conclude by saying that champagne corks should pop because local authorities will have much more power, but how does he explain why 70 pages of legislation contain 79 references to the Secretary of State's powers—new powers, reserve powers and powers that will not be given back to the local authorities? There is only one instance in the Bill of power being given away without obligation, and that is in connection with the prescription of rateable values.

Mr. Raynsford: It is clear that the hon. Gentleman has not read the Bill, which makes it clear that local authorities will have a substantial number of additional freedoms. For example, the borrowing approval requirement will be ended, councils will be allowed to charge for discretionary services, and fair, good and excellent authorities will be allowed to trade. In addition, councils will be allowed to give discretionary council tax discounts, and to reduce or withdraw discounts on second homes and homes that have been empty a long time.

Dr. Pugh *rose—*

Mr. Raynsford: No, I have given way already to the hon. Gentleman. He may not like what I have to say, but he is going to hear it. The Bill gives a substantial number of freedoms and benefits to local government. Local government welcomes that, as the hon. Gentleman should know. However, the Bill also contains a number of innovations, such as the business improvement district. We do not want to be too prescriptive at this stage, as that would hamper innovation and the exploration of different models. As I explained in detail to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Committee—and I think that the hon. Gentleman was present at the time—we have chosen, in the relevant part of the Bill, to operate largely through regulation. The Bill contains frequent references to regulations made by the Secretary of State, because that allows us to give effect to policies that emerge as the business improvement district scheme unfolds. If we specified in the Bill how the scheme should operate, it would be more difficult to alter, as the hon. Gentleman knows. He should not jump to the conclusion that the references to the Secretary of State's powers mean that it is a centralising Bill. The official Opposition have made exactly that mistake. The Bill is not a centralising measure, but a deregulatory one. It gives substantial additional benefits and freedoms to local government, and local government welcomes it.

Mr. Bercow: Leaving aside the question of the precise balance between centralisation and decentralisation in the Bill, will the Minister say whether, on the whole, the bulk of the Bill's powers to make regulations and orders will be subject to the affirmative procedure of the House, or to its negative counterpart?

Mr. Raynsford: As the hon. Gentleman will discover if he serves on the Standing Committee considering the Bill—and I should be very pleased if he does—the Bill offers a judicious mix in that regard. The affirmative powers will be used in respect of a substantial number of measures, and the negative procedures will be used in other cases.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): Will my hon. Friend the Minister confirm whether the housing direct labour organisation in my area will be able to trade with

former tenants who have exercised the right to buy? Will the HDLO be able to sell those tenants double-glazing at a reasonable price, for example?

Mr. Raynsford: I know that my hon. Friend takes a great interest in these matters, and I have visited the double-glazing factory in his authority. It manufactures units to a very high standard, but I must say no more in case it could be implied that I am giving a commercial advantage to one operator. However, I can tell my hon. Friend that authorities that achieve a good, excellent or fair rating under the comprehensive performance assessment will be given powers to trade—with the private sector, with individuals who have purchased their homes and with other authorities. That is another of the important deregulatory measures that give local government additional powers, and which are the hallmark of the Bill.

I was referring to part 8 of the Bill, which contains the non-finance provisions and gives to local authorities greater freedoms, such as the trading powers that I have described. However, all local authorities will also have the freedom to hold advisory polls on any matter relating to the services for which they are responsible, and on matters connected to the well being of their areas. Councils will also be allowed to retain the proceeds from litter and dog fouling penalties and spend them on local environmental improvements.

I turn now to the fire service, which is a local government service and fire authorities are included in a number of the reforms that the Bill will institute. In addition, the Government will move an amendment in Committee to remove Whitehall's detailed operational control of fire brigades' establishments—the number of staff, the deployment of appliances and the location of fire stations.

Such an amendment arises from the Government's acceptance of the urgent need to facilitate a move to a new approach to fire cover, identified by the Bain review as the key to change in the fire service. The current detailed control makes modernisation on the ground more difficult. That amendment will repeal, in England and Wales, most of section 19 of the Fire Services Act 1947. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister said on 16 December, when the Bain report was published, that we would introduce such legislation at the earliest opportunity, and he announced his intention to use the Bill as the vehicle to do so on 19 December.

My right hon. Friend also made it clear that we accepted in principle the Bain recommendations for wider legislation to modernise the fire service, to improve inspection and service delivery and to set up a new central body to drive modernisation. We will give further attention to those matters in a fire White Paper, which we intend to publish in the spring. We will therefore consider the issues raised in that regard by the Bain review during the next few months, and a Bill giving effect to the White Paper proposals will be introduced as soon as the legislative programme allows.

Mr. Pickles: I seek clarification on what the right hon. Gentleman has just said. Can he give us an indication of how much the proposals will affect the local determination of fire services run by local councils?

Mr. Raynsford: The measure is all square with our overall approach—to devolve power—and it specifically builds on the Bain recommendation that modernisation should be based on a risk assessment carried out in each fire authority to determine staffing and the correct location of appliances. Those issues should be determined by the fire authority in consultation with the senior fire officer for the area. In our view, such matters should not be determined by Whitehall. The current position is a relic of a previous centralising regime that goes back to the 1940s, which should be replaced in line with our overall approach.

Mr. Curry *rose—*

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole) *rose—*

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North) *rose—*

Mr. Raynsford: I will give way to my hon. Friend, and then I shall give way to other hon. Members.

Ms Walley: Will the amendment that my right hon. Friend has just mentioned be consistent with the findings of the earlier working parties that were set up jointly by the Government and fire service employers? The Bain recommendations should be considered, but the amendment should be consistent with the wider work that took place with the fire service.

Mr. Raynsford: That amendment is warmly welcomed by the Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers Association, and I believe that it will be very warmly welcomed by employers. Certainly, the employers' representatives to whom we have spoken have been extremely enthusiastic to hear that we are making such rapid progress on implementing that firm recommendation of the Bain review. It is crucial to ensure that modernisation is carried forward on a proper, risk-assessment basis to ensure that, in every area, those people best able to determine how to respond to the risk of fire do so and that the deployment of appliances and crewing levels are sufficient to meet the needs of that area in the most effective way. That is the objective, and it should be achieved through local assessment.

Mr. Curry: We have already heard that an amendment relating to section 28 will be moved in Committee, and we have now heard that there will be an amendment relating to elements of the Bain report. My understanding is that the Bill is intended to go into Committee on 21 January and to come out on 6 February. That is what the Local Government Association says, and it seems to get much more advance notice of such things than we do. Even though there has been some pre-legislative scrutiny of elements of the Bill, does the Minister seriously think that what is now becoming a parliamentary pantechnicon is capable of being examined in six sittings?

Mr. Raynsford: As the right hon. Gentleman has rightly pointed out, the Bill has been subject to very detailed pre-legislative scrutiny. It was scrutinised by the Select Committee and was the subject of detailed observation by local government. We will certainly try to ensure that it receives the most effective scrutiny in Committee, and a programme motion will determine

[Mr. Raynsford]

that—that is not the subject of this debate, but it will no doubt be considered later. I am sure that the Bill will be properly scrutinised in Committee.

Mr. Syms *rose—*

Mr. Raynsford: I was about to say that we will publish a fire White Paper in the spring, and we will consider the issues raises in this regard by the Bain review over the next few months. The conclusions, which we will set out in the White Paper, can therefore be brought forward, as soon as legislative time allows, in a new piece of legislation.

Mr. Sanders: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Raynsford: I have given way to the hon. Gentleman once already, and it is time that we made progress.

This is an ambitious and far-reaching Bill, which extends substantial new freedoms and benefits to local government. It takes a very significant step forward in putting central-local relations on a sounder, more constructive footing. It will help local government to be more responsive to local needs and pressures, and will improve the delivery of local services. It will encourage councils to be innovative in developing new services and partnerships. It will encourage all councils to emulate the achievements of the very best performers, and will be warmly welcomed by all who care about the future of local government. I commend the Bill to the House.

5.36 pm

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): I beg to move, To leave out from "That" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"this House declines to give a Second Reading to the Local Government Bill because it is a centralising measure that will have the effect of undermining local democracy by imposing new duties and responsibilities on local authorities; it places in the hands of the Secretary of State too much power to determine the management of individual local authorities; it deprives local authorities of control over housing and capital receipts; and it gives unnecessary powers to the Secretary of State on financial administration, particularly the powers to specify the level of local authorities' reserves and to monitor budgets."

It is pleasure to start the new year by following the Minister, who, as always, is a master of his brief and has a clear idea of where local government should go, even though, occasionally, it pays to go in the opposite direction from what is intended.

Let me start with a quote:

"The Government promised to redress the imbalance between central and local government. This Bill fails to achieve that. It makes some small steps in the right direction but at the same time increases the power of the Secretary of State. Central Government seems to be terrified of trusting local authorities and allowing them their independence."

Those were the opening words of the Select Committee's verdict on the draft Bill. That Bill, unaltered other than by tinkering at the edges, is before the House today. I want to pay tribute to the work of the Select Committee—it has made the Bill easier to understand and has acted as a persuasive advocate for more freedoms for local authorities. It has not pulled its punches in that report or in the report that it published last Friday. I am sure that the House is grateful for its work.

Many high hopes and expectations were raised by the earlier White Paper. I shall make a small confession, which I pray will not get me into too much trouble with my party—I found the White Paper bold in its promises. Its general direction offered promise and a chance to address relationships between central and local government, which was long overdue. I had reservations, of course—who would not with this Government? I was not sure whether they would have the bottle to see it through, and we have seen evidence today that they do not. This poor managerial mish-mash falls well short of the radical overhaul promised. In the words of the Select Committee,

"aspects of the Bill centralise powers unnecessarily".

At least I now have empathy with the plight of Labour Back Benchers. I, too, know what it feels like to be betrayed by new Labour.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) raised some legitimate points. We now know that important matters relating to the future of the fire service are to be considered, which will take a little time—although I suspect that we will support the Government's aims when they table the amendments, if they are in the terms that the Minister has mentioned. We have the prospect of the repeal of section 28 of earlier legislation, which will take some time.

Andrew Bennett Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pickles: I will do so in a second.

We have just three weeks to consider the matter. The Minister made a promise about regulations, which I am sure he will fulfil. I hope that those regulations will be available in sufficient time for members of the Committee to be able to table relevant amendments. That will cause problems.

Kali Mountford: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pickles: In a moment.

I therefore hope that that time will be reconsidered. After all, a similar time was allowed for consideration of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill. That is a complex measure, but it is nothing compared with this. If we get wrong the provisions for prudential borrowing, pooling, business zones and trading, we will rue the day. Local government deserves reasonable time for scrutiny of those issues.

Andrew Bennett: Earlier, we heard a ringing declaration from the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) about section 28. Can we now hear the position of those on the official Opposition's Front Bench?

Mr. Pickles: We will wait to see the amendment that is tabled. We very much regret that the Government have not had sufficient bottle and have twice failed to table their own amendment. Perhaps they will rely on the services of the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Kali Mountford), but I am confident that whoever tables the

amendment will do their best to seek consensus across the House so that it receives wide support. No doubt, well before that, the Conservative party's Chief Whip will announce the whipping for that particular debate.

Kali Mountford: I am interested in the hon. Gentleman's remarks. The House has had many opportunities to discuss what is known as section 28, but is, in fact, section 2A of the Local Government Act 1986, and the issue should not be used to play ping-pong on the programme motion. Does he agree that it is far too important an issue for that sort of parliamentary game?

Mr. Pickles: I agree with the hon. Lady. The amendment should have been tabled by the Government. In due course, I hope that we will be able to debate this important issue. However, that point underlines the strong and overwhelming need for the Government to provide extra time in Committee to discuss it.

The Bill falls at the first hurdle over which any radical overhaul must jump. If it managed to negotiate this hurdle successfully, everything else would follow naturally. The hurdle is one of simple trust. The Bill plainly shows that the Government do not trust local government. It seeks to provide for prudential borrowing, but the Government retain draconian powers. It seeks to give new financial responsibility, but they will retain the powers over balances. It seeks to give more freedom to housing associations but introduces the pooling of capital receipts. It seeks to recognise the community advocacy of councils, but introduces business improvement districts.

Local government is marginalised in the eyes of the public. It is seen rightly or wrongly—I believe rightly—to be utterly the creature of central Government for pay, for rations and for policy. The recent settlement and the comprehensive performance assessment findings will have confirmed just that and the public's suspicion. What used to be a sea of vibrant vitality, innovation and new ideas is slowly turning into an ocean of bland uniformity. Local government has been diminished to the local delivery of central services. Little wonder that the electorate do not think it worth while to walk a few hundreds yards to put a cross on a piece of paper. We wring our hands and complain of apathy, but it is not apathy. The electorate have rumbled us. When a change to the grant regime can move tens of millions of pounds to and from an authority and when an authority can raise council tax by 6 per cent. to generate just 1 per cent. of income, the public draw their own conclusions as to who is running the show.

The Government think that the problem is voter fatigue. That is why clause 103 will give the Secretary of State the power to lay an order to make the date of the local and Greater London Authority elections in 2004, and therefore enable them to coincide with the European parliamentary elections on 10 June. There is no case for combining the polls. The suggestion that it might be done to avoid voter confusion and fatigue looks, even at the most cursory examination, as a thin veneer to hide partisan advantage.

The right hon. Gentleman's consultation paper does not address the problem of possible voter confusion by having to vote in elections with different voting systems on the same day and with the resulting set of complex ballot papers. Voters in London will face three, and possibly four, different voting systems simultaneously: a supplementary vote for the Mayor; the additional member system for the London Assembly Members; the regional list system for Members of the European Parliament; and the first-past-the-post system if there is a by-election in a borough for either a constituency or the council. Holding both elections on the same day will prevent a proper debate on the separate issues of Europe and local public services and London government. In particular, issues relating to local government will be squeezed out. It is a recipe for confusion and spoilt ballot papers.

The Bill gives powers to the Welsh Assembly to introduce similar measures. The Welsh have dealt with the problem before. I commend the words of the Labour Minister Edwina Hart, who said:

"local government and National Assembly elections should take place on different dates. That would reduce confusion and, hopefully, encourage participation in democratic elections in Wales. It would help to clarify in the public's mind the accountability of local government and the National Assembly for their various responsibilities."—[*National Assembly for Wales, Official Record,* 25 October 2001.]

To combine the polls on the same day shows a lack of respect for local government and the clearest indication to the public of what the Government really think about the value of councils.

Even in this meagre Bill there are measures that the Conservatives can support and improve. We support the concept of prudential borrowing. The idea that local authorities can manage their financial affairs within their own resources should attract wide support. It is an important step on the long road towards establishing a healthy relationship with local government. It is such a pity that the Government find it necessary to have wide and catch-all reserve powers.

Mr. Tony Travers of the London School of Economics told the Select Committee that the

"same legislation would indeed allow the Government to operate a very different capital control system, one similar to or even more controlled than the present one."

I fully understand the need for the Government to manage the national economy and to control the amount of aggregate borrowing. Conservative Members are in favour of making the scope of the Government's intervention limited and transparent. More sensible people would want that and see it as reasonable. I recognise that the Government have offered a reassurance on that, which I suspect is about to be repeated.

Mr. Raynsford: I am listening carefully. The hon. Gentleman says that he wants the Government's use of the powers to be transparent. I thought that I had made it clear, not just before the Select Committee but in the Bill itself, that there are two reserves powers. The first is in respect of the national economy and will be used only to protect the overall national interest. Is he seriously suggesting that any responsible Government should not have such a power? The second is in respect of individual authorities whose performance is unsatisfactory. He knows that that applies to only a small number of authorities. Is he suggesting that there should be no scope to intervene to stop an authority such as Hackney

[Mr. Raynsford]

getting into a position in which it so mismanages its affairs that it creates a large debt that the Government have to bail out?

Mr. Pickles: The Minister may be falling into the same trap as other occupiers of his post. They look at Hackney and think that is local government, but in fact it is an aberration and should be treated as such.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Christopher Leslie): What would the Conservatives do?

Mr. Pickles: There is much merit in the Select Committee's recommendations. In its report of July 2002, it suggested an amendment to clause 4 which set out the procedure by which the Government could act. If Ministers want broad consensus, I hope that a similar, if not identical, amendment will be accepted in Committee. If that happens, we can bridge the gap, square the circle, and be happy about the results.

Sir Paul Beresford: Perhaps I could intervene before my hon. Friend becomes too enthusiastic about the freedom to borrow, which rather concerns me. From his background knowledge, he will recognise that any prudent authority will assist the revenue aspect of the capital that it would borrow. He will also know that the people who hold the purse strings for the local authority revenue are, in effect, the Government. So the new borrowing proposal is actually a sham.

Mr. Pickles: My hon. Friend was party to the report; I commend the parts of it saying that without resources these provisions do not achieve much. My hon. Friend is right in his assertion. If that is the point that he is making, I agree with him, and I hope that he has the opportunity to serve on the Committee to ensure that that point is rammed home.

Mr. Bercow: In reflecting on the capital receipts provisions in the Bill, can my hon. Friend tell us what assessment he has made of the effect of the change in the last Parliament on the rules for the use of capital receipts from the sale of council houses on the size of interest repayments on local authority debt?

Mr. Pickles: No, I am afraid that I cannot. I have not the remotest idea, and if that is my hon. Friend's idea of being helpful, I look forward to his next intervention. However, I will look at the matter and write to him. Let me say to him, "Thank you very much."

We oppose the pooling of capital receipts which will penalise well-run authorities, particularly those which are debt free. This matter was raised in interventions on the Minister. For such authorities—there are more than 90—that is the only flexibility they have. The provisions will reward badly run authorities and those which have not acted prudently in the past. The Minister tells us that those which are debt free have, somehow, committed a cardinal sin and that any Member who intervenes will be ticked off. I do not think that this will work—it is double taxation on tenants. Not only have their rents paid off debt, they must now contribute to the national pool.

Mrs. Browning: Does my hon. Friend agree that if there is one thing better than prudential borrowing, it is no borrowing at all? The Government borrow nationally and they want to encourage councils to borrow nationally. Not borrowing and not being in debt means not being in new Labour.

Mr. Pickles: I am very pleased with my hon. Friend's intervention for two reasons—I understood it and I agreed with it.

Sir Paul Beresford: When my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) intervened on the Minister, she was upbraided for picking out debt-free authorities. However, in paragraph 27 of the Bill's explanatory notes, the Government have selected debt-free authorities for special and positive treatment related to capital receipts. Would my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) care to comment on that?

Mr. Pickles: Yes, there was more than a hint that the Government were peeved in their response to the Select Committee. They said that they could see no reason why debt-free authorities should not be included in the pooling arrangements. I can think of many reasons. It may well have the perverse effect of working against the Government's intentions. The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors believes that it will provide a disincentive in terms of sales. It asked in the brief prepared for this debate why a local authority should sell its housing stock if it loses the money that it gains as a consequence. It said that the proposal may also encourage local authorities from selling some of their property to fund improvements to the remainder. The measure runs contrary to the Government's stated aim of giving more freedom to local authorities.

A similar pattern emerges over the new financial accounting arrangements bringing local authorities in line with modern accounting practices. A code of practice will be drawn up by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, which will lay down sensible accounting practices. So why is it necessary to lay down the level of local authority balances? Too much statutory regulation runs through the Bill.

We will study the proposals on business improvement districts keenly. The irony that they are contained in a Bill that purports to give additional powers to councils while using the same instruments to pull the rug from under the feet of local authorities will not be lost on the House. There will be a democratic deficit in the management of the districts. They will be, to quote an American critic of the schemes, a "city within a city". Given that they are an American invention, it seems perverse to introduce them at a time when they are falling out of favour in the United States.

In Committee we will be paying particular attention to the rights and responsibilities of landlords and property owners and the protection of small business enterprises from undue burdens. The present threshold over which a successful vote must pass is too low and we will seek to make it more reasonable.

We recognise the need periodically to revalue properties for the purpose of council tax. It must be remembered that the tax was introduced partly as a property tax and partly as a reflection of services provided to a wider community. We support the

revaluation being made on a regular and predictable basis. However, we have grave reservations about the introduction of an additional band. We know from reports in the media that some sections of the Labour party regard this as a way of soaking the rich and punishing the wealthy south.

If the newspaper reports are correct, it is the Government's intention to introduce a new band between bands G and H. That would have a severe effect on those on low to middle incomes in London and the south in general and would in particular affect owner-occupiers on low incomes living in high value homes. This phenomenon can be seen in parts of London, Kent and my county of Essex, but it is particularly noticeable in East Sussex. With levels of deprivation similar to those of the north-east, East Sussex property prices are nevertheless in line with the rest of southern England. These families will be badly hit by this latest Labour stealth tax.

There is also a strong case for saying that changes made to taxation by introducing an additional band should be debated on the Floor of the House and not done by regulation. I asked the Minister about the advantages of an additional band over a change in the composition of the bands, but his answer did not satisfy me. The Government would be very unwise to introduce an additional band. I believe that it would cause unforeseen problems and add considerably to the burden on people with low to medium incomes.

The Select Committee expressed concern about the trading arrangements for councils under the Bill. Its report referred to the tradition of ensuring as far as possible that when local authorities trade with the private sector, they do so on fair and equal terms. It expressed worries about the possibility of cross-subsidising the costs of providing traded services with other areas of councils' activities. I acknowledge that in their response the Government indicated that they were sympathetic to this view and that they would address the matter. Our worries go deeper than that, however. We believe that clause 95 could jeopardise the whole process of competitive tendering by enabling authorities to set up an in-house company for services which, under normal circumstances, would be put out to tender. The industry fears that they would have an enormous competitive advantage over private sector bidders.

We fear that the best value tendering process could be distorted unless there are strict safeguards against such companies receiving favourable or preferential treatment. There is a grave risk that the opportunities for private sector companies to operate services for the more successful best value authorities would simply dry up to the detriment of those authorities and the wider community.

If authorities best value companies are able to cream off successful undertakings, there will be a real danger that private sector companies would find it uneconomic to bid for some less profitable services and best value would simply cease to operate in practice. It would be very helpful if the Minister outlined what safeguards the Government intend to adopt to ensure that there is no preferential treatment. In particular, how will the assessment be made that the same performance criteria are being used for private sector companies?

All the commentators, the Select Committee and anyone who knows anything about local government agree that it is over-regulated and overburdened. It is a shame that, with the exception of high-performing councils, the Government have not sought to reduce regulation. Talk privately to officials at the Department and they will openly admit that the burden of regulation does little good and is positively damaging, despite its good intentions. Its only purpose now is to act as an incentive to councils for its own removal. It is a sad indictment of the Government that the only carrot for local authorities is the promise to stop hitting them with a stick, but that is indicative of their approach to local authorities, which can be summarised as two bands—trust and understanding. However, the Government neither trust nor understand local authorities, and it shows.

Andrew Bennett: Will the hon. Gentleman place in the Library a list of all the regulations that he would abolish?

Mr. Pickles: I am grateful for that opportunity, but I have to say that I am surprised by the aggression of the hon. Gentleman's intervention, as I was largely following the lines taken by his Select Committee. In fact, I was quoting his Select Committee with regard to the amount of overburdening, but perhaps he is retracting.

Andrew Bennett: Let us be quite clear. I want to know which regulations, most of which were introduced by the Conservative Government, the hon. Gentleman is prepared to renounce. A list would be very helpful.

Mr. Pickles: I am not partisan. I am not suggesting that a matter is sacrosanct because it was laid before the House by a Conservative Government, but if the hon. Gentleman is retracting what he said in the comfort of his Select Committee, so be it. I happen to think that he was right when he showed courage in attacking the Government, so I am sorry that he seeks to retreat from that.

The Government know that they should release their grasp, but they seem unable to do so and the Bill is no more than a pause in their march towards centralisation. I commend the amendment to the House.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. I remind all Members that Mr. Speaker has placed a 15-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches.

6.3 pm

Andrew Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I am grateful to be called, Madam Deputy Speaker. First, may I make it clear to the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) that we look forward with pleasure to seeing his list in the Library so that we know which regulations covering local government he would repeal? Then, perhaps, we could have some common ground. My disappointment with the legislation is that it does not go far enough or fast enough, although it is easy for him to have a general feeling that there are too many

[Andrew Bennett]

regulations without being prepared to be specific. It would be helpful if we had a list of those that he would repeal.

I want briefly to deal with the question of scrutiny of the legislation. I very much welcomed the Government's publication of a draft Bill in the summer, although it would have been nice if they had given the Select Committee a little more time to scrutinise it. I understand all the difficulties for the Minister, however. In a sense, the difficulties involved not the Select Committee, but the people outside who gave evidence. The strength of a Select Committee report is the quality of the evidence it receives. I make the point to the Government's business managers that if we are to get pre-legislative scrutiny right, we need a little more time for it.

May I also place on record my appreciation of those who advised the Select Committee? I must refer in particular to Rita Hale, Professor Michael Lyons, Anna Capaldi and Amanda McIntyre, whose help was important. I also want to place on record my appreciation of the Clerk, David Harrison, and our special assistant, Claire O'Shaughnessy. They all worked very hard. I also express my appreciation of all members of the Committee, as we had to carry out the scrutiny in a week. A little more time might have made our efforts that bit better.

Mr. Edward Davey: Given that the Select Committee had so little time to scrutinise the draft Bill, does the hon. Gentleman share my concern about the Government allowing the Standing Committee only six sittings to scrutinise the real Bill?

Andrew Bennett: The question is, are we getting scrutiny in the House right? It seems to me that the key to scrutiny in the House is what goes on beforehand. A draft Bill was available in the summer, so almost everyone involved with local government had a chance to study it then, and the Bill itself was published about five weeks ago. People outside have had a good—opportunity to consider the legislation and the fact that the Bill will be considered in Committee for a relatively short time does not mean that there is a problem with the scrutiny.

I have wasted lots of time in Committee filibustering, which does not take the arguments forward. The question is, how effectively is time used in Committee? I believe that a Standing Committee of the House will be able to deal with the Bill very effectively. If I were an Opposition Member, I would not be complaining about the time available in Committee. I would be rather more concerned to ensure that there is adequate time for consideration on Report. The legislation can be adequately scrutinised and a good job has already been done, up to this stage at least.

I am pleased that we had the chance to scrutinise the Bill, but I would like the Government to have even more confidence in local government. I believe that the Minister has that confidence, but the difficulty lies in convincing some of his colleagues in other parts of government that we should provide that extra power. I hope that we can move in that direction.

The question of giving greater powers to excellent local authorities lies, unfortunately, in the hands of the Audit Commission. Anyone who considered the scrutiny process and the evidence given by Paul Kirby of the Audit Commission would have been flabbergasted by its quality. We were totally baffled by the end. If that person is supposed to be setting out the league tables, we cannot have much confidence in them.

I am very worried about the local authority league tables. In football, the teams at the top of the league have usually scored more goals than those at the bottom. That is pretty objective, but it would be difficult for a football referee to judge whether one team had played better than another without referring to the goals scored. Some Audit Commission decisions are extremely subjective and some people who come out from the Audit Commission to study local authorities do not have a clue what is going on.

One of my great complaints about Reddish is the fact that so much rubbish is left behind by the cleansing department when it clears the bins, yet that local authority has been commended for its refuse collection service. Instead of relying on the Audit Commission, why do not the Government rely a little more on the local electorate? If they are going to give the local authorities more powers, let the local authority and the local electorate decide whether they will be used, rather than depend on the Audit Commission league tables.

Dr. Pugh: Does the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that a Select Committee recommendation was that it should be possible to appeal against the decision of the Audit Commission, although the Government did not accept that and it is not in the legislation? Will he urge the Standing Committee seriously to consider that matter?

Andrew Bennett: There is a case for an appeal process, but that would just make everything even more bureaucratic. I should prefer to get rid of the whole thing and tell local people to make up their own minds about whether they trust their council with the extra services, rather than telling them that because their council was just above the relegation zone on one bit of the table it would be allowed to have those extra powers.

Mr. Pickles: Has the hon. Gentleman formed an opinion as to the real costs for authorities of the scrutiny and inspection processes in terms of officer time and actual outlay?

Andrew Bennett: I cannot remember the exact figure that the Audit Commission is charging local authorities, but it is pretty appalling. It worries me greatly that officers are being taken away from actually running services to hold discussions with the Audit Commission's representatives. I have great reservations about the amount of inspection, but fortunately the Government are starting to move in the right direction by reducing it. Services need a push to get them going, but once they are rolling they have their own momentum. It worries me that the Audit Commission may not be able to step back but will want to carry on pushing.

Mr. Chris Mole (Ipswich): My hon. Friend will be aware that I had not joined the Select Committee when

it was considering those aspects of the Bill, but surely he appreciates that inspection will be reduced for several years in authorities that did well under the comprehensive performance assessment process. Indeed, many local authorities have welcomed the process of self-analysis and assessment and found it useful in undertaking their corporate business.

Andrew Bennett: I understand that many local authorities have benefited from the process. I have been told regularly by people who have helped with the process in an authority other than their own that they found such work useful and learned much from it.

However, I am a little concerned about some of the quirks in the league table. I have been pressed by Tameside metropolitan borough council because Wigan received a much better result, which appeared to turn only on the question of when their respective social services departments were inspected. Wigan has done an outstanding job in the north-west but Tameside is a good authority, too, and my electors would rightly be a little suspicious if Wigan received extra powers and Tameside did not.

Revaluation is important, but the key point for local government is that it should have a form of buoyant income. Whenever there is revaluation, there is an outcry from people and local authorities usually take the flak, even though they are not actually involved in the process.

I was very disappointed that the Opposition were not prepared to support the proposals on bands. They do not understand the problems in places such as Denton and Reddish and the east side of Greater Manchester. When properties are losing value due to the weakness of the housing market and people cannot even sell them for £10,000 or £15,000, yet similar houses only a short distance away go for £30,000, £40,000 or £50,000, there is considerable concern that council tax bands do not reflect economic reality in those areas.

Mr. Pickles: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Andrew Bennett: I will, although I am reluctant to do so because of the time restrictions.

Mr. Pickles: Will the hon. Gentleman answer the question that the Minister did not want to answer? What is the advantage of an additional band as opposed to adjusting the existing bands or introducing a regional variation?

Andrew Bennett: The advantage of extra bands is that in areas such as mine they would deal with the fact that band A currently covers a wide range of properties. Although redistribution or lowering of the bands might have some impact, the easiest solution would be to increase their number. We should remember how we got into this mess. Some people were keen to get rid of the rates. Then we got the poll tax and we are reaping that harvest in our current problems. I make a strong plea for splitting band A. There is also a case—although it is not so important in my constituency—for increases at the higher end of the scale.

I very much welcome the proposals for business improvement districts although there are some problems to be sorted out, especially between owners and tenants. In many business improvement areas, the tenant of the property will make the contribution but if, as we hope, the area succeeds, the owner of the property will receive the greatest benefit. We should try to ensure that everyone in a successful business improvement area where property values increase should have made some contribution. We need to do further work on that.

It is also important that some of the business improvement schemes should be for small areas. In my constituency, there are problems due to competition between the town centre and out-of-town shopping areas, but the hardest-hit places are the small shopping parades which used to have the butcher, the baker—although perhaps not the candlestick maker. They included a small range of shops but they have almost all disappeared. Boarded-up shops give the whole neighbourhood a depressed look so I hope that local authorities can undertake improvements in small business areas as well as in town centres.

I apologise to my right hon. Friend the Minister if I pressed him too hard and too early on clause 28. I thought that he was going to tell us that there would be separate legislation, but I welcome his comments. I hope that we can include those suggestions and that the official Opposition will support them instead of dodging them as they did this afternoon. If we can get all-party support we could get the provision out of the way with very little debate. We have, after all, spent a huge amount of time debating it in the House; it will have a big impact outside but it probably does not need so much debate.

I hope that when the Deputy Prime Minister makes his statement on housing in a few weeks time we can look into the powers for local authorities to regulate landlords. I realise that legislation is proposed in the future, but it would be most helpful if we included a clause that allowed local authorities simply to undertake the preparations for registering and regulating landlords who want to benefit from social security payments.

I commend the Government. The Bill may be only a modest step, but we are moving in the right direction and I very much hope that it will quickly reach the statute book.

6.17 pm

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): The House is indebted to the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett) and his Select Committee. Their report on the draft Bill, which, as we have just been reminded, was compiled in only a week, was hard hitting.

Many of the Committee's criticisms of the draft Bill apply to the current measure. The Committee may have been influential in persuading the Government to change a few things—it is especially good that the proposal for one special single formula grant has been dropped—but many of the Committee's other pertinent criticisms still apply to the Bill; the hon. Gentleman held back a little when mentioning them.

The Liberal Democrats will support the Bill for at least three major reasons. First, we support the new prudential capital regime, albeit with reservations. Secondly, we support the proposals on business improvement districts, which are an important step forward, and I shall spend some time discussing them.

[Mr. Edward Davey]

Thirdly, the council tax reforms are extremely welcome, as far as they go, and will help many councils and, more important, council tax payers throughout the country. Those significant prizes should not be lost by opposing the Bill. However, we have serious reservations that we shall press hard in Committee and, indeed, in this debate.

The Government are retaining many reserved powers, especially in respect of capping borrowing powers and minimum reserves. Along with many others, I am concerned about the potential for party political meddling. We are particularly concerned about the pooling arrangements, about which many right hon. and hon. Members have already spoken but which I shall consider in some detail. Furthermore, I have counted at least 38 new regulation-making powers in the Bill, many of which are unnecessary.

I agree with one thing that the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) said. The public have undoubtedly rumbled the Conservative party. When the hon. Gentleman criticised the Government for centralising powers, many Members shook their heads in disbelief. Given its record in local government, the extent of forgetfulness in the Conservative party makes amnesiacs seem like nostalgics. Conservative Front Benchers have a lot to apologise for, and the current weak state of local government is a direct result of many years of centralising measures by the Conservatives.

We shall argue, both on Second Reading tonight and in Committee, that the Government should have a much greater vision. They should put the Conservative years much further behind them than they seem willing to do. They should abolish the Tory council tax—the real reform that the country needs. In many ways, we also want to abolish the Secretary of State. He has far too many powers over local government, and they should be removed from many areas. We need to rebuild local government, and to show that central Government trust local government. The Bill does not provide for that.

I want to make some detailed comments about the prudential capital regime. The regime it is replacing was quite disgraceful. The credit approval regime, with its basic credit approvals and supplementary credit approvals, was not just a complex regime that undermined local democracy and meant that councils and councillors had to go cap in hand to Whitehall; it was also very inefficient, and prevented sensible investment. Credit approvals could not be carried forward to the following year, which made a mockery of the long-term planning necessary for many capital proposals. It also prevented best value and invest-to-save schemes. Indeed, it also reduced local expertise in local finance departments. I am, therefore, very pleased to see it going.

Liberal Democrats have campaigned for a prudential capital regime for many years. I could read out a long list of Liberal Democrat policy papers in which we have proposed such a regime, but I can see that that would be just too popular tonight. I will simply refer to the Liberal Democrat LGA group's submission in 1998 to the Government's Green Paper, "Modernising Local Government Finance" on capital finance. The group said:

> "We believe that capital controls should be removed, but that guidelines are needed to control the total level of debt within each authority."

That is a policy that we continue to support.

The problem is that the Government's implementation of that very sensible idea does not go far enough. Reserve powers, especially under clause 4(1), contain the potential for the creation of a universal capping regime for borrowing. The Minister said, in response to various interventions, that that was not his intention and that the reserve powers to limit the borrowing of all local authorities, for "national economic reasons", or of individual local authorities would be used very sparingly. I suggest that there is no need for such powers. The prudential regime, which could be worked through with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy and the Local Government Association, would be sufficient. Even if the Government were still worried about national economic conditions, those issues could be dealt with in far less threatening ways than those proposed in clause 4. For example, I am concerned that the provisions in clause 4 for retaining borrowing capping powers do not spell out what the "national economic reasons" are. Perhaps the Government intend to do that in the subsequent regulations. It is important that the Chancellor and the Deputy Prime Minister should not suddenly say, "Right, we have decided to use these powers and stop the borrowing." That power is excessive, and needs to go.

Local authorities could take other routes. If an authority wanted to exceed the guidelines for prudential borrowing set by CIPFA, a trip mechanism could be put in place. For example, there could be a local referendum allowing local people to decide what level of borrowing would be appropriate, if it were to exceed CIPFA's recommendation. This is a real weakness in the Government's implementation of a prudential capital regime. As the hon. Member for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford) said, there are great limitations to the new freedoms, particularly in respect of the revenue that would be required to service the debt that would spring from the Government's failure to reform the tax regime and the taxation powers for local government. This problem also applies to the failure to reform the housing subsidy scheme, because borrowing for investment in housing is linked to the rent subsidy scheme that the Government have for housing. That is not being reformed, so, again, there will not be the revenue to support increased debt for investment in housing. The effect of pooling will also restrict the ability of local councils to borrow within the new framework. These are serious weaknesses.

When might reserved powers be used? Would they be used halfway into a project in which a local council had decided to invest? That might deter the investment in the first place. The pooling proposals will bring great instability to the setting of prudential borrowing limits. The Secretary of State's regulations on pooling, which we have not yet seen, could easily be changed in future. A council could therefore find that it had to contribute more to the pool than it had expected, thus reducing its

prudential limit and its ability to borrow. Of course, the reverse could also be the case. The instability built into the new capital regime will make the regime far less effective. So, while I am happy to give two cheers for the new prudential capital regime, I am afraid that the remaining central powers make it less effective than it could otherwise be.

The remaining centralisations that are retained in the Bill concern me particularly. Clause 26, for example, will allow the Secretary of State to set minimum reserves for each local authority. That is a new power—a new centralisation—and it is unnecessary. The Minister will know that section 114 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 gives chief finance officers powers to take action if they see overspending during the year. I cannot see what the extra powers in clause 26 add to that system.

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the existing CIPFA guidelines on finance officers' powers have been in place since 1995. Despite that, we have seen clear evidence recently that a number of authorities have got into serious financial difficulties—Hackney, Walsall and North Tyneside, for example. All those cases seem to be associated with a failure to maintain adequate reserves. The Government had to provide some £25 million of additional finance to cover the position that Hackney had got itself into. Is the hon. Gentleman seriously suggesting that we should simply turn a blind eye and do nothing at all? The reserve powers are designed to cope with circumstances such as those—which, as I stressed in my speech, are exceptional, but they happen—and it is necessary that there should be a safeguard against those eventualities.

Mr. Davey: I am afraid that the Minister does not make his case. There are other ways of dealing with this—for example, by improving the powers that currently exist. I mentioned section 114 of the Local Government Finance Act. That power could be developed to ensure that the Minister would not be able to put his mark on every budget and budget-making process up and down the land.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish spoke of the centralisation in respect of the comprehensive performance assessment under clause 100. The fact that the CPA has been linked to some of these new freedoms gives the lie to the idea that this is really a devolution measure. The CPA is a centralising measure, whereby the Government set the regime and can subsequently change it. This is a flawed concept. The idea of earned autonomy—which can, in fact, be taken away—is not really what is meant by real freedoms and real flexibility. It creates instability and it is extremely bureaucratic.

I said that the Bill would give the Government 38 new regulatory-making powers. I wonder how many regulations will be made under the 38 new powers. The Government claimed that the draft Bill was a deregulatory measure, which was bizarre. The Local Government Association and individual councillors cannot understand how the Government can use such rhetoric and then introduce the Bill that is before us. The situation is particularly disappointing given that we would expect a draft Bill to reduce the need for regulatory powers in the first place and to ensure that we get the legislation right and therefore do not need to return to it and do not give extra powers to the Secretary of State to have another think. Unfortunately, that has not proved to be the case.

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): Given the hon. Gentleman's catalogue of concerns, why will he and his party support the Bill this evening?

Mr. Davey: I said at the outset that we are in favour of the prudential capital regime, of business improvement districts and of some of the council tax reforms. Those are the main reasons why we shall support the Bill. However, the hon. Gentleman will be surprised to hear me make a criticism.

Mr. Field: The hon. Gentleman has said that he would abolish council tax. Surely the small reforms that are being proposed would not go far enough. I am intrigued to know on what basis he feels that his party can support the Bill.

Mr. Davey: The hon. Gentleman should learn to be grateful for small mercies. We waited many years for the Conservatives to produce a fair system of local government finance: they failed, even at the second attempt. We shall not take too many lessons from the Conservatives.

The proposal to pool the proceeds of asset sales is nothing less than a stealth tax. It legalises the theft of council tax payers' money by taking it from areas that it was not raised for or not meant for. It is one of the worst examples of a stealth tax. Furthermore, there will be huge distortions and disincentives. Only Labour could produce a system that will discourage debt reduction. Surely we want to encourage debt reduction, but the Government are building into the system a disincentive for doing so. Debt-free administrations will be penalised. Many of us in this place are concerned that the proposal will discourage debt-free authorities from sensibly managing their capital portfolio. They will be discouraged from cashing in some assets to use the money elsewhere. It cannot be right that the Government should create such a barrier. I believe that the measure will prove to have a counter effect to that which the Government intend. It is a recipe for lose, lose.

Authorities with assets will not sell them. There will not be any money for authorities that might otherwise have benefited from the pool. The pool will not be very large and there will be inertia in the management of local government capital stock. It is an ill thought through measure and it should be dropped.

Expert comment on the proposal is increasingly insulting and the Select Committee was vehement in its opposition to it. The evidence that it heard from bodies such as CIPFA entirely undermined the Government's case for pooling. The London Government Association has consulted councils throughout the country. Even some of the councils that will benefit from the measure oppose the proposal. They recognise that it would undermine many other local authorities. The majority of local authorities are against the measure. The Government's analysis of the consultation shows that 134 respondents were against the pooling proposals. I challenge the Minister, when he replies to the debate, to

[Mr. Davey]

give the House a list of the respondents who are in favour of the arrangements. I think that there will be very few, if any.

Mr. McWalter: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the matter is of grave concern and that it stands as a threat to authorities that have resources, which they would like to spend for the benefit of the communities they are elected to serve? Authorities are being stopped from spending such resources because they know that if they do so they will face considerable debt. The proposal is freezing programmes that might otherwise be implemented to improve the condition of life in many areas.

Mr. Davey: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. What will a finance director and a council do? They will say, "Maybe in a few years the Government will come to their senses and get rid of the scheme. Perhaps they will get rid of pooling. We would be mad to sell assets now and to lose all the proceeds elsewhere." The asset portfolios of many local authorities will be put in aspic.

Mr. McWalter: The hon. Gentleman has not quite got the point. In addition, authorities will be held to have the capital asset in stock, as it were, even if they have acquired something with it. They then face a double whammy: they will not be able to hold on to the asset because they will be forced to account for the resource even if they have acquired something with it.

Mr. Davey: The hon. Gentleman will note that the Minister is shaking his head. Perhaps he will explain why that is not the case in due course.

Another aspect of the Government's proposals is that when a council makes a sale and the proceeds go into the pool it will not even earn interest. As I have said, it is an ill thought through proposal. If the Government persist with it, I suggest that in a few years' time we shall see the repeal of a rather silly measure.

I move on to a slightly less esoteric issue—council tax. I have made it clear that Liberal Democrats want to abolish it because it is such an unfair tax. It is the tax that I receive most letters about, and I am sure that right hon. and hon. Members have had the same experience. I receive letters especially from low-income pensioners, who cannot understand why their council tax is increasing year on year above inflation, irrespective of the party in control of the local authority. The entire local government finance system is involved because it is such a non-buoyant tax. It hits those on fixed incomes especially badly. It is time that we got rid of the tax, and there are many other reasons for doing so.

Council tax is quite costly: there must be a system to administer and collect it in every town hall throughout the country. When the Bill is implemented, it will be necessary to meet the costs of revaluation. It is not a particularly efficient tax. The failures—the unfairnesses and the inefficiencies—are becoming worse as we see a shift from central taxation to local taxation. The Government are asking the council tax payer to shoulder even more of the burden. It is time that the Government crossed the rubicon and said, "This was an unfair tax that was introduced by the Conservatives." The Government do not have to live with that inheritance. They can take a bold decision and abolish council tax.

Mr. Andrew Turner: The hon. Gentleman has referred to the shift of the tax burden from central Government to local government. Is the Liberal Democrat party in favour of raising more money locally, or against it?

Mr. Davey: We are in favour of raising money more locally if the tax base is a fair one and if—this is another important criterion, which I mention before the hon. Gentleman puts out a leaflet—national income tax is cut as we raise local income tax. The net tax burden may not increase under our proposals for local income tax.

I should be fair to the Government. The proposals for reform of council tax would improve the tax, albeit at the margins. The proposal for more bands must be right. We have heard some sensible and articulate reasons for introducing more bands at both ends of the scale. Revaluation is inevitable, and I think that the way the Government have gone about that is extremely sensible. Abolition of council tax benefits subsidy limitation schemes is welcome in the area that I represent. The reduction of discounts on second homes is also welcome. We shall disagree about whether the extra 10 per cent. or the minimum 10 per cent. is needed. I am still not clear from the Minister's arguments whether it is necessary to keep that percentage. I think that it should be got rid of entirely and that the local authority should be allowed to keep the proceeds.

Similarly, the Government say that they intend to abolish the council tax discount for empty homes, so why will not local authorities be allowed to keep 100 per cent. of the proceeds? That seems rather odd, and it goes against the Minister's argument for simply reducing the discount on second homes. There are a number of specific wrinkles in the council tax proposals that we want to iron out in Committee, but their general thrust is welcome.

Business improvement districts are a very welcome innovation, and they have enthusiastic support among at least some Members of the House, although the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar did not seem too enthusiastic. In a speech a few years ago, my noble Friend Lord Ashdown was one of the first British politicians to look to the United States' experience of BIDs and to suggest that we should introduce them here. When one listens to businesses' views about the proposal, whether the CBI or the chambers of commerce express them, one is impressed by the level of support. The benefits are wide, and we welcome the fact that there will be earmarked funds that businesses, working with the local authority and the community, can use to improve the area for the collective good. That will help to regenerate rundown areas, and to spruce up and revitalise even successful ones.

Mr. Patrick Hall: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Conservative spokesman's contention that a business improvement district would represent a city within the city wholly misses the point? If such a scheme

were to go ahead, there would have to be a strong local partnership, and it is inconceivable that the local authority would not be part of that.

Mr. Davey: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. BIDs would provide the dynamic for engaging the business community with the local council to produce even stronger partnerships working for their area.

Of course, there are caveats. The additionality point is important: we want to make sure that extra money produces additional funding for additional services. I share the concern of the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish about whether property owners and landlords will have to pay the extra rate. Will they get the vote before the BID is set up? The Government need to clarify that. The Government need to ensure that they are fair in their treatment of different businesses in the community, and I hope that their guidelines will ensure that that happens.

I am proud that Kingston, the area that I represent, is to be a pilot for the whole of London. We are grateful for the London development agency's funding for us to develop our bid. Kingston is already a successful town.

Mr. Pickles: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davey: I hope that the hon. Gentleman is going to talk about the benefits and excellent progress in Kingston, so I will give way.

Mr. Pickles: Indeed, I once parked there.

The hon. Gentleman is very enthusiastic about business zones. Would he care to comment on research evidence on such zones between 1980 and 1990, which shows that they were no different from other areas in terms of progress and economic benefit, and in some cases the conditions in business zones were inferior to those without the zone?

Mr. Davey: One always has to be careful about interpreting such research. It may be that areas with a BID would have declined significantly without it. Without having read the research, I shall not take the hon. Gentleman's word for it. I would be grateful if he sent it to me, and I promise that I will look at it.

I was talking about the success of Kingston upon Thames. We have 18 million visitors a year, and in the south-east the town is second only to the west end as a favoured retail venue. We are taking that success further with the new Rotunda development, the Charter Quay development and the new theatre, which is to open in spring 2004. However, it would be sensible for Kingston to have a BID. We cannot be complacent and there are negative aspects to our town centre. It is dirty, and we suffer from graffiti, litter and chewing gum. Signage in the town needs to be better maintained.

Mr. Pickles: Chewing gum?

Mr. Davey: The hon. Gentleman worries about my point on chewing gum. If he takes a walk down Clarence street in Kingston, he will see that chewing gum litters the town and needs to be cleared up.

Mr. Pickles *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Although it may be interesting to hear the hon. Gentleman's comments, it would be appropriate for hon. Members to come to the subject of the debate.

Mr. Davey: I certainly intend to do that.

Mr. Pickles: The hon. Gentleman really should look at the evidence for business zones, and perhaps speak to Lord Ashdown, because the zones are about much more than picking up chewing gum. They are far more fundamental to the economy than chewing gum.

Mr. Davey: The great benefit of these schemes is that businesses, working with their local community and local authority, can decide what is right for them. In Kingston we have the problem that our town centre is dirty, and it needs to be cleaned up. These proposals are exciting for Kingston and other towns, and they will improve partnership, reduce problems and lead to greater regeneration.

There are many other issues in the Bill on which we could comment tonight: the reforms to the housing revenue account, which are welcome; the proposals for the housing strategy; the reform of non-domestic rates, and the small business rate relief, which has much to recommend it. On the latter proposal, I simply ask whether it should be revenue neutral or whether the Exchequer should add more money. Should there be more local flexibility in that scheme? An allowance system might be a better, fairer and more efficient way to make sure that small businesses get more relief from non-domestic rates. There are welcome proposals for charging and trading regimes, although again the Government seem to have taken a narrow approach. We will consider all those matters in Committee.

Although the Bill is extremely welcome, it does not merit Ministers' rhetoric. When the Bill was first published, the Deputy Prime Minister talked about a historic change in the relationship between central and local government. I am afraid that this is rather a timid Bill that will not go down in history as making a major change to that relationship. The smile on the face of the Minister for Local Government and the Regions suggests that he, too, thinks that. However, the Bill contains welcome measures. We particularly welcome the prudential capital regime, and we hope that that at least will improve local government throughout the country.

6.47 pm

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): I want to offer some words of welcome to the Bill. It introduces significant new features for local councils and it makes a good move towards restoring confidence in the capacities of local government genuinely to serve local communities.

It was my privilege to serve in local government before I served in the House, and I emphasise the word "privilege". That was a great experience, and years later, I still feel that we must be careful not to turn local government into an arcane debate for archival accountancy types which fails to connect with local people's needs and interests. The Bill is part of the process of restoring the faith of people in local government and in the local political process.

In the 20th century, the great environmentalist Schumacher urged us to think global and act local. Our world is more complex now. It is increasingly interconnected, interdependent and vulnerable, and it is a world of increasing personal mobility in which we constantly have to rebuild local communities of diverse groups, ages and backgrounds. Perhaps we need to

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think and act globally and locally at the same time, realising that the two are inextricably connected. In other words, I suggest that, in the 21st century, the local is as significant as the global.

I passionately believe that restoring faith in the capacities of representative, democratic politics can come only from building from the base upwards. We must affirm and support efforts at the local level, and we must sustain active, progressive councils as the means of democratic participation and management of resources for the common good.

I want to raise four themes in the Bill: much-needed capacity building; match funding; the insensitive analysis of local needs to which the Chairman of the Select Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett) referred; and, to use his words, the league-table problem that can distort that analysis. The proposed new capital finance system, the financial management duties on the local authorities and the new powers to issue grant assistance are welcome but are only part of the process. As was said earlier, capital spending has a revenue impact. In practice, the Government have increased resources from the centre to localities, and have introduced myriad welcome initiatives, including the single regeneration budget, neighbourhood renewal funds, resources for anti-crime measures, and sure start projects to name but a few. All those initiatives from the centre address local issues, social exclusion and the need for local service provision. However, I suggest to my right hon. Friend the Minister that we need to look seriously at how top-down initiatives and resources can lock into local needs and engage local people. There is not a great yawning gap in resources but there is a lack of capacity in the local neighbourhood or at street level. There is no reaching up to the downward stream of initiatives—they are not rooted in the locality or bedded in for the long term.

We cannot assume that that amorphous, abstract and pliable noun "the community" exists at the local level. Communities are not innate organisations of people who have been thrown together by circumstance—they need to be patiently built and supported. In the past, we have paid far too little attention to the basic need to build communities, particularly in inner-city neighbourhoods such as that in which I live in inner-city Leeds.

I recall a letter from a constituent some years ago. He had moved into rented accommodation in a local terrace, and said that I had been his MP for about two years. In all that time, he had never been introduced to his next-door neighbour—what was I as his MP going to do about it? At the time, the Tories were in government, so I succumbed to the temptation to remind him that every single year under the Tories, local government budgets were reduced—they were cut again and again. As a result, the local Labour council could not afford to pay "neighbourhood introducers" to help him to get to know his neighbours.

On reflection, local capacity building is what is needed—people working to connect people and build basic community organisations that are fully representative and supported and that can engage with top-down initiatives and resources. We need massive, sensible and proper investment in local capacity building to facilitate the gearing of top-down and bottom-up approaches. We cannot have joined-up government at any level if we do not facilitate the joining together of local people. Capacity building needs to be built into the Bill's budgetary approach.

Mr. Andrew Turner: I hope that I do the hon. Gentleman no disservice if I say that I recognised a note of irony in the letter from which he quoted. However, I am not sure where the irony began or ended. Will he tell the House whether he believes that capacity building, which is a terrific objective, is the same as community building, and whether the great problem with communities is the fact that it is easy to destroy them but difficult to build them?

Mr. Battle: I basically agree, but assumptions are made about communities that already exist. I am suggesting that we must start by addressing supportive capacity within communities.

In recent years, a key concept in encouraging engagement and local rethinking about funding has been match funding: central Government grant matched by a similar amount from elsewhere—sometimes, it is assumed, the private sector. In inner-city neighbourhoods, where there is not much private sector investment to start with, the matching has come from other sources, and the result has been a virtual matching from local government or other public resources. They are forced to meet half the costs, with little say in the delivery, and usually without any extra resources to fund the matching. Increasingly, matching means that central and local government resources are put together, but with a mass of bureaucratic form-filling in between. The results are insecure projects, a waste of time and inefficiency.

Can we look again at the purpose and reality of matching, and have enough confidence in local government to agree that, if it has to provide the resources to keep projects going, it ought to play a proper role, rather than being a late-in-the-day funder of last resort? The Youth Justice Board, and the schemes for youth offending teams and youth inclusion programmes are classic examples. The need for real grants, rather than phoney matching with leftover allocations of single regeneration budget grant, could be sorted out in the Bill.

Turning to insensitive analysis, what do we mean by a best-value authority and prudent financial systems? Again, top-down approaches often ignore detailed local analyses of need. Leeds, my city, is acknowledged as thriving and is undergoing renewal, not least as a result of the prudent and visionary management of the Labour council during the hard times of the 1980s and early 1990s. Yet the indices of need for the city as a whole—a city of 750,000 people—can disguise the needs of the 230,000 people who live in the inner city, 160,000 of whom live in 10 of the poorest wards in Britain. Life between the prosperous central business area and the thriving suburbs beyond the ring road can be disguised by averages. Average and mean figures, and the greatly misunderstood difference between them, completely disguise deep pockets of poverty, ill health, social isolation, lack of training and work opportunities, and the prospects of inner-city neighbourhoods.

In inner-city areas, average figures from cake-slice shaped wards radiating from the city centre, such as Kirkstall, Armley, Wortley and Bramley in my constituency, bury the deep needs of the poorest who live near inner-city prosperity. Statistics from the outer areas disguise the problems of the inner city, smoothing over need in a general trickle-down theory. The theory that the rising tide of economics will lift all boats does not work—in particular, it does not lift holed boats. Recently, our local paper, the *Yorkshire Evening Post*, has featured vignettes of divided Leeds—inner-city neighbourhoods are missing out on initiatives in the shadow of a thriving retail and business centre.

Where I live in the inner city, a ward may not qualify for a single regeneration budget grant because of the weighting of the better-off who live out near the ring road. Instead of the usual ward indices, we need subtler, more detailed analysis and a more localised response to tackle the complex clusters of inner-city poverty and need. If we are to try to root out urban poverty and close the widening gap between the better-off and the poor, we should accept that there is a dangerously divisive scar in inner-city neighbourhoods.

On the analysis of league tables, I could argue that my city of Leeds is penalised for doing rather well. In recent years, because of prudential financial management of precisely the kind advocated in the Bill, the redistribution of grant formula—the gearing that was referred to earlier—has resulted in Leeds receiving an increase of 5.7 per cent where other metropolitan districts received 7.3 per cent.

That was a welcome increase, unlike our experience under the Tories. However, because council taxes were not pumped up to force its citizens to compensate for deep Tory cuts, the council is caught in a double bind: a great unacceptable council tax hike, or being unable to spend as much as the Government are encouraging it to spend. In those circumstances, how can the city break out of the box and start using resources to tackle those deep pockets of poverty that are disguised by the average and need extra support and investment?

We are not calling for a recasting of a complex formula that has been worked out well by the Government but simply suggesting a more sensitive local analysis and an acknowledgment of what is really needed. In practical terms, I suggest a more imaginative approach. For example, use of the enhanced neighbourhood renewal funds may be a means of addressing local poverty pockets and engaging people at the local level. It might also provide opportunities for exploring new capital investment in genuine basic community capacity building, and for exploring the possibilities of local neighbourhood provision of services, such as care of the elderly, cleaning and meals services, care of the sick, child care and family support. Such services could all be provided locally, at the street level, employing local people instead of resources bought halfway across the city.

We could explore investment in the local environment, recycling potential, waste and energy management, investment in the local provision of basic needs, shopping and finances, and better use of derelict land and property, using the new business improvement district idea as an innovative template for getting down to the micro level and promoting long-term change.

At the urban summit in Birmingham on 31 October last year, the Deputy Prime Minister said:

"This is an exciting time, with a big agenda and a big challenge for us all. That challenge is about developing sustainable communities—a new type of urban development. But it's also about a vision, about doing things differently, with imagination, and lifting our horizons."

I welcome the Bill. It could be a catalyst for such a step change in thinking, and contribute to developing a local neighbourhood perspective to the rebuilding of much-needed basic supportive communities, building sustainable local economies, and perhaps equally important, restoring confidence in local government and in local representative democracy. The Bill should kick-start that process.

7.2 pm

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): The hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) made a thoughtful speech about the needs and challenges of local communities on the one hand, and the resources of Government on the other—a subject on which he has strong and clear views. I do not share his optimism that the Bill will unlock the new vision that he described, but he delivered his speech with great conviction. I hope that he will excuse me if I do not follow him down that path.

Another new year, another Local Government Bill. I find this a Bill without any theme. Bits of it are deregulatory and welcome; bits of it are highly regulatory and less welcome. Bits of it are decentralising, but most of it is centralising. Even the general secretary of the Labour party made a speech last month criticising the amount of ring-fencing and the use of specific grants, and said that the Government have not done what they could to reverse the trend.

Not only does the Bill suffer from having no theme, but in parts it is very boring indeed. Many of the clauses contain unexciting provisions that the Department has been trying to get on to the statute book for some time—I believe that I recognise one or two from my days there a decade ago. Ministers should not claim too much for the Bill. I fear that it will not re-ignite interest in local government, as the hon. Member for Leeds, West suggested. It will not bring forward a fresh generation of local councillors or increase the turnout in May's elections, and our debate this evening may not engage the attention of the nation's press. However, there are some important points that need to be made.

Before turning to the detailed provisions, I shall pick up something that the Minister said right at the beginning. It is worth making the point that he has a more benign environment, where local authorities are not challenging the elected Government of the day. In the 1980s, a few local authorities decided to take on the Government. Commissioners were put into Norwich, which refused to implement the right to buy. Councillors were threatened with suspension for not fixing a legal budget. The Government contemplated suspending Lambeth and Liverpool as they faced financial meltdown. Indeed, some of the provisions in the Bill dealing with the evasion of capital controls date back to those days of confrontation—confrontation certainly not sought by the Government of the day. The present Government are fortunate that local authorities are more compliant now and more willing to work with the elected Government than some of the more bloody-

[Sir George Young]

minded and extreme authorities that were around in the 1980s, so the background for a Local Government Bill is more favourable.

I welcome in general terms the thinking behind clauses 1 to 11 relating to capital finance. The clause in the original draft Bill that would have allowed the Secretary of State to require non-housing capital receipts to be paid to the government has been withdrawn. That is appreciated. The major change brought about by this part of the Bill is the duty in clause 3 imposed on a local authority to determine how much money it can afford to borrow. That is a welcome change, providing more scope to incur short-term borrowing costs on investment in projects that will be self-financing in the medium term, either by saving running costs or by enabling the generation of capital receipts.

I wonder whether clause 4, which nationalises, as it were, local authority debt, is really necessary. Surely the Government do not anticipate a return to boom and bust. I thought that we had so many golden rules, so many self-correcting mechanisms, and so many independent monetary regulators that an economic crisis was unthinkable. It is not quite clear how the country's economic interests would be challenged by clause 3. Is local government to be singled out for special treatment if and when the crisis comes? Will the Government's own capital programme be subject to the same sort of restrictions as those envisaged for local government?

Ministers may have overestimated the impact of clause 3 on the freedom to manoeuvre of many local authorities. Given all the pressures on budgets and the necessity of increasing the council tax way beyond the rate of inflation to get the investment in social services and education that the Government want, I do not think that local authorities will conclude that they can use the freedom under clause 3 to afford additional costs for servicing borrowing that is not backed by Government grant. Certainly in Hampshire, where we got the minimum cash uplift in grant for next year, and where a big increase in council tax is inevitable, there is no scope to go on a capital spending spree.

The position is made more uncertain because the Government have yet to decide how to support new local authority capital investment—whether by capital grant or by revenue grant towards borrowing costs. Knowing how the Treasury operates, I see a risk. Once the Government no longer have to approve local authority borrowing, they may well no longer provide adequate grant aid for capital investment, so further burdens may be placed on the council tax payers.

Clauses 7 and 8 seem to introduce one rule for local government and another for central Government. We are told in the notes that local authorities used to engage in innovative deals to evade controls on borrowing. Clauses 7 and 8 will stop that. We are told that the definition of a credit arrangement will rely on the accounting concept of long-term liabilities. I hope that the same concept will apply to Government borrowing, and that where the Government stand behind Network Rail, the private finance initiative for the tube, or the channel tunnel rail link, those long-term liabilities will also be brought within the definition of borrowing controls. What is sauce for the local government goose should be sauce for the Chancellor's gander. Clause 18 is also relevant because it stops local authorities getting round capital controls by operating through companies that they own or influence. Network Rail is a similar ruse used by central Government.

Clause 11 deals with capital receipts, and I have several concerns about that. I am not sure that the new system is fairer for different groups of council tax payers than the old one. It is indeed the case that housing capital receipts accrue faster in the shire districts, where the right to buy has taken off, than in the inner cities, where the right to buy has generated less in capital receipts. Under the old system, we dealt with that by obliging the shire districts to use the right-to-buy receipts to pay off debt, and we increased the borrowing powers of the inner-city areas so that they could invest in housing. Under that regime, ratepayers in the shire districts benefited because their local authorities' debt was paid off. Under the new system, if I have understood clause 11(2)(b) aright, the cash receipts are to be paid directly to the Secretary of State. If that happens, there will be no benefit to the ratepayers who provided the capital asset in the first place. I think that that needs explaining, as it strikes me as unfair.

There is a second problem with the proposed new regime. It will hit constituencies such as mine hard because housing costs are high and more affordable homes are desperately needed for teachers, nurses, policemen and other key workers. The proposed pooling of housing capital receipts destroys the current regime, under which the capital receipts of Test Valley borough council and Basingstoke and Deane district council are focused on local housing priorities. If the Minister looks across the south, he will see that approximately two thirds of the affordable development programme funding comes from local authority social housing grants; only one third comes from the Housing Corporation's ADP. Pooling the capital receipts knocks away the foundations of the local affordable housing programme. In no way will the Housing Corporation make good the deficit, because it has a regional agenda and has already stated that it will direct its future funding at specific areas of growth such as the Thames gateway.

Prior to the transfer of its housing stock, Test Valley council could produce only 30 affordable housing units a year through the Housing Corporation's ADP. With a combination of the local authority social housing grant and the ADP, it now produces 100 affordable housing units a year. That increase in investment in the provision of new dwellings was one of the main reasons why the council decided to take the route of large-scale voluntary transfer. However, if it can no longer access its capital receipts, the affordable housing programme will dry up.

Indeed, the change compromises the basis of the deal with the local authority tenants. Part of the deal and understanding with tenants was that the money received from the sale of the housing stock would be used to provide affordable housing in the borough. As has been mentioned in relation to part 2, the Government have underestimated the impact on future large-scale voluntary transfers. The programme may die, as there will be little motivation for any council to consider

LSVT if one of the major benefits of the capital receipt is removed. I have deep concerns about that part of the Bill.

Even if the Government could claim that part 1 is deregulatory—I have some doubts about it—they certainly cannot say the same about part 2, which creates a wholly new and unnecessary regulatory burden with controls on the adequacy of reserves and the monitoring of budgets. The Bill would be improved if the whole of part 2, which contains clauses 25 to 30, were omitted.

Mr. Raynsford: Does the right hon. Gentleman care to recall the similar provisions relating to local authority housing revenue accounts that his Government—and possibly even he as a Minister—introduced? They were very similar in many respects to those in part 2, which relate to general local authority funding. If he wishes to do away with part 2, why did he introduce similar measures relating to housing?

Sir George Young: My speaking notes contained a section on part 2 that I skipped over because of time pressure. The Government have produced no evidence to show that the controls in clauses 25 and 28 to 30 are necessary other than for a few poorly performing local authorities, and nor am I convinced that the controls would have much impact on such authorities. They simply impose further central prescription on the setting and monitoring of budgets. For most local authorities, existing financial reporting arrangements are wholly adequate.

On clause 78, which deals with bands, I have a lot of sympathy with the points that have been made about the need for a new band at the lower end of the scale, where a number of properties are caught up in a band that is too broad. I have deep reservations, however, about the introduction of a new band at the top end. In the south-east, where house price inflation has taken off, people would suddenly find themselves in a new band and discover that their bills had increased without any change in their circumstances or the services that they receive. If the Government continue piling pressure on the council tax payer, they may find that the consensus on the council tax as an acceptable means of funding local government disappears. In that case, they would be in choppy waters indeed.

I welcome clauses 87 and 88, which deal with housing strategies, although the housing strategy for many local authorities in the south-east will have to be revised because of the impact of the new capital receipts regime. I pause over clause 89, which implies that tenants of indifferent local authorities are to be doubly penalised. First, they have to put up with a bad landlord, but secondly, their housing revenue account will get less subsidy from the Secretary of State because of their having a bad landlord and their rents will therefore be higher. I would like to attend the meeting at which the Minister explains that measure to the tenants of a Labour-controlled inner-city authority.

Clause 90 makes a major change to the housing revenue account, but leaves unaddressed the grievance of tenants in that regard. It is indeed the case that better-off tenants resent subsiding less well-off ones. The notes on the clause criticise the current arrangements because they are not well understood. The trouble is that they are only too well understood by the tenants who have looked at them. They want the subsidy that is provided to less well-off tenants through housing benefit to be removed from the HRA so that their rents can decrease. Clause 90 achieves the first objective but not the second. Housing benefit is taken out of the housing revenue account, but an identical sum is instead paid to the Secretary of State. I doubt whether tenants will derive any comfort from the fact that their rent is no longer going to their neighbour, but to the Government. I believe that we considered that solution, which in my time involved something called negative E7s, and rejected it as more difficult to explain to tenants than the current system. I wish the Minister good luck with that.

I should like to make two short final points. First, I hope that the Government will look again at the impact of pooling on the housing programmes of authorities in the south-east, where there is a desperate shortage of affordable housing currently funded by the local authority social housing grant and where that may be removed. Secondly, notwithstanding the fact that there may be only six Standing Committee sittings on the Bill, my interest on Second Reading does not extend to serving on that Committee.

7.16 pm

Barbara Follett (Stevenage): It is always a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young). Unlike him, however, I do not find the Bill boring and or lacking a theme. Its theme is the devolution of powers to the local level. Its aim is to use those powers to drive up standards in the vital services that our local authorities deliver. I am extremely pleased that it is before the House and that my right hon. Friend the Minister is putting it before us.

It is anything but boring to talk about business improvement districts, which are desperately needed in areas such as my own. It is also anything but boring to look at the way in which elections impact on people and schools. Holding two lots of elections in 2004 would do a disservice to the schools in my community. *[Interruption.]* Yes, it would. Schools would be closed twice. Also, the public can get election fatigue. There is no danger of a very intelligent public confusing the two elections. They will simply be grateful that we are giving them the opportunity to vote once instead of twice. Even though we may not consider that politics can occasionally get boring, believe you me, it can. In the context of all the other pronouncements that I have heard about local government, which can, dare I say it, be extremely boring, the Bill is not. In fact, it verges on being exciting, although I hesitate to use that adjective in terms of local government.

I am concerned about one provision, however, as my earlier intervention illustrated: clause 11 and, in particular, the subsection dealing with capital receipts and debt-free authorities. I represent the new town of Stevenage. I turned 60 on Christmas day and Stevenage is just a little bit younger than me. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] What gallant hon. Members we have in this House. However, I can assure hon. Members that, underneath the façade and the decorative application, I am wearing, just as Stevenage is wearing. However, Stevenage does not have the benefit of the decorative application, and of the Polyfilla that I put on before appearing in this Chamber.

[Barbara Follett]

In fact, bits of Stevenage are really showing their almost 60-year-old age. One school has seven miles of flat roof. Has anybody got any idea what it costs to repair seven miles of leaking flat roof? Most of the public buildings in Stevenage have flat roofs, because in the late '50s and early '60s, which I remember well, we thought that it was a "brave new world" thing to do to build flat roofs. Now we do not, because we now know the problems that flat roofs cause, but we have them in Stevenage, and Harlow and Hemel Hempstead have them too. In fact, six debt-free new towns have huge infrastructure problems. Although I and others in Stevenage understand the redistributive drive behind the need to pool capital receipts, it will cost us dear and will make it impossible for us to deliver the regeneration that we need in these ageing new towns.

We in Stevenage need a completely revamped town centre. We have huge parking problems because when the town was built in the '60s, it was built for people who had one car or, in the main, no car at all. There is a real problem with parking on grass verges, which we have to address. Part of the £14.4 million that my right hon. Friend rightly said has not been spent on housing in Stevenage has been spent on trying to improve the infrastructure and other local services. The population of Stevenage happens to be particularly needy. We have the highest level of teenage pregnancy in Hertfordshire, and we have to devote a great deal of time and money to social services. Stevenage is one of the few authorities that still gives free milk to school children in the morning. We do this because many of our children come to school having had no breakfast. My husband is the chair of governors in what used to be the worst performing school in Stevenage—thankfully, it has now risen to the middle ranks—and one area that was pinpointed was the fact that the children are hungry. So we give them milk, but this costs money.

Stevenage also has a very high proportion of pensioners. Because it is a new town, most of the people moved there at about the same time, and like me, they are all ageing together. In fact, in Stevenage my age is quite average. Members who got married 20 to 30 years ago, and who suddenly find that every towel is threadbare and that they put their feet through every sheet and duvet that they pick up, will understand the problems experienced by a new town. It is a trousseau problem—everything wears out simultaneously, and that is what is happening in the new towns. We desperately need our capital receipts to provide regeneration, and to provide the services that a slightly hostile, Conservative-controlled county council is not being very helpful with. We need our youth services and the children's play schemes that we run during the school holidays to enable mothers—we have a lot of single mothers—to go out to work.

I therefore beg my right hon. Friend to look at the new towns in particular, and to consider some alleviation in the pooling of capital receipts. I know that he said that we will get back what we say we will spend on housing, but unfortunately some of our need relates not just to housing but to services. Unless we deliver those services, we will be failing the people of our towns. I should point out with the greatest sincerity that it is very difficult indeed for Stevenage borough council—it has been Labour controlled ever since Stevenage became a new town, and is currently the only Labour authority in Hertfordshire—to deliver what it wants to deliver for the people of the town without some alleviation.

I am proud of what Labour has done for Stevenage, and I am very proud indeed of what it has done since 1983. My right hon. Friend said that the new towns received a gift of free housing, but I know that we did not. When that housing was transferred in 1983, we incurred a debt of £66.6 million, which was repayable on a 40-year annuity. We repaid that debt up until 1996, when it was cancelled in return for a reduction in our housing subsidy. So we are still paying it, and I beg my right hon. Friend to look again at how the new towns have repaid that gift of housing stock. I should also like him to consider the state of that gift when we received it. A lot of it consists of poor and experimental housing, and some of it is prefab housing. There are two extremely needy wards in my constituency, and the reason why they are so needy is because of the state of the housing.

I welcome the Bill and the aims of my right hon. Friend, but I ask him to pay particular attention to the needs of the ageing new towns, which, like Stevenage's ageing MP, need a little tender loving care.

7.27 pm

Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley): There is nothing wrong with my eyesight, and if the hon. Member for Stevenage (Barbara Follett) is ageing, she is ageing a darned sight better than I am—even when I pull my jacket in.

I have great sympathy for the hon. Lady's point about the pooling of capital receipts. In fact, as she knows the Select Committee felt exactly the same way, but we did not restrict the argument to the new towns. Indeed, many of the points that she made apply to local authorities throughout the country. Capital receipts are assets that they wish to use for various facilities in their own areas. They paid for them, so why should they not use them? For those that have not made use of that opportunity, the pooling of those receipts is not a good idea.

The Minister spoke at length—both today and before the Select Committee—about how superb and positive the Bill is, and how it will introduce huge freedoms, and so on. However, as he is probably aware, the Committee was underwhelmed by it, and in this regard he seems to be on his own. It is perhaps worth quoting from the first paragraph of the list of conclusions in the Committee's report on the draft Bill. It states:

> "On the whole the draft Bill appears to be far from a radical overhaul and in many cases gives more powers to the Secretary of State. The way in which it is drafted could enmesh local authorities in more regulation. We are furthermore concerned that aspects of the Bill centralise powers unnecessarily."

It is probably worth touching on that particular aspect in the short time available. This is yet another classic example of Government spin. They talk of freedom and of greater democracy, but in fact they are providing exactly the opposite. At best, the Bill redefines the methods of restrictions, and at worst it actually increases bureaucracy and regulation.

Most of the Minister's spin has concerned authorities having much greater freedom to borrow for capital expenditure, but his own Department's explanatory notes point out that this applies only

"where they can afford to service the debt."

It is clear that any local authority has to estimate the availability of revenue to cover that aspect of any capital borrowing. Particularly following the announcement of the grant regime for next year, with central Government direction on levels of expenditure in many areas, coupled with target grants and ring-fenced grants, the Government's hold on local government revenue expenditure is tighter than ever.

There is no doubt that, for ordinary capital spending, local authorities are heavily dependent on annual Government support. No prudent local authority will assess that long-term borrowing as affordable in any ordinary sense of the word unless there is a good expectation of full Government support. Such an expectation is the basis on which local authorities have borrowed for many years, as credit approvals have automatically generated additional annual grant under the standing spending assessment.

I understand that local authorities are still awaiting the Government's proposals—which were promised last summer—for future grant arrangements to support capital spending. The natural expectation for many local authorities, following the Government's deeply entrenched centralisation techniques, is that the current controls, though credit approvals, will be replaced by an equally restrictive regime of conditional grant approvals. To back their claim of further freedom, the Government are relying on the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy to develop what is called a prudential code to define what borrowing is affordable, and what is not.

I understand that the institute has prepared a draft code that will impose more performance yardsticks and more bureaucratic procedures on local authorities—as if they did not have enough already. I further understand that the draft code focuses only on the first three years, and that it therefore cannot address the fundamental problem that local authorities are not in a position to assess affordability for many years ahead—in other words, over the whole period of the standard time of local authority debt.

In essence, the overall effect of these proposals will be an increase in bureaucracy, with little or no worthwhile gain of freedom from Government controls. Is all the pain worth the bother, given that there will be such little gain?

Clause 11 has been touched on already. It gives a general power to the Secretary of State to confiscate the housing capital receipts of local authorities. I suppose that few people will be surprised about that, given the political machinations relating to the formula for distribution of revenue grant. Here again, the Government are intervening by giving to themselves the powers to confiscate housing capital receipts and consign them to a central pool. Although I guess that that procedure may be the Deputy Prime Minister's way of killing dead the right to buy—a constant blind spot in his tunnel vision—this manoeuvre, on local practical grounds, will destroy any interest in maintaining incentives for the good management of public assets.

The Minister assured the Select Committee that that confiscation would not be allowed to have a retrospective effect. That was very welcome. It is therefore with great concern that, according to my quick reading of the explanatory notes to the Bill, the effect of the assurance applies only to debt-free authorities. I hope that, when he winds up the debate, the Minister will reassure the House on that matter.

This Government, and in particular the Minister of State and his predecessor, constantly say that they trust local government and wish to give it more freedoms. If that were really so, clauses 25 to 28 could be deleted. They contain a high-handed and unnecessary range of procedures and prescriptions about local authority reserves and budgetary controls. The absolutely irresponsible behaviour of a few authorities in the late 1980s, and especially of some Labour authorities in that period, is no longer evident. Small changes made since then now protect public expenditure and, as a consequence, we do not need all the proposed restrictions. Indeed, no other public bodies are subject to this degree of legal prescription. In essence, all local authorities are being treated as if they were less capable of running their finances than colleges and housing associations.

As I have already said, legal safeguards currently exist. They require the appointment of properly qualified officers to take charge of financial administration, the adoption of proper accounting practices, and internal and external audit. Furthermore, there is a requirement that each local authority must review its reserves before it decides the level of council tax. Even if the Minister can point to any cases where these legal safeguards have proved inadequate—and he mentioned one—methods already exist that make it possible to alter one local authority's approach without imposing extra burdens on other authorities, as clauses 25 to 28 do.

The cost and delay caused by the restrictions imposed by these further bureaucratic burdens will tend to degrade overall performance and increase financial costs.

Mr. Raynsford: Earlier, I asked the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) a question to which he did not make a complete response, so perhaps I can ask the hon. Gentleman the same question. Why, if the measures are so objectionable to Conservative Members, did the previous Conservative Government impose rather more stringent controls on local authority housing revenue accounts? The controls were designed on exactly the same lines as those proposed in the Bill, in that they required minimum balances and reserves, and very specific observation of budgeting rules. Why was that acceptable under a Conservative Government, but not under this one?

Sir Paul Beresford: It is an interesting question. I do not want to dodge it, but I must point out that I was not here at the time. Did the Minister support the Conservative proposals, or vote against them? Moreover, the Conservative proposals applied to only

[Sir Paul Beresford]

one element of a local authority's budget, whereas this Government's proposals apply to the whole budget of every authority.

Mr. McWalter: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the previous Conservative Government had a highly centralising approach to local government, whereas this Bill purports to be liberating and devolving?

Mr. Curry: The verb "purports" is an interesting one to use.

Sir Paul Beresford: As my right hon. Friend notes, the verb "purports" is interesting in this context. If the hon. Gentleman reads the Bill carefully and talks to his local authority's finance officers quietly behind closed doors, he may find that he supports many of the concerns expressed by Conservative Members. The Bill purports to be decentralising, but in reality is not.

The draft Bill included references to the general formula grant. Presumably, those references related to the ministerial speeches and papers that preceded the Bill, when Ministers explained that the Government's intention was to improve the general grant system, giving more predictability and stability in order to support long-term planning and strengthen local authority accountability. The proposals have since been dropped and replaced by clause 31, which proposes an unrestricted power to enable Ministers to

"pay a grant to a local authority towards expenditure incurred or to be incurred by it".

Furthermore, clause 32, contains an "ancillary" power to require a local authority to formulate policies in relation to any matter and to supply such information as the Minister may require.

That is an absolute monstrosity. The power is much more wide ranging than any that I know, and it will allow direct opportunity for funding by ministerial whim. There are no safeguards, as the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) noted. There is no requirement for prior consultation with local government, nor even for a statement to be made—for instance, within six months of the end of each financial year—showing all the grants paid to each individual local authority in exercising this power. The proposal is yet another example of central direction that will enable Ministers to provide grants to local authorities as they see fit. In other words, it is the specific, targeted grants system taken just a little further.

Mr. Edward Davey: The hon. Gentleman will recall that the Minister intervened on me when I made that point. He said that parliamentary scrutiny would be provided by means of the estimates debates. However, does the hon. Gentleman agree that the estimates procedure is in such a sorry state that it will not provide real scrutiny of the new grants, which will therefore be open to the abuse that he has described?

Sir Paul Beresford: One problem with the present scrutiny system is that there is so much to scrutinise and so little time available. I believe that the proposed system could be manoeuvred by Ministers, who will face no risk of intervention.

The next station on the centralisation line is the new approach to the housing revenue account. The Bill introduces a subjective basis for determining annual subsidy. That will destroy the improvement in predictability achieved in the past year or so. That predictability was welcomed by housing authorities, but the Bill will replace it with confusion and uncertainty. To add to the difficulty, and to exacerbate the continued trend of centralisation, clauses 89 and 92 will allow the Government to determine by formula the rent of every council and housing association dwelling in England. The proposal will destroy the previous provision in the Housing Act 1985, under which housing authorities must have regard to the pattern of private sector renting in deciding rent distributions for their own dwellings, thus ensuring that differentials reflected tenants' own experience.

Finally, it is worth referring to clauses 101 and 102, which have not been touched on, but which provide the opportunity for the Secretary of State to interfere even in the minute detail of contracting-out exercises. Clauses 101 and 102 will essentially remove the opportunities for any of the benefits to local council tax payers and residents of the discipline of competitive tendering. Perhaps that is a suitable note on which to end a Bill from this Government. In essence, this restrictive, centralising Bill will further damage the freedoms of local government, while flying under the Government's tarnished flag of the so-called expansion of local government freedoms.

7.40 pm

Mr. David Lepper (Brighton, Pavilion): I wish to concentrate on part 4, which relates to business improvement districts, but I should like to welcome some other aspects of the Bill before doing so, such as the help that it will provide to small businesses, and, despite what the hon. Member for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford) has just said, the measures to protect the rights of local authority staff, especially their pension rights when councils contract out their services.

I welcome the ability of councils to trade, and mine is likely to be one of them as Brighton and Hove city council achieved a good rating. The right to vary the discount for empty private properties and second homes will be much welcomed in areas such as mine with very real housing need and where several hundred private accommodation units are still empty.

I also welcome clause 82 on quashing liability orders. I have raised that issue with Ministers on several occasions on behalf of a constituent who understandably felt that, although it was acknowledged that a liability order served on him was a mistake, a blot would remain on his character unless the council went through the expensive higher court action procedures, which the Bill will replace with a simple recourse to magistrates.

I welcome what my right hon. Friend the Minister has said about a possible amendment to section 28. It seems to me that, despite the nit-picking comments made by some hon. Members earlier, it does not matter whether the Government or a Back-Bench Member introduces that proposed amendment to repeal section 28. The important thing is that an item on the statute book that remains to many gay and lesbian people a threat and a

powerful symbol of prejudice and discrimination is removed. Through their action on adoption and their forthcoming proposals on partnership rights, the Government are already doing much to combat that discrimination and prejudice. I hope that when that proposal is introduced—I am sure that it will be—official Opposition Members who wish to support such an amendment will at least be free to do so, even if they are not whipped to do so.

I come now to business improvement districts. I pay tribute to the Association of Town Centre Management for the ceaseless work that it has undertaken over the years to promote the idea of business improvement districts. I am glad that the all-party group on town centre management issues, which I have the honour to chair, has been able to play its part in that lobbying. I am also pleased—I have to declare an interest—that I have been asked to chair the steering group on business improvement district pilot projects, which is being administered on behalf of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister by that association. That steering group brings together the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the Countryside Agency, English Partnerships and the private sector.

I also pay tribute to the many town centre managers and their teams who brought together the public and private sectors in town and cities across the country to improve their areas, to bring new prosperity to local businesses and generally to revitalise town centres as places in which to work, to do business and to live. I pay tribute especially to the work of the Brighton city centre business forum and its manager, Tony Mernagh, and its chair, Derek Maddison. Not the least of their achievements has been bringing together businesses, the council and the police to make Brighton the first of the south's cities to receive the Home Office safe shopping award, combating retail crime.

In 1999, Lord Rogers' urban taskforce report proposed town improvement zones, recognising the problem with many town centre management schemes was the difficulty of securing sustainable funding. That problem was underlined by the study undertaken by the Association of Town Centre Management on behalf of the then Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions on schemes in six towns and cities. The study showed that the time devoted to fundraising weakened the effectiveness of the schemes themselves and that making funding dependent on voluntary contributions generated a sense of vulnerability. It also showed that there was some resentment against those who did not make the voluntary contributions but who still benefited from the cleaner streets, safer environment and the increase in customers that the town centre management scheme brings to the area.

The proposals in part 4 are welcome, as they will provide a way to find sustainable funding for those improvement schemes by allowing a levy of businesses to be used, with the agreement of those businesses, specifically for agreed improvements to make areas safer and cleaner and to deal with crime and grime. Some hon. Members may be sceptical about the idea of business rate payers being willing to pay more. To those sceptics, let me say that more than 80 councils across the political spectrum expressed an interest in becoming pilot bid areas and more than 50 have subsequently submitted formal applications.

The intention is that when the legislation is in place, as it should be by the summer, some 20 or so pilot areas should be ready to test and, I believe, demonstrate the benefits that BIDs can bring to an area. May I reassure my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett) that it is certainly the intention that those pilot areas should be representative not only of city centres, but of suburbs, market towns, coastal towns and all the regions of England as well.

Those who have had the opportunity to talk, for example, to Robert Walsh, New York's commissioner for business improvement districts, will have no doubt about the benefits of those schemes. The statistics that I would use are rather more up to date than those referred to by the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles), given that they apply to the past five years or so.

In New York's BIDs, empty commercial properties have been filled, graffiti has been dealt with effectively and 40,000 new jobs have been created during those five years. Similar results are on record for Philadelphia and Washington DC. In Washington, there has been a 28 per cent. drop in serious crime, thefts from cars are down by 71.6 per cent. and pick-pocketing is down by 50 per cent.

This is new territory, bringing together the public and private sectors. The Government's proposed ballot process—the total rateable value of those in favour of such a scheme has to exceed that of those against—seems to be a way to guard against domination by large multiple retailers or the independent sector. It is also a way to maximise turnout and to secure a democratic mandate before schemes can go ahead for an initial five-year period. However, as I have said, this is new territory, so I wish to indicate two issues on which I hope that Ministers will ensure that there is clear guidance and which need detailed consideration. The money raised in BID areas must ensure true additionality for the services provided, and the criteria for defining that additionality must be absolutely clear if the proposals for a BID are to command support.

Secondly, I believe that the use of the business rating system as proposed is the clearest basis for the levy. Through the CBI and the British Property Federation, however, landlords have expressed genuine support for BIDs and a wish to play a formal role. Complex arrangements could no doubt be devised to bring the property owners and the tenants into the voting process. I am not sure, however, that that would be the most profitable way to proceed at present. I urge Ministers, however, to give proper consideration to ways in which property owners can be involved formally in a relationship with those who have voted for the BID.

Mr. Patrick Hall: In relation to the role of property owners, I take it that my hon. Friend refers to freeholders. If so—and if they are to make a contribution, which sounds fair in principle—perhaps they would also like to have a vote. That would entail the grave difficulties of identifying those people. In many town centres, the freeholders are remote, they hardly ever visit, and their property portfolios are looked after by managing agents. That is a problem.

Mr. Lepper: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. I remind him that, as a representative of part

[Mr. Lepper]

of the city that provided a home for Mr. Nicholas van Hoogstraten—until Her Majesty provided a home for him outside the Brighton and Hove area—I am aware of the difficulties of tracking down the property owners. I hope that I have indicated that my view is that the business rating system is the best basis for voting on BIDs. I hope, however, that Ministers will consider carefully—and that the Committee will consider—the possibility of a formal relationship between property owners and tenants in the BID, to enable property owners to manage some form of contribution.

I am mindful of the wish of many Labour Members, if not official or unofficial Opposition Members, to take part in this debate—that may be a comment on the value given to local government by the different political parties—and I will end my contribution with those remarks. I look forward to my right hon. Friend's comments in his summing-up.

7.53 pm

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): My right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) indicated that, with regard to serving on the Bill Committee, he might wait for the film. I may be a glutton for punishment—or a sufferer from excess nostalgia—but I am willing to serve on the Bill Committee. It is not merely that the Minister's company is invariably entertaining and agreeable, but that once one has got into a habit it is difficult, as all old lags find, to get rid of it. This area is so frequently abstruse that one might as well maintain one's reputation for having expertise in it, especially as few people would even aspire to have such expertise.

This is yet another Local Government Bill and, as we are in a period in which we are giving fundamental consideration to what we must now call the governance of the United Kingdom, it might be sensible to look at what it tells us about the relationship between central and local government: mainly, to lament that the Government do not seem to want to stand back and look at where the proper balance lies between the two authorities, and at the whole issue of authority and accountability.

The political architecture is changing considerably. Multinational decision-taking structures are growing, and although the European Union tends to preoccupy us because of its relationship to the authority of this place, it is far from being the only one. A diversification of authority has taken place within the United Kingdom, with the creation of a semi-federal system, and if we move towards regional government we will have an even more federal system, although a remarkably heterogeneous one, as it will be far from uniform in application. Equally, a process of atomisation as opposed to globalisation has taken place, with devolution "à l'outrance" to the local citizen on the school board, for example. That is passing through the instruments of democratic accountability. Much is therefore changing. At the same time, we see a much more diversified service delivery between the public sector, the private sector and voluntary bodies of one sort or another. Without wishing to trespass on the quarrel between the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, that is likely to be one of the dominant themes of the next year in politics.

Why are the Government so persistently anxious to maintain their hand on the brake of local government? Why are they anxious to be the back-seat driver and, on many occasions, sit in the front seat too? There are three reasons. First, as the Minister mentioned—this is an excerpt from my speeches as a Minister and the speeches of my predecessors—local government spends 25 per cent. of all public expenditure. The figure was £40 billion in my day, and it is more now. No Government trying to maintain national competitiveness in a globally competitive marketplace can afford not to take a view on what is the correct volume of that expenditure. There is no point in pretending otherwise or looking back for a lost golden age in which that did not happen. We are in a modern world in which that is an inescapable imperative.

Secondly, there is a need to get value for money in an age of restraint on the share of GDP that Governments feel that they can take, partly for the reasons that I have just mentioned and partly because of the allergies that have overcome the political system about the raising of more money in taxation, particularly in highly visible direct taxation. The Government may be finding some way out of that allergy through their persistent tax increases.

Thirdly, there is the distrust of a political culture in local government, which all parties share. Ironically, the last Conservative Government had the same problem as this Government: old Labour and local government. I do not know which of those Governments have been more inconvenienced by that. We have certainly both been inconvenienced, and that was the cause of a great deal of distrust of what was happening in local government, even though old Labour was often new polytechnic when translated into local government terms. That manifested itself under the Conservative Government in instruments such as capping. There were a series of tough settlements, although the suggestion by the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) that there were cuts in real terms year after year was a fictional element in his contribution. Compulsory competitive tendering was important as many local authorities had no way of assessing what was a proper place for a service before an element of competition was introduced into the tendering process. The Audit Commission, which has now become a sort of super-gendarme in the firmament of this Government, was an invention of the previous Conservative Government.

The Tory Government used weapons that were largely financial as instruments of control of local government. Under this Administration, the instruments used are much more managerial in approach, although not exclusively so, as that does not take account of the financial instrument of a very great increase in direct grants—a kind of challenge to non-hypothecation—which has been carried out over the last few years. Best value was the great instrument that replaced compulsory competitive tendering through the wonderful regime of the gendarmes that attended almost every move of local government. The then Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, the right hon. Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers)—who is now, in political terms at any rate, deceased—confessed at Harrogate that the machinery had become too heavy and would have to be unwound to an extent. It was certainly oppressive and time consuming.

Subsequently, we have seen the prescription of how councils were to run themselves, of which the Tory Government never even aspired to dream, and the choice of a mechanism by which they were to discharge their political function, let alone their services. We had elected mayors, a process that went catastrophically wrong in the places where it was tried, cabinets and the mayor plus manager. All those systems were prescribed on the basis of token notice being taken of the views of the general public as expressed in referendums with extraordinarily low thresholds for turnout and the majorities needed to bring about change. The proposals for regional assemblies have further implications for the planning role of local government. We therefore have an incredibly confused architecture of government and confusion as to where the Government see the broad thrust of their strategy leading. I fear that there is no clear strategy.

There have been more generous settlements recently but, because of the way in which council tax works and the gearings that are involved, there have been spectacular increases in the council tax needed to deliver services. At the same time, there has been an increase in micro-management, with the daftest increase of all being that whereby the Government take money off the national health service to give it back to local government so that it can it repay the NHS to deal with the problem of bed blocking. If ever tautology was written into legislation, the Government have managed it with that particular provision.

There is much talk of freedom, which is the new buzzword in local government. However, there are two sorts of freedom: the freedom from and the freedom to. It is important to draw a distinction between the two. Much of what has happened of substance is of the freedom from variety rather than the freedom to. For example, a policy classifies councils in a range from excellence to Hackney, which I suppose is the effective classification for councils at that end of the range.

The rewards offered to councils include a reduction in ring fencing, the removal of the requirement for statutory plans, a reduction in the level of the intensity of inspections and the removal of the never used threat of capping. They are part of a local government parole system. Councils are allowed out on parole after a period of good behaviour, but the classification itself is still a central mechanism that is too dependent on Ofsted's classification of education spending and the way in which Ofsted defines that. There must be greater equivalence between the way in which Ofsted judges education services and the judgment that is made of other services if the classification is to operate fairly.

The inevitable question that we ask ourselves about the Bill is whether it contains more freedoms. As many speakers have said, it contains more freedoms, but we are also moving in the opposite direction simultaneously. It is an itsy-bitsy Bill, like so many other itsy-bitsy Government Bills. The freedoms in it are far from clear cut or they represent an ambiguous new direction. For example, while the Minister talks about freedom, he will no doubt be aware that the Department for Education and Skills, which has always been the most Stalinist Department when it comes to controlling its expenditure, is even now telling local authorities that it must passport through to schools a volume of their budgets. Local authorities that have received a baseline increase in their budgets have been told that the Department has to passport more than the entire increase in their resources to schools. That is prescription in its most extreme form and lives alongside the Minister's claims that it is a greater freedom.

On balance, I welcome the proposals on capital finance. However, they do not involve freedoms US-style. Although one or two local authorities will have their own credit ratings—they are very much at the limit—they are not companies going to market. All local authorities will continue to borrow from the Public Works Loan Board and will all pay the same rates of interest. I hope that arrangements will be made so that, if there is early repayment of debt, they do not suffer from some of the disadvantages that have occurred with voluntary transfers. That would constitute a serious disincentive. Furthermore, as my hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford) pointed out, we do not know what the support arrangements will be for the continued capital borrowing that will continue to form the lion's share of the capital investment made by local authorities.

I think that I am in favour of the proposals to trade and change provided that there are the obvious safeguards for competition between local authority and other suppliers. Some of the other measures in the Bill introduce sensible flexibilities, including the new stab at rate relief for small businesses. If I may make a forecast that is born of the scars that I bear, that proposal will be welcomed and then immediately dismissed as being wholly inadequate for the needs of small businesses.

I am hesitant about the proposal for the pooling of housing capital receipts for precisely the reasons that my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire has already outlined. I will not repeat what he said other than to say that I hope that we will receive clarification in Committee so that we can understand how the proposal will work.

I am also cautious about introducing too many changes to council tax. It has the advantage of being a very efficient tax in terms of its rates of collection. Many local authorities are very close to collecting the practical maximum of what can be collected. However, I accept that there is a problem, notably for lower-value properties, and the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett) has already mentioned that. If we could introduce a little more logic into the system, we could all escape from the silly political business of swapping arguments about which party charges council tax payers less. We all know that the answer is fundamentally a function of the proportion of houses of different grades that are in each local authority area. The Minister must accept that, because of inflation in house prices, people will be deeply concerned to find themselves suddenly in a new band when the level of services provided remains the same. The council tax is designed to create a balance between capital values and services delivered, and that balance must be maintained.

Where does the Bill leave us? It leaves us with small increases in discretion and flexibility; it maintains a largely command-and-control system from central Government; and the prevailing culture is still that of reward for performance. We have not really considered whether and how we can reassert representative

[Mr. David Curry]

democracy, so it is not a case of paradise gained or even of nirvana deferred. It is a small earthquake in Walsall, with not many shaken.

8.7 pm

Mr. Patrick Hall (Bedford): I will concentrate my remarks on part 4 of the Bill as I strongly support the proposal that business improvement districts be enabled. It will turn out to be an extremely positive and welcome initiative that could yield wide-ranging and lasting benefits throughout the country. My remarks have been encouraged by the views of the Bedford Town Centre Company as well as by my experience as the former town centre manager for Bedford and as a member of the all-party group on town centre management.

It is difficult to write down a formula that would produce a successful town centre—so many ingredients and variables are involved. None the less, when we enter a successful town centre, it is clear that our experience is very different from what it would be if we were in a town that was failing. I had better resist the temptation to devise a formula for success. A thriving town centre, however, is successful economically, socially and environmentally. It has achieved that state of affairs because certain functions and activities are integrated and working together rather than operating in an isolated and fragmented way. It is all too easy for isolation and fragmentation to be the order of the day in town centres.

The private sector is, by definition, individualistic. It mainly comprises individual shops, services and businesses that are in competition. It is self-evident that shops in a town centre are often in direct competition with each other. The public sector, which looks after the public realm in the town centre—street lighting, cleansing, policing and so on—is the responsibility of different agencies and departments. They can act without reference to each other, which all too often happens, even with bodies in the same local authority. If left to itself, the town centre can be characterised by a lack of co-ordination. It has increasingly been acknowledged over the past 20 years or so that deliberate action must be taken to encourage different interest groups to talk to each other, to work together and to act in partnership to achieve common goals. That is what town centre management is all about. When it works, it benefits everyone: trade, the shopper, the visitor and the public realm as a whole.

There are many successful examples of town centre management initiatives across the country. The establishment of the Association of Town Centre Management in the early or mid-1980s considerably boosted the status of town centre management. It has helped to generate debate, raise awareness, undertake research and promote good practice by being in touch with what is happening on the ground daily. My hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper) referred to the association.

One of the consistent features of town centre management identified by the association that has been experienced by town centre managers around the country and by town centre partnerships is that although everyone clamours for initiatives such as Christmas lighting, Britain in bloom projects, shopping guides and competitions from which all parties gain, few are willing to pay for them. Apart from that being inherently unfair and causing ill feeling, it also suggests that it is possible to achieve even more if only all the parties were to contribute. I believe that the potential is considerable, which is where business improvement districts come in. It is inherently fair that costs are spread among those who might benefit. In addition, the necessity of working in a partnership to draw up the business plan for a local business improvement district and the need to campaign to advocate a BID to win the vote should generate even more ideas and commitment, as well as the sustained additional income that current town centre management arrangements are able to provide. That is the great benefit—the great beauty—of the idea.

In my opinion, a successful system of BIDs could represent a breakthrough in town centre management. That is also the understanding of the Bedford Town Centre Company and the perception of the Association of Town Centre Management. I echo the congratulations that my hon. Friend extended to the association on having the foresight to prepare for the enabling primary legislation by promoting pilot BIDs in different parts of the country. That is important because it will take time for a BID proposal to be properly prepared and to stand a fair chance of winning a yes vote in a local ballot of business rate payers. By encouraging the work to be undertaken now, a number of proposals and ballots could be launched next year, when we hope that the legislation will come into effect. Schemes will be ready to hit the ground running, which is welcome. The selection of pilot BIDs is a matter for the Association of Town Centre Management. I am pleased that the Bedford Town Centre Company, among others, has put in its application. It has done so with strong support from many interest groups and people within Bedford. That is the result of its enthusiasm and hard work, and I wish it well.

I wish to question one aspect of the BID proposals: the nature of the ballot of business rate payers within the defined bid area that is required before a scheme can proceed. Clause 52 requires that a simple majority of those voting must vote in favour for a BID and the levy to go ahead. That is uncontroversial; we all understand it. It goes on to say, however, that, for a scheme to proceed, the total rateable value of the properties of those voting yes must be greater than the value of those voting no. So even if a majority of small businesses voted no, a scheme could go ahead anyway because the big boys say yes—or vice versa. That would be a bizarre situation, and I do not see it creating consensus, partnership and credibility. After all, life will go on, and there will be a need to address town centre management issues after a ballot has been held.

We abolished the property qualification in the general franchise more than 120 years ago. A person's vote is not worth more because his or her property happens to be more valuable than someone else's. I think that Ministers have missed an important point.

Business improvement districts can open up effective town centre management schemes by drawing in ideas and commitment from the smallest business as well as the largest. They can all operate as equals and in

partnership, paying a levy according to the scheme agreed locally, which may, as we see in the Bill, vary according to turnover or rateable value—something for the local partnership to determine before the ballot is held. That is very different from saying that the value of a vote in the initiating ballot should be weighted according to rateable value.

I am extremely concerned about this proposal. Why complicate matters? Having counted the votes, the returning officer of the local authority will then have to identify and add up the rateable values. There is a lot of scope for dispute, uncertainty and error, especially if the result is close. I ask Ministers to keep this simple and credible and to stick to a system that everyone respects and understands. The only system with legitimacy is the one that encourages people to vote yes or no and the majority wins.

Mr. Clifton-Brown *rose—*

Mr. Hall: I am about to conclude.

I do not think it wise for the Government to be prescriptive. We heard some comments about the lack of prescription in the Bill, but it is not necessary here. I urge the Government to think again and not to allow this aspect of the BID proposal to undermine an otherwise excellent initiative.

8.17 pm

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): I, too, want to concentrate on business improvement districts, as the hon. Members for Bedford (Mr. Hall) and for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper) did. However, I should like to start with some more general comments.

My background is in local government, although it is not as illustrious as those of many of today's speakers. That is no longer a matter of embarrassment in the Conservative party, as it might have been in the past. I am a great believer in the concept of localism, and it seems that localism will be achievable only with far greater financial autonomy. The Bill is deeply centralising, and in that regard I endorse the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) and my hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford).

In London we have had a dire experience since the mayoral election two and a half years ago. There is a lack of financial transparency. The battle between the Mayor of London and the Treasury means that Londoners have lost out. That is evident from our public services, not least London Underground.

The Bill makes some significant claims on council tax issues. I confess that I disagree profoundly with the second home provisions in clause 75, which seemed to have almost universal support earlier. The clause displays a strong misunderstanding of the notion of the council tax, introduced in 1991, which was designed to be partly a property and partly a personal tax. That is the basis for the 50 per cent. second home discount. However, I accept that Government pressure on local authorities, particularly Conservative local authorities, has forced a number of the Tory shire counties to lobby for this change, which I suspect will be made.

In general, I support the concept of revaluation, but I disagree with the power in clause 78 to change the valuation bands, with one caveat that was referred to forcefully by the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett). Obviously the point is unknown to me from my constituency experience in central London, but clearly, if there should be a subdivision of band A in a number of our bigger northern cities it would make sense to have one.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I am sure that my hon. Friend, with his knowledge of local government, can cast his mind back to the introduction of the council tax bands in 1991. He will remember that a large number of appeals were made, because people were aggrieved at finding themselves in a certain band. If we restructure the bands, exactly the same thing will happen. Does he agree that that would place a huge burden on local authorities?

Mr. Field: I could not agree more, and a wholesale revaluation or rebanding in that regard would not make a great deal of sense. Interestingly, when all those appeals took place 10 or 11 years ago, a lot of people felt aggrieved because the property market was somewhat questionable—it was coming down. Within a short time—perhaps this applies mainly to London and the south-east—a lot of people were keen for their properties to be revalued into a higher band for council tax purposes, which obviously made a difference to the resale value of their property.

I am concerned that the proposals to extend the number of bands beyond eight to perhaps 10 or even a dozen are, effectively, another stealth tax on middle class London and the south-east. We have already seen something of a gerrymandering of the grant system to favour the north of England and Scotland. There is no doubt that the old standard spending assessment was a complex system for local government finance, but the new system does not seem any more straightforward or transparent to me. Transparency must be at the core of the council tax, not least because if we are to move towards more local autonomy we should consider more local taxes. We should examine the American example, which involves raising a sales tax locally and using it on local matters.

As Ministers have rightly pointed out, we face a great concern that goes back to when my party was in government: more than 80 per cent. of local authority expenditure comes from central Government grant or the uniform business rate, so it is perhaps unsurprising that we have concerns over centralisation.

Business improvement districts are of key importance in my constituency, as they are in that of the hon. Member for Bedford. They are, of course, an American concept that was pioneered to provide a mechanism for private sector leadership in the general improvement of a locality. In my constituency, we have the New West End Company, which takes in Oxford street, Bond street and Regent street. I am inclined to think of the dark green spaces on a Monopoly board. Perhaps the idea would not have quite so much success in Old Kent road or Whitechapel road. Thankfully, neither is in my constituency.

One benefit of the proposal is that it would allow people to work alongside local stakeholders. The private sector, therefore, would be able to take a lead on long-term projects, over and above the general local authority

[Mr. Field]

services. However, as a number of Members have pointed out, we must ensure that there is a genuine sense of additionality rather than a feeling that local government funding is simply being replaced.

We also need to ensure that there is greater public reassurance as to the deterrence of crime. I support zero tolerance on quality of life issues such as illegal street trading and graffiti. We must also ensure that we spruce up open spaces and enhance sanitation in many of our inner cities.

I also support the Government's safeguards for the minority interest, which are in clause 52 and which were referred to somewhat less favourably by the hon. Member for Bedford. It strikes me as fair to have a twofold test involving, initially, the majority of stakeholders. However, the test must also represent a majority of rateable values. Interestingly, in New York, for example, a 60 per cent. values test applies. However, we must ensure that there are at least some safeguards against the "no taxation without representation" argument, which could equally be put by unreconciled minorities.

I hope that we shall be reassured in Committee on the organisation of ballots—regulations need to be set out in more detail than in clause 57—and we must also consider the potential use of a veto by any relevant local authority.

The key long-term effect of business improvement districts, however, is that they result in increased property values so, as has been pointed out, property owners and not just tenants stand to gain most from their success. In the United States, for example, property owners pay rates but in the UK it is envisaged that the occupiers will pay, although owners have a greater vested interest in the long-term success of the area.

There is genuine concern that the UK approach will not be workable as that unfairness could impede initial interest in BIDs as well as their longer-term sustainability. I realise that we shall discuss these points in greater detail in Committee but, notwithstanding the Minister's earlier comments, there should be more detail in the Bill rather than leaving the matter for regulation at a later stage. I accept the argument that we need a sense of flexibility—it is an entirely new area and we do not want to take an overly prescriptive view. However, there is a real worry that unless there is a clear idea in the minds of local businesses in areas that are subject to a BID scheme, there will be no BID at all.

The experience of Westminster city council in joint partnering with the private sector to fund such improvements is that land owners rather than occupiers are willing to contribute. Their engagement in business improvement districts should remain explicit. That experience is confirmed by the New West End Company, to which I referred earlier. The whole initiative has been driven by property owners; more than two thirds of the £1.6 million budget of the past three years was funded by owners rather than tenants. I appreciate that what goes on in the west end of London may be somewhat different from what happens in many other parts of the UK, but it shows the importance of bringing owners on board at an early stage.

Comparisons have been made both with New York and with other US cities, especially by the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper). However, one or two of those comparisons do not entirely pass muster and when we are setting up BIDs we should ensure that we do not have such high expectations for them that they are disappointed. In New York, for example, BIDs came in only after a large increase in police numbers and a commensurate fall in crime rates. Similarly, New York could generate specific quality of life legislation in some localities. Even though we can make use of byelaws in this country, such legislation would not be appropriate in the UK. Furthermore, New York has a 24-hour transport system and is able to disperse large crowds rapidly—that is especially relevant for London—so it is far easier to deal with quality of life issues there.

I have grave concerns about several other points to which my right hon. and hon. Friends have already referred. However, the BIDs initiative is positive. It needs far more scrutiny in Committee, which I hope will ensure that a robust business improvement district regime will come about.

8.28 pm

Kali Mountford (Colne Valley): Many Members have said that the Bill is confusing, but I think that the debate itself has been confusing. The Liberal spokesman, the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey), told us that he supports the Bill but is critical of certain aspects of it. A more intriguing contribution came from an old friend of mine, the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles). I am sad to see that he is not in his place, because I greatly enjoy sparring with him. He told us why he did not support the Bill, yet many of his hon. Friends said that some parts of it had merit. It is thus not surprising that I feel somewhat confused by the different positions adopted within the two Opposition parties.

I strongly agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle), who talked at length about the essence of community and community life. He described how we reach up from our communities to local government, to central Government and even beyond to the European Parliament to find ways of improving our lives. For that reason, business improvement districts are a good idea.

My constituency has hardly any areas that might attract objective 1 or objective 2 funding for investment in their communities. In areas such as mine, where the communities are largely rural, BIDs will give us the chance to reach out and invest in our businesses and deal with them in ways that are locally accountable. In a very short time, on 10 February, I shall meet business people and the many partners that work with the local authority to discuss how to develop Holmfirth, which many hon. Members will recognise from "Last of the Summer Wine". That community is highly developed, and the people there know what the essence of their community is.

For the purpose of this debate, an element of our communities is missing. Certain members of the community have been vilified by pernicious legislation, and this should be an opportunity for us to remove it. Many hon. Members know it as section 28, but its proper title is section 2A of the Local Government Act

1986. The Act has been in place for 17 years, and, to my knowledge, has never been used by any local authority. We have heard about freedoms of many kinds today. The right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry)—with whom I enjoyed sparring when he held the office of Minister with responsibility for local government and I was chair of finance on a metropolitan council—captured the essence of the argument for me in asking whether we have "freedom from", or "freedom to". He did not, however, extend that argument to the freedom that we ought to allow teachers and parents in educating our children.

We are leaving on the statute book an onerous responsibility for local education authorities that they cannot use and which has no place. The right hon. Gentleman also talked about the atomisation of local government, down even to governor level, yet he did not go on to say that local governors, teachers, parents and the children themselves in a school community have clear ideas about how sex education ought to be dealt with. Indeed, many other pieces of legislation have been placed on our statute book over the last 18 months to two years. I am thinking of different aspects of health Bills, and of the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 2000. I am also thinking of the Bill before us today, which could offer us the opportunity to put right this situation.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Does the hon. Lady acknowledge that, since local management of schools came in, what is taught in schools, particularly in respect of sex education, is entirely a matter for the discretion of the governing body and therefore not affected by this legislation, which merely constrains what local government can properly spend its money on?

Kali Mountford: The hon. Gentleman makes my point for me. Since those matters are the responsibility of governors, that piece of legislation should not be left in a Local Government Act when it is no longer required. It is an anachronism, and it is time that it went. We ought to tidy up the law, and now that we have given that responsibility to school governors, we should allow them to do their job, and use this debate—the earliest opportunity since we last discussed the issue—to say that the House of Commons has made its position clear in previous votes and now believes that it is time to remove a pernicious piece of legislation that is an outdated anachronism.

Communities, if they are anything at all, are the development of society, and society has moved on greatly in recent years. A Government who lag behind as society moves on not only fail to show leadership but are not even in tune with the very people they represent. Here we are, debating a Bill about the representation of the people at local level, yet we are leaving with them this onerous task that they have never wanted to use, have never used, and are never likely to use. Is not this the right day, the right time and the right place to say that we will have no more of it? Let us allow local democratic accountability to be more meaningful. The measures in the Bill relating to changing voting systems, bringing together timings, and looking at how we relate to people and engage with the business community, local tenants' groups or council tax payers all relate to people who are the parents of children who might be gay. They are the parents of children who are going to school and need to learn. They are the members of the community who are attending schools as governors. They are members of the local activist groups that engage in our community. These people are not split up into different salami slices for the purposes of one Act against another.

I feel encouraged by the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Minister. I hope that during our consideration of the Bill, the Government will accept a sensible amendment and that the House will develop a consensus. If there cannot be agreement on some aspects of what I have to say, let us at least agree, given what the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) has said, that section 28 is an anachronism. It is no longer needed. We have given the powers to somebody else. Let us allow that person to do the job that has come through the democratic process. Let us get rid of a pernicious piece of legislation during our consideration of the Bill. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will accept my remarks.

8.36 pm

Sue Doughty (Guildford): I return to the problem of clause 11, which heavily affects debt-free local authorities such as those in my constituency: Waverley and Guildford borough councils. We heard graphically about the problems of new towns from the hon. Member for Stevenage (Barbara Follett). I shall cover some of the housing problems in what are apparently hugely prosperous areas. However, there are people living in these areas who are certainly not prosperous.

It is easy to think that certain constituencies are part of the gin-and-jag belt. It is easy to dismiss their needs and say that somewhere such as Surrey generates wealth for the rest of the country. We do not deny that we are successful economically. We pay our taxes and contribute to the wealth of the country. We do what we can. We accept that redistribution is part of the great economics of the United Kingdom. That is the role that we play here.

There are some, however, who are not participating in the process. We have a need for social housing and council housing as well as those in the poorer parts of the country such as the south-west, the north-east and the north-west. We have areas of social deprivation. We do not have empty homes or houses going for a song. On our council list, we do not have three and four-bedroomed houses available for people as their families grow. It may take many years to get a council house in Guildford or Waverley. Such housing is likely to become available only if someone's needs are so desperate that he or she finally gets the points that take them to the top of the list. The idea that a decent low-income family will get a suitable house is a myth in the area that I represent.

It is a scant comfort to know that people in other parts of the country may benefit from the pooling of revenues when a shop assistant is trying to find somewhere in which he or she can afford to live with their family. What is the position of a bus driver who is trying to house his family? We do not have enough bus drivers because they cannot afford to live in the area that I represent. They cannot find anywhere.

Week after week, Members who represent constituencies in my part of the world have people coming to their surgeries who present heart-breaking

[Sue Doughty]

cases of desperation. For half the weekend, I had phone calls from a family who were again desperately in need of housing. There was abuse and all sorts of problems. They were almost losing the will to keep on trying to stay together as a family because of the lack of housing. They cannot move away.

What do I say to a couple in their late 20s—a nursery nurse and a gardener—who have never been able to move away from the family? The other siblings are still there. When the baby comes, they will have room for the crib in the house but there will not be room for a cot. What will that family do?

The average price of a house in Surrey is £250,000. Members will know that private houses for rent are affordable only to people with a large income. Private sector rents are high. Very few properties are available for less than £1,000 a month, and in the best areas, rents go up to £15,000 a month. I cannot tell constituents who come to me with problems to try the private sector—the houses are not there. The Government must recognise that we need our social housing and our council housing, and, above all, local authorities must be able to invest in those. We have problems with housing key workers and, in other schemes, those who do not even get to key worker level are desperately needy.

Mr. Swayne: Will the hon. Lady acknowledge that the problem is, at least in part, of the Government's making? New Forest district council wants to deploy more of its budget in building houses that are desperately needed, but it is prevented from doing so by a Whitehall-imposed policy that requires it to spend that money ripping out perfectly good kitchens and putting in new ones. Frankly, in the New Forest, the need for new houses is greater than the need for new kitchens, and such decisions should be made only by locally accountable politicians, not by Whitehall.

Sue Doughty: I agree that it is essential that councils can determine their housing needs and their strategies to ensure that they have adequately maintained housing stock. They should also be able to invest in new housing where necessary. That should be a local decision, not a national one.

When a constituent asks me, "What am I going to do with my three teenage children? We live in a two-bedroomed house, and by the way my husband has a mental illness, cannot stand the stress and is about to walk out," it is no good my replying, "Well, you shouldn't have had the children." The family, including the children, have needs. We must remember that there is housing need across the country, and it is not something that can be subsidised in one area by funds from another.

In Guildford, we have invested well in our housing stock and in maintenance. Maintenance has been paid for by rents, which are set so as to allow us to make that investment. Tenants invest in their own homes, and council tax payers invest in those homes. Properties built before the war have, over the years, received huge investment from local people and they are a local asset. Guildford has been prudent; it has been listed as above average in managing its housing by the Government office for the south-east. However, if property is sold off under the right to buy, we could lose that money. We need to build more properties. We have £35 million in the bank from right-to-buy income, and we cannot invest it as we would like.

Clause 11 is unjust and unreasonable. Local government has to mean exactly that, and it must be locally run. I support everything that my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) said about the need for local government. Central Government have a role in allocating resources, but the notion that they can purloin a council's assets and give them to someone else is totally unacceptable.

On 18 July last year, the Deputy Prime Minister stressed that not only do we need more homes but more homes that people can afford. Councils work in many ways to develop affordable housing, but taking away their capital receipts is a way of preventing them from doing so. Councils such as Waverley need to be able to spend their receipts on meeting the decent homes standards. Waverley will struggle in that respect, and it needs that money. The council is patching up holes in woodwork instead of replacing windows.

The Government need to recognise our problems with our dwindling housing stock. They must recognise that not all high-cost areas are populated by affluent people. I spend a lot of time trying to explain the problems of the public sector and the pay and housing needs of its employees. There is a constant drain on the numbers of police officers, qualified teachers and experienced people away from the south-east, because they cannot afford to live here. The problem is even worse among lower paid people.

I urge the Government to rethink the clause. The towns and the countryside in the south-east need a balanced community, not only people who can afford to be here. It is essential that our communities have that balance, but the proposed pooling of receipts will not deliver it. The need for good housing across the country is not a party political issue—there is no logic in not housing bus drivers in the south-east so that we can house bus drivers in the north-west.

If the Government are not prepared to reconsider the clause, perhaps they will consider what councils want to do with the money and what investment they want to make. Before pooling the money, they could ask councils what they would otherwise do with it. Would councils use it to bring themselves up to a decent standard, and how many homes would they fail to provide if the Government took it away? If they are going to start putting controls on local government finance, they should use them constructively to encourage councils to invest as best they can in housing for people with the greatest need.

8.45 pm

Mr. Neil Turner (Wigan): First, may I congratulate the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) on his bid for the 2003 brass neck award? He occupies the pole position in such a contest, and made a good job of getting off the starting blocks quickly.

I was a member of a local authority from 1979 to 1997. During that time, I recall only one Conservative Secretary of State introducing plans to reduce the

regulations on local government. After a lot of huffing and puffing and vanishing into the jungle, he introduced a number of proposals. In the 15 years during which I chaired Wigan council's highways council not once did I avail myself of the opportunity to introduce cattle grids in Wigan's roads without reference to the Secretary of State for the Environment—that was the sum of Conservative attempts to reduce the burden on local government. It is therefore a bit rich of the Opposition to start to complain now about a measure that does just that.

Kali Mountford: Did the scales fall from my hon. Friend's eyes, as they did from mine, when the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) told the House that such difficult legislation was imposed on local authorities at that time because of the Labour councillors he had to deal with? If he had not had to deal with them, he would not have introduced the legislation.

Mr. Turner: Certainly, scales fell from my eyes several times when previous local government Ministers spoke. The hon. Member for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford) and the right hon. Members for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) and for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) gave tremendous reasons for doing all sorts of things at the time. Now they come along and say that we are not doing enough to repeal measures that they introduced.

I want to deal with clauses 77 and 78, which deal with the extremely important matters of property revaluation and council tax banding. Revaluation is essential—nobody can be in any doubt that since 1991 there have been huge changes in property values, not just nationally, but within and between regions, so we must make sure that that is reflected in council tax bands. There is an extensive home ownership market in this country, and house values represent closely people's ability to pay for housing. If they can do so, they can pay for their council tax as well. A council tax band that does not accurately reflect the real value of a house will in the long term bring banding into disrepute.

Mr. McWalter: Does my hon. Friend agree that if band A is split into, say, band A1 and band A2, with A2 people paying the current band A and A1 people paying rather less, there will have to be compensation for the difference in revenue? It would therefore make sense to split band H at the other end.

Mr. Turner: I shall deal in a moment with banding and the splitting of bands. If my hon. Friend will bear with me, I shall finish the point that I was making about council tax valuation and the need to ensure that that is done at least every 10 years. Sophisticated information is available from the building societies and other bodies, which would allow us to revise house valuations on a more regular basis than that. Why can we not carry out a regional uplifting every year and a complete revaluation every 10 years to bring the two together? That would provide buoyancy for council tax income without the need to increase the council tax rate and levy each year, as those on the Liberal Front Bench suggested would be beneficial.

On the council tax ratios, my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett) pointed out forcefully the problems that we have in many areas of the north-west. I am sure that his authority is similar to mine, where 70 to 75 per cent. of houses are in band A or band B. Of 120,000 properties in the Wigan borough we have 141 in band H. That shows the disparity that exists. We need to consider not merely splitting those bands, but introducing a more realistic ratio between the value of those bands and the amount of council tax that people pay. At present, someone living in a band A property worth £30,000 pays six ninths of the standard rate. Somebody with a property worth £300,000—10 times as much—or £400,000, £500,000 or £1 million will be in band H and will pay only twice the band D rate. In other words, somebody at the top of the scale will pay only three times as much as somebody at the bottom.

That cannot be right. It is hugely regressive, and there is no doubt that the reason why the Opposition do not want the introduction of new bands or the splitting of existing bands is that they prefer a regressive council tax to a progressive one. I hope that the Minister will make sure that we consider splitting the bottom range and that we introduce a number of new ranges at the top, so that through the bands and the ratio between them, the system reflects people's ability to pay.

Clauses 40 and 41 deal with housing finance. I was disappointed with this aspect of the Bill. It does not level the playing field between local authority housing and registered social landlords. Only by transferring from local authority housing to a registered social landlord will the overhanging debt be written off. That is the wrong way of using the available finance. It should be used for additional investment in housing, rather than paying off debt to transfer the ownership of those houses.

There may be good reasons for transferring housing ownership to registered social landlords and away from local authorities. The local authority may not be a particularly good landlord, and it should not be allowed to continue in those circumstances. However, we should recognise that there are dangers involved in transferring to registered social landlords. A registered social landlord usually has a fairly small number of properties, so only a small group of people can do that. Even so, in small district councils, the consequent reduction in the size of its housing department may represent a quarter or a third of the intellectual mass that goes into that local authority's corporate ability to deal with problems. That seriously diminishes such an authority's ability to take corporate actions to solve housing and other problems. In all good authorities, there is corporate accountability and local authority chief officers act together to discuss and resolve problems. If part of the intellectual mass is taken away, particularly in district councils, that limits their ability to tackle problems.

There is another issue relating to registered social landlords. People who live in social housing usually face a host of problems, including educational, social, financial and health problems. We are trying to create a system to ensure that all those problems are dealt with on a corporate and partnership basis. Taking away the housing aspect and giving it to a registered social landlord means taking away the ability of the local authority to control the issue directly and deal with it properly. The needs of tenants will be suborned to the needs of the registered social landlord's finances and other priorities. We must be very careful of that danger in the transferral to registered social landlords.

[Mr. Turner]

Clause 103 deals with voting on the same day in both the European and council elections. I welcome that and I can see why the Opposition have doubts about it. One of the major reasons why they had a better result than they might otherwise have achieved in the elections held in June 1999 was that they took place only one month after other elections and people had become tired of voting, so they voted with their feet by staying at home. Holding the two elections together will ensure that that does not happen, and I am sure that Opposition Members will be pleased to have properly elected members on the basis of a full ballot rather than a diminished one.

I hope that the Minister will take on board my concern about the fact that the Bill currently mentions only 2004. However, in 2009 and 2014 we will run into exactly the same problem, so I suggest that we consider amending the Bill in Committee to ensure that, after a debate in the House, the Secretary of State can move local elections to the same date as European elections or general elections, which sometimes happen at about the same time, without necessarily introducing another Bill.

Mr. Swayne: The hon. Gentleman suggested that we should change the system because my party did rather better last time and he wants it to work to his party's advantage. Will he not at least acknowledge that there are difficulties with voting in as many as four different voting systems on one day? Does that problem not occur to him at all?

Mr. Turner: I think that that is rather insulting to the electorate. The last general election took place on the same day as county council elections. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is not trying to suggest that people were so confused that they voted for parties for which they would not otherwise have voted merely because they had to vote in a county council and general election at the same time. There are difficulties, but most of them concern the counting of votes, their separation from different ballot boxes and the delay that that causes, rather than any problem that the electorate have in putting a cross on the appropriate ballot paper. We should consider some of the examples from abroad. For example, the American ballot paper often looks more like a toilet roll than a traditional English ballot paper. If the Americans can deal with that, I am sure that the British electorate can do so as well.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: How does the hon. Gentleman square the provisions to allow the elections to be held on the same day with the Welsh Assembly's postponement of the Welsh local elections from 2003 to 2004 so that they would not coincide with the main elections? How does he square those two events?

Mr. Turner: I shall not try to square anything that the Welsh do with anything that we do. I merely point out that it is entirely up to the Welsh to decide when they want to hold their elections, although I believe anything that applies to the British electorate as a whole could apply to the Welsh electorate. They might not wish to hold their elections at the same time, but that is a matter for them.

I welcome the Bill. It is not the sort of Bill that I would have wanted, as I would have liked it to go much further. Nevertheless, it makes a lot of very good proposals. Some of them are modest, but some are positive and some bold. Once it is enacted, I am sure that local councils will be much better able to serve the needs and meet the aspirations of their communities than they have been previously.

9 pm

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Turner), and I should like to begin by dealing with his final point concerning elections held on the same day. The reason why my election to this place was not announced until 2.30 on the Friday afternoon following the day of the general election was precisely because we were trying to hold three elections on the same day. *[Interruption.]* It does no harm to remind the House that my victory was indeed a Conservative gain.

The point about holding such elections on the same day is that they are elections about different things. Doing so means that people concentrate on different issues, because different campaigns will be waged on different issues. If possible, one wants to encourage an improvement in turnout by giving people information on a specific election. I did not notice the hon. Member for Wigan pointing out that there was a low turnout in the county council and general elections in 2001 because they were held on the same day. Perhaps that was entirely a coincidence.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: There is a more fundamental point. Elections are the fount of a democracy, and holding general, local government and European elections on the same day restricts the amount of discussion that could otherwise take place on them. Democracy is therefore diminished by holding such elections on the same day.

Mr. Turner: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, but democracy is also diminished if Ministers and Governments seek to move elections for party political advantage. Indeed, that is an even more significant diminution of democracy.

Local government has been responsible for some of the best services—from the time of Chamberlain in Birmingham, to that of my hon. Friends the Members for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) and for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford), who gave distinguished service to Wandsworth council. However, local government has also been responsible for some of the worst services. As a former parliamentary candidate for Hackney, South and Shoreditch, I had great opportunity to experience and observe the appalling quality of its local authority services. My last job before being elected to this House involved helping to sort out the failing local education authority in the London borough of Southwark. I doubt whether many Conservative Members have done that job—that is probably better for the borough of Southwark—but I did. There were problems in that authority not because the officers were poor—in fact, there were many very good middle-management officers—but because they were unable to exercise the control and discretion that would have been good for the delivery of education in that borough. In part,

they were prevented from doing so by excessive political intervention, but also by excessive, sustained and continually changing Government intervention. I have to say that such intervention began with the Government whom I supported, and it has continued with the Government whom I did not support.

Local government is not the creature of Government, but it is and remains inescapably the creature of this Parliament, so there are some things on which Parliament is entitled to pronounce. For example, it is entitled to limit the ability of local councils to trade at the expense of, and in competition with, the business rate payers who operate in the local areas. However, Parliament should be able to set a limit on only a restricted number of matters. Many hon. Members on both sides of the House will undoubtedly agree that local government needs greater stability of regulation, which would ensure greater responsibility on the part of local authorities. Greater responsibility itself engenders, and entitles local authorities to exercise, greater autonomy. The more we can stabilise the systems of local government finance and regulation, the better the public will understand them. People will therefore be better able to exercise their discretion at the ballot box, on the day of the European elections or otherwise.

I hope that we will move towards a more transparent local government system that everyone understands. The least transparent part of the present system for electors is the annual finance settlement. The Minister for Local Government and the Regions is not in his place, but I thank him for agreeing to see a delegation from the Isle of Wight authority next Tuesday. On 18 December, he stated that the local government settlement for the Isle of Wight took account of my area's special circumstances. I hope that he will be able to convince councillors from all parties in my constituency that that is the case. It might help if he were to let them know in advance exactly how the specific needs of the area are taken into account. I asked him whether the settlement took account of the cost of delivering statutory services on an island. I know of no reference to those costs in the local government settlement, but I am prepared to be convinced.

The Bill gives many additional discretions to the Secretary of State, rather than to local authorities. One such is contained in clause 31, and in clauses 36 to 42—the ability to make grants unconstrained by any regulation by this House, or by any resolution of this House. Indeed, that ability is unconstrained by anything but the wording of the Bill. It may not be what Ministers intend, but that is an invitation to pork barrel politics.

Mr. Mole: Would the hon. Gentleman welcome the use by the Secretary of State of one of these powers to award a specific grant to authorities that exist on islands?

Mr. Turner: Of course, but I should prefer the Secretary of State to place in regulation objective criteria according to which such grants would be made available. Those criteria could then be discussed by this House. The point is that such criteria must be objective and transparent, and able to be scrutinised by the House.

I shall give the House an example. It comes from the Department for Education and Skills, but is none the worse for that. It is one of 12 different schemes by which that Department gives money to local education authorities. One third of all LEAs do not benefit from any of those schemes. They are not distinguished by being suburban authorities as opposed to shire county authorities, nor by their prosperity or their super-duper results. That is because so few objective criteria are set out for the distribution of the grants.

I shall refer to the criteria set out by the Secretary of State for Education and Skills for the allocation of "diversity pathfinder" grants. The first criterion is that the LEAs involved should have "a good track record", but that is not defined. The second is that they should be "innovative" in their approach, but no objective measurement of "innovative" is supplied. I accept that the third criterion—that the LEAs should have good Ofsted reports—is objective. The fourth criterion is that the LEAs should be a mix of rural and urban areas, but in what proportion is not specified. The fifth is that the LEAs should have

> "demonstrated good change management strategies in the past",

but when in the past is not specified. The final requirement is that the benefiting LEAs should have implemented

> "strategies to develop the specialist schools model."

That criterion is modestly objective. The money went to Birmingham, Middlesbrough, Cornwall, Hertfordshire, Newham, Portsmouth, Essex, Wigan, Medway, Leeds and Tower Hamlets. That is good for them, but poor for the other LEAs, and especially for the one third of LEAs that received no money at all because of the lack of objective criteria to govern the distribution of the grants. What criteria there were could not be scrutinised by the House.

If the Minister for Local Government and the Regions is to take the power to allocate money in that way, I hope that he will set out objective criteria. I acknowledge the fact that he said earlier that there will be clear criteria and that they will be scrutinised objectively—excellent, but does he mean that they will be scrutinised by the House? That is what is needed.

I shall move on to other aspects of the grant and council tax arrangements. I welcome the proposed changes to the second homes rebate. I have always thought it curious that there is so much objection to the second homes rebate at local council level because it is, in fact, a subsidy from the national taxpayer to those who are fortunate enough to own second homes, but it is no more justifiable for that. I wonder why it is necessary to retain a 10 per cent. mandatory minimum payment for second homes, or maximum payment—*[Interruption]*—I am not sure which it is.

I welcome the changes to the empty property rebate. I ask that local councils should be able to keep that element of rebate as well, but I question clause 76, which will give billing authorities the power to reduce the tax payable for any class of council tax payer. Is that not a curious power to give to local authorities? It is one thing to say that they should acknowledge when someone has gone bankrupt and cannot afford to pay the tax, but to say in advance that the council tax payer or a class of council tax payer need not pay anything—again, without objective criteria—seems particularly difficult to justify. I hope that the Minister will justify that clearly if he attempts to do so, and I am sure that, if I am wrong, he will tell me clearly as well.

[Mr. Turner]

A final element of council tax that causes a great feeling of injustice, although possibly less injustice than a feeling of injustice, is so-called dual taxation. In fact, it is the non-taxation of non-parish, as compared to parished areas, in rural authorities. There is a feeling of injustice where a local authority provides a service in the non-parished area but expects the parish and town councils to pay for that service at the cost of the parish and town council tax payers in the parished areas. Of course the taxpayers in the parished areas are contributing to the cost of providing the service not only in their area, but in the non-parished areas through their local authority council tax. Although local authorities have the discretion to add an element to the council tax in the non-parish areas, they have no obligation to do so, and it may be appropriate to impose that obligation in the interests of fairness.

I should like to discuss briefly issues relating to the new council structures. I doubt very much whether the new council structures are any better than the old ones, but the fact is that we have got them. I wonder whether we should examine how effective scrutiny committees are, especially in local authorities where one party has the majority on every scrutiny committee and the chairmanships of those committees are held by members of the party that forms the majority on that local authority. That happens in my local authority, and it is felt that scrutiny in such local authorities is not of such high quality as it is in those areas where there is a diversity of chairmanship and perhaps a greater diversity of membership on those committees.

My last point but one relates to the creation of local partnerships and community forums. I am concerned that local authorities are handing over powers and cash to local partnerships and community forums, which are allowed to meet in private. It is a long time since, I think, my noble friend Baroness Thatcher introduced the legislation that required local authority committees to meet in public. Many of the responsibilities are now being passed to community forums, which are meeting behind closed doors. That seems to be a means of evading some of the responsibilities of parish and town councils.

Finally, my hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley spoke of the Bill interfering in the setting of rents by local authorities and rents for social housing. I hope that the Minister will examine this issue. In my constituency, the maximum rent set by his Department, through the Housing Corporation, for new social housing is so low that it cannot pay enough to construct a decent house. It is as simple as that. Construction costs are high on the island, although housing values are low relative to the rest of the south-east. The amount of money that our housing associations are allowed to charge in rent is inadequate to support the cost of constructing a decent house. I hope that Ministers will be prepared to address that issue in this Bill or elsewhere.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) described the Bill as itty-bitty. It is itty-bitty because it contains quite a lot of new regulation and very small elements of freedom. In fact, the elements of freedom are so small that they might be described as itsy-bitsy bits—itsy-bitsy and teeny-weeny. I wish that there were more, and I hope that we can improve the Bill in Committee.

9.16 pm

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): It is a privilege to be the last to speak in this excellent and wide-ranging debate, which shows that we need a Local Government Bill. My reaction to the Bill is that although it contains some welcome improvements to the administration of local government, it is essentially an opportunity missed. As the Bill relates to my constituency, I wish to reiterate some of the points made much earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Stevenage (Barbara Follett), who also represents a Hertfordshire new town. She handled the matter with great good humour and reflection, but I am more inclined to foam at the mouth and go ballistic, although I shall try to avoid that on this occasion.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) talked about how the Government have displayed what he termed rather gently, as an ex-Minister, an insensitive analysis of local problems. I would put it more strongly: local government has been the Government's Achilles heel. We want delivery of a huge range of policies. We have shown great imagination and determination, and we have been willing to brook policies that might be unpopular in the short term for the greater benefit of our population and our country in the longer term. Those policies, of course, need delivery. The agents of delivery, for policy after policy, must be local government. The misery endured by communities when they are terrorised by young thugs requires the implementation of antisocial behaviour orders through a co-operative arrangement between the police and the local authority. The abandoned car that drags a neighbourhood down to the point that the elderly are frightened to walk the streets must be removed by the local authority.

In my constituency, an extraordinarily large demand exists for social services, not least because Hertfordshire grew up as the place where people in London dumped their mentally defective relatives. Hertfordshire had a huge number of mental hospitals, but, in the aftermath of the misnamed care in the community policy, those individuals were pushed out, many of them bereft of any kind of help. Hertfordshire has a huge problem with its social services budget even now. The number of people with mental health difficulties in the county is very high, and the local authority has to support their needs.

We all encounter road safety issues. The other day I asked my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport about the problem faced by one of my constituents who does not have a car—I did not give the details—and who used local transport to visit a relative in a residential home. It took three buses two hours and 40 minutes to travel seven miles. Leafy Hertfordshire may be all right in some respects and it may share some of the qualities that Guildford has and that were described earlier—but people's needs are the same everywhere in the country and local authorities have an extraordinary responsibility to deliver the policies that will help. When I consider a Bill that says that it will remove millions of pounds from my community, my heart sinks.

Hemel Hempstead is very used to being deprived of resources by central Government. It was set up as a new town in 1947, and I talked to an 87-year-old lady the other day who remembered coming there from the east end of London. She confessed that she kept coal in the bath and that she was not the only one to do so.

Dr. Iddon: They still do in Wigan.

Mr. McWalter: My hon. Friend suggests that they still do that in Wigan. That is an interesting aside.

People moved to an extraordinary place and had never seen such houses and fields before. When the town was established, central Government came along as Santa Claus but did they say, "Here is a resource. Now look after it and manage it."? Did they heck. They said that they would set up a quango—the Commission for the New Towns—and would make damn sure that all the gifts that they had given the town would be looked after very carefully. It is a bit like Santa Claus bringing us presents and making sure that we play with them in exactly the right way. If one of the presents begins to have a higher value than it did originally, he wrenches it back. The Commission for the New Towns ensured that the land that it had enriched by developing it would repatriate funds by the million to the Treasury. That still goes on, but now under the name of English Partnerships. Recent welcome changes by the Government have made English Partnerships a bit less like the Commission for the New Towns and a bit more like a body that is trying to work with the community to create a better life for people.

For nearly 60 years, funds have been pulled away from our community at every hand's turn. What does that mean? Go to Hemel Hempstead library in leafy Hertfordshire; like most of the other public buildings in the town, it has a flat roof, and we heard about them earlier. The best thing that could be done to the local college would be to raze it to the ground and flatten it. However, that has already been done to the only facility other than the pubs that provided young people with somewhere to go in Hemel Hempstead town centre in the evening. The place where the local theatre and dance clubs used to meet has been razed to the ground. It was built totally ineptly in 1960 and cost £500,000 a year to run. The local authority said that it could not afford it and so knocked it to the floor a couple of months ago.

The local authority fears the Bill and what it means for its finances. It is right to do so. Clause 90 talks about negative subsidy. Most Members have not had to do much about that issue, but if they go to the Library and ask for the negative subsidy handbook they will find in it many of my speeches. That is probably not a recommendation, but I have had to become involved with the issue of negative subsidy. Clause 90 in its old form would have meant £10 million a year being taken away from my local authority, which has a standard spending assessment of £12 million. I had to negotiate with the then Minister for local government so that the Government would give it £500,000 a year each year. I am now told that no local authority will lose out, but we will.

Not much has been said about needs, although we used to talk about them all the time in local authority lingo. The rate support grant used to be based on needs and my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West mentioned them in his welcome contribution. If the people in my constituency were living in clover and their needs were being addressed, the Government's request to take £3.5 million from us this year in negative subsidy would be acceptable. I would say, "Take it. Put it to use for the people who put the coal in the tub in Wigan", although I am not sure whether my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Mr. Turner) accepts that there are any.

Mr. Neil Turner: We will take the £3.5 million.

Mr. McWalter: I am sorry to disappoint my hon. Friend, but I cannot say that. The public sector buildings form the core of my constituency, but we should be ashamed to ask people to use them for their cultural and leisure activities. In fact, there are hardly any facilities. The library would not grace a town of 10,000 people let alone 80,000. As my hon. Friend the Member for Stevenage emphasised, the infrastructure is rotting at the core. We have asbestos-ridden buildings that need an enormous amount of attention. I do not want money to disappear until I am assured that those who have plans to use it effectively to address needs will be given the opportunity to do so. Clause 90 will have an important effect on my constituency. I hope that I am put on the Committee to argue my case at greater length and to defeat the clause, although I suspect that in light of my comments that will not happen.

All hon. Members mentioned clause 11 and capital receipts. I commend what my hon. Friend the Member for Stevenage said. Many of the assets in new towns which accumulated through capital receipts were deemed to be housing receipts when they were in fact just land. The problem arose because they were denominated housing land in the initial formulation of the new town. However, we cannot use housing receipts for non-housing. The biggest need in my constituency and many others is housing. By the way, we have nowhere to put homeless people. They are either put in a church overnight at Christmas or they go to St. Albans.

Affordable housing is a problem. The hon. Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty) asked where the bus driver lives. If there is nowhere for him to live, the bus service is lousy because there are not enough drivers to run a service that allows the people who need buses to get around by them. That is a basic element of life. The nurse shortage in London is 6 per cent. and patients suffer badly as a result. In leafy Hertfordshire, it is 8.2 per cent. According to the explanatory notes, my local authority is one of the richer authorities and will be required to redistribute its funds. Under the definition, Dacorum borough council in my area is the richest authority in the country. Its standard spending assessment is £12.4 million and last year it spent more than £20 million. It is debt free, so it is rich. However, it does not use that money to keep the rates low—they are fully consistent with those of other boroughs. It uses the money to make up the deficiencies that Hertfordshire county council is unable to meet. When I wanted my mental health team to get £10,000, I went to Dacorum borough council. My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West spoke of a vision of how local authorities could be—my local authority has been like that, but it is

[Mr. McWalter]

being stripped away, piece by piece. It can no longer make up for the deficiencies of Hertfordshire county council.

This is a welcome Bill, which contains many good provisions, but we need to empower local authorities and move away from the arrogant belief that things need to be run from the centre because local authorities cannot do it. It is time to ditch that attitude once and for all.

9.31 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): This has been a wide-ranging, constructive and good-tempered debate. The only issue on which I agree with the hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter), whom I am pleased to follow, is that the Bill is an opportunity missed. It could have included so many good things to strengthen local government and devolve power to the lowest possible level. Instead we have the reverse: a highly centralising Bill that gives huge powers to the Secretary of State and introduces 34 order-making powers by secondary legislation.

We heard some excellent speeches, particularly from some very experienced right hon. and hon. Friends. My right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) made an excellent speech—I did so agree with what he said about pooling capital receipts. His council is similar to mine in many respects, and had my council not been able to make a large-scale voluntary transfer of 500 houses and spend the interest on the receipts, it would have not been able to build 400 new affordable houses in the past four years. If the Secretary of State insists on the pooling of capital receipts, I suspect, as many right hon. and hon. Members have said, that we will not see so many affordable houses built with the proceeds from large-scale voluntary transfer. The only crumb of comfort is that the provision will apply only to capital housing receipts.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford) is another colleague with extensive local government experience. I particularly agreed with his comments about the restrictions on local authorities' prudential borrowings regime. How will they be able to operate CIPFA's draft code if they do not know what grant they are likely to be given by the Government in future years?

My right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) also made an excellent speech. He made some very interesting points that I should have thought would appeal to Labour Members, if they were listening, about the interaction between the voluntary, public and private sectors—an extremely important point that will be one of the main political issues in the next year. I am not sure that the Bill does a huge amount to encourage that interaction. My right hon. Friend described the Bill as a small earthquake in Walsall, and I think that he was probably right.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) used his experience to point out some of the deficiencies in the BIDs regime proposed in the Bill. He said that it is an American concept, but that the difference between these proposals and those in America is that in this country it is mostly the tenants who pay non-domestic rates, whereas in America it is the landowners. Landowners in this country, of course, will benefit largely from the BIDs proposals. Bizarrely, tenants who pay non-domestic rates might vote for a scheme from which landlords might benefit. We must look at those proposals carefully in Committee.

We heard an excellent speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner), who made his usual special pleading for the island. He is right that his is the largest constituency in this country, and it has specific problems. He correctly focused on the proposal to pay specific grants wholly at the Secretary of State's behest. Conservative Members believe that we should move away from specific and special grants and give local authorities more discretion over how they spend their money through the rate support grant mechanism.

This huge Bill has 123 clauses and seven schedules, yet the Government propose a timetable with just 12 Committee sittings. Members should compare that with the fact that the considerably smaller and less complex Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill has also been given 12 sittings. I appeal to the Minister across the Dispatch Boxes and in a non-partisan way: we still have time before the Bill is debated in Committee to consider, through the usual channels, giving it more than 12 sittings.

I am sure that the Minister wants, as I do, to ensure that all colleagues in local government feel that the Bill has received proper scrutiny in this place. That is all the more pertinent as he has announced today a completely new proposal to amend section 19 of the Fire Services Act 1947, which we welcome. We look forward to seeing the detail. The proposal accords with Professor Bain's report, so we shall consider it and we hope to give it a fair wind in Committee, but that will not take five minutes.

We have also been told by the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Kali Mountford) that section 2A of the Local Government Act 1986 is to be amended. If that is so, no doubt it will take up further time in Committee. Therefore, I say to the Minister and the usual channels that the time allocated for consideration in Committee is not adequate.

Mr. Swayne: It is an outrage.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: As my hon. Friend says, it is an outrage. I hope that we can consider the matter before the Bill reaches Committee.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley made pertinent remarks on the prudential borrowing regime and the reserves included in the Bill. Those matters are complex and they need careful examination in Committee. He also made the point that we are swapping one regime for another—the permission to borrow for the new capital and special grants scheme. We need to consider that carefully to see whether we are not just making a huge nutcracker to crack a very small nut represented by bad councils such as Hackney and North Tyneside, which the Minister mentioned.

My hon. Friends have referred to the pooling of capital receipts as well as the fact that the Minister is taking to himself some draconian powers to deem that such receipts have been received and to direct how they

should be pooled for other, less efficient councils. Members on both sides of the House, particularly those representing new towns such as Hemel Hempstead, have criticised the Minister over those proposals, so we must consider the matter very carefully.

Indeed, some while ago in a reply to a parliamentary question, the Minister told me that the proposal is aimed at encouraging debt-free authorities to take up their borrowing allowances. My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) made the point that there are 48 debt-free authorities in this country. Some may have achieved that status through good fortune or the assets that they have been able to sell, but I put it to the Minister that most have achieved debt-free status through good management. Some councils have managed their affairs prudently for many years, which has enabled them to become debt free, so forcing them to borrow is draconian step. I ask him to consider that very carefully.

The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy drew up the draft code on prudential borrowing, which has been refined from that which was originally proposed. Here, the whole House owes a debt of gratitude to the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett) and to the Select Committee, which has worked on the Bill and made some pertinent criticisms. Through his Committee, the hon. Gentleman is achieving a considerable reputation for the thorough scrutiny of draft Bills according to the short timetables set by the Government. The Bill was published only on 21 November, so it was a commendable achievement to come up with such a substantive report in the time available.

The Government should take note of that point. There is no earthly reason why Bills should be rushed through in such a way. The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill is being rushed through in exactly the same way. My hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) made the highly pertinent point that if there are 34 order-making powers in the Local Government Bill, we want to see draft copies well before we reach the relevant stage in Committee so that we can table appropriate amendments.

If we cannot do that, it will be an abrogation of democracy and neither the House or the Standing Committee will be able to do their jobs properly. For all of us who want to uphold the reputation of the House, those procedures are bad practice and I hope that the Minister and his colleagues will take note of our comments and ensure that Bills are not rushed through in future.

Andrew Bennett: Does the hon. Gentleman not realise that he should be congratulating the Government? The promise about regulations is firm. Will he promise us that the list of all the local government regulations that the Opposition want to get rid of will also be available by the same date?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: It is the Government who are making the proposals; it is the Opposition's job to scrutinise them, not to offer alternatives. If the hon. Gentleman serves on the Standing Committee—I hope that he will, given his knowledge—I can give him the categoric assurance that we shall scrutinise the proposals with all the vigour that we can muster. What we lack in numbers, we certainly make up for in intellectual argument, rigour and vigour—*[Interruption.]* We can all get excited about that, but the Bill includes other important proposals and if I do not deal with one or two of them I shall not have properly summed up the measure.

Much comment has been made about the proposal that the elections for the European Parliament and the local government and London Assembly elections should be held on the same date in 2004, even though they are all subject to different election regimes—as my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar pointed out. The proposal amounts to gerrymandering; altering the dates of elections sets an unfortunate precedent. Elections are set for certain dates for good reason, so that people have a proper time to carry out their mandate, whether for central or local government. It is an abrogation of democracy to gerrymander the dates in such a way.

The latter part of the Bill deals with trading and local authorities. The proposals that local authorities should be involved in trading will set a difficult precedent, unless they are carefully constrained. To allow local authorities to set up trading companies would evade prudential borrowing regimes and other regimes. The Minister referred to the matter in his opening speech, but when the Under-Secretary sums up will he assure us that he will make doubly certain that such companies will be subject to resource accounting? As the Minister will know, that means that they have to make a proper return not just on revenue but on all capital assets employed—on all the property that they employ. The Opposition will be scrutinising that point carefully in Committee, because the powers to trade could distort competition, which is a cause of real concern.

I do not see why a local authority should trade in any service that is not included in its normal delivery pattern. As the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) pointed out—although he is not listening to the debate because he is talking to his colleague—if one was to sell double glazing just because there was a particular double glazing firm in one's constituency, it would set an extremely difficult precedent indeed and I caution the Government—

Mr. Edward Davey: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: No, I will not. I have only one minute in which to sum up.

To sum up, Mr. Deputy Speaker—Mr. Speaker, I do beg your pardon! Happy new year!—this is a highly centralising Bill that will introduce redistribution on a grand scale: redistribution of housing receipts, housing revenue accounts, and rent limitation subsidies. Indeed, it will set rents in the public sector for the future in this country. The Bill gives the Secretary of State huge order-making powers. We will oppose it root and branch and we will seek to amend it in Committee with all the vigour that we can.

9.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Christopher Leslie): It gives me great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for

[Mr. Christopher Leslie]

Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) in summing up this debate. I certainly agree with him on one issue at least: I also wish you a happy new year, Mr. Speaker.

The relationship between central and local government is at a crucial juncture, and it is entirely proper for the Government to help to ensure that all communities have their right to decent local services fulfilled. It is also right, however, that Whitehall should begin to have more faith in local councils to deliver quality local services. We need to put more trust in local government to do the right thing, and the Bill takes us further forward in that regard. Relations between local and central Government are improving, power is being devolved, and more freedoms and local responsibilities are being given to councils.

The Bill proposes that unnecessary controls and regulations should be replaced with a more appropriate, targeted approach, recognising and rewarding the best-performing councils and encouraging improvements in others. The Bill is designed to help local government to be more responsive to local needs and local pressures—precisely the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) in his excellent contribution earlier. I am pleased to say that the Local Government Association has welcomed the Bill, and the significant new freedoms that it contains. The Welsh Assembly also supports the specific clauses relating to Wales. The Bill is a key ingredient in our wider policy approach, and, of course, needs to be looked at in the wider context of the White Paper and of other changes that we have made to devolve power, raise standards, invest more, increase funding and give greater freedoms and flexibilities to local government.

At the outset, I would like to say a brief word about the fire service, as my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and the Regions mentioned earlier. The fire service is a local government service, and, in the light of the publication of the independent review of the service under the stewardship of Sir George Bain, the Government are determined to press ahead with changes in line with the principles that he set out. The fire service needs modernisation, but fire chiefs are often hampered in making changes by antiquated requirements to get the Secretary of State's permission, as set out in section 19 of the Fire Services Act 1947. Fire chiefs need to be given more freedom to manage and to modernise, so the Government will repeal the relevant parts of section 19 to help local chief fire officers to implement a risk-based approach to fire cover. The Fire Brigades Union has today tried to paint that change as the removal of the right of the public to be consulted. Nothing could be further from the truth. Chief fire officers and fire authorities will want to involve the local community in shaping their fire and rescue services, but there is no longer any need for every dot and comma to go through the Whitehall machine. Reform and modernisation have to proceed.

There are many detailed provisions in the Bill, but it will be impossible for me to go through every one of them in the time available. Many hon. Members talked about the provisions relating to council tax reform, and the Liberal Democrats—in the shape of the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey)—now want to scrap council tax altogether. Perhaps we will hear a little more in Committee about what they intend to replace it with, although I suspect that they are less clear on that. The proposals to give councils the power to reduce the second home discount to 10 per cent., to reduce or remove the empty homes discount and to introduce other council tax discounts have been welcomed. I realise that they have been opposed, in part, by the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field), but they have been welcomed in other ways by the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner). We shall have to see which of those hon. Members gets on to the Committee.

Few Members mentioned the exemption for students from joint and several liability for council tax, although many students in further and higher education will welcome that provision. The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton welcomed as sensible the introduction of the new statutory revaluation cycle, to take place every 10 years. Many hon. Members took note of the new power to change the number of valuation bands. The hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) did not want this, but I believe that it may be necessary to improve fairness and the level of progressiveness in the council tax system. We have not made decisions on that yet, but it makes sense at this stage to take the position that we have adopted. My hon. Friends the Members for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett) and for Wigan (Mr. Turner) have rightly pointed out the economic realities. Some people feel that they are being penalised by the low value of their homes, with band A being too wide. I am pleased that at least we have the support of the Liberal Democrats in that regard.

There are many changes relating to business rates. Very few Members went through them, so I shall not dwell on them too much. However, I believe that they are necessary and administratively sensible.

Many Members referred to housing capital receipts. In particular, the pooling arrangements have been criticised and questioned. The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton and the right hon. Members for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) and for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) were worried about the provisions. They were queried too by my hon. Friends the Members for Stevenage (Barbara Follett) and for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter). I shall make three points. First, clause 11 applies only to housing receipts, not to other capital receipts. Secondly, it is principally right-to-buy receipts that will be pooled alone. It is—*[Interruption.]* Perhaps the hon. Member for Cotswold should listen to this because he was incorrect on this matter earlier. It is not stock transfer—large-scale voluntary transfer receipts—that will be involved in the pooling. The right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire was also incorrect on that matter. The receipts did not accrue, therefore, as a result of prudent debt management, but as the result of individual decisions of householders to buy their properties. It is not a question of penalising prudent authorities. It is principally right-to-buy receipts that will be pooled.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: In his clarification mode, will the Minister clarify the matter further? Can he confirm that there will be no element of retrospectivity and that there will be receipts only after the Bill receives Royal Assent?

Can he confirm also that there will be no element of pooling of clawback from previous sales—that is, uplift in value and clawback from previous sales?

Mr. Leslie: I am happy to be able to confirm those points. However, I shall go further and say that I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be persuaded that the principle of pooling is the right approach to take. It is the fairest approach to ensure that we treat equally all authorities throughout the country and spend on the basis of need, bearing in mind especially deprivation and disadvantage.

We have increased spending on housing by more than two and a half times. It is precisely to tackle the issues raised by the hon. Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty) that we need to ensure that investment in housing is made on the basis of need for social purposes.

The hon. Member for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford) rather peculiarly attacked clauses 101 and 102, which are designed to protect employees of local authorities where contracting out is to be conducted on the basis of staff transfers on preserved terms and conditions unless there are exceptional circumstances, and where transferees are to be offered either retention of their local government pension scheme or a broadly comparable scheme. I believe that it is important to institute a measure of protection for local government employees. I am glad that the Bill contains such provisions.

There are important provisions that relate to better accounting and financial management practices. For example, we will ensure that we have a prudent level of reserves set in local authorities. The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton opposed these provisions. However, there are some extreme cases—for example, Hackney, Walsall and others—that we cannot ignore. We need to have a safeguard against some of the more extreme eventualities. I am concerned that the Liberal Democrats are perhaps looking slightly reckless and imprudent. None of us would want that, would we?

It is important also that the provisions to ensure that councils monitor their own budgetary performance are approved. That is not about intervention but simply about following good practice. I believe that when these matters are considered in Committee, Members will come to realise that point. There are many other technical provisions about resource accounting in terms of the housing revenue account. I believe that we are taking an equitable approach. It is simply an accounting change. The financial position of authorities will not be affected.

My hon. Friends the Members for Denton and Reddish, for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper) and for Bedford (Mr. Hall), the hon. Members for Cities of London and Westminster and for Kingston and Surbiton and others, dwelt on the provisions relating to business improvement districts. I am pleased to have their support. The official Opposition oppose the measures, despite the fact that the Confederation of British Industry has given them its full support. BIDs will create partnerships between businesses and local councils, which will work together to improve their area. I heard the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bedford, and there are safeguards in the provisions. There is a double lock on the vote because there is a requirement not only for a simple majority but for one based on the aggregate rateable value. That is very important. The nature of the activities of the business improvement district and the levy must be set out before the vote.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): Will the Minister confirm that the change in the arrangements for transitional relief on business rates will mean that the Treasury grant, which was over £300 million last year, will now be withdrawn? Does he agree with the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors that the measure will penalise the poorest areas and those where values are falling?

Mr. Leslie: We certainly intend revenue neutrality in the transitional arrangements. Obviously, arrangements for the revaluation of business rates have existed for much longer than those for council tax, which has not gone through a revaluation process. We can consider those provisions in more detail in Committee.

The power to make grants to councils for any purpose has been criticised, in particular by the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner). However, the Local Government Association has welcomed the measure as providing freedom and flexibility. Indeed, the hon. Member for Cotswold welcomed our intention to move away from special grants. The current arrangements are too restrictive on local government because special grant reports are not amendable. Treasury consent will still be required of course, and parliamentary accountability can still be exercised in the normal way via the scrutiny of departmental votes and estimates. That, I believe, is quite sufficient and answers the point made by the hon. Member for Isle of Wight.

I am surprised that the hon. Member for Cotswold and the Conservatives now so vociferously oppose even looking at the combination of local government elections and European elections in 2004. I would not want to ascribe to them any malign motivation concerning that not being to their party political advantage. I am sure that that has nothing to do with their stance. Their belief that electors cannot handle a combined poll displays a patronising attitude to the general public. The electorate are capable of doing more than one thing at a time, and the Conservatives should have more faith in them.

There are many new freedoms and flexibilities in the Bill, too many to mention. I shall refer to only a couple. The first is the trading freedoms. In Committee, we can discuss the assurances that the hon. Member for Cotswold sought on charging for discretionary services. There are also freedoms in the new prudential borrowing regime, which does not require Government consent. The Opposition criticised the fact that there is a reserve power, but we need that to protect the national economic interest and to prevent unreasonable or reckless debt in exceptional circumstances. In any case, the Conservatives never gave any such freedoms to councils.

My hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Kali Mountford) and the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) were keen to raise section 28. I confirm that the Government will support a suitable amendment to repeal that measure that is compatible with our

[Mr. Leslie]

manifesto commitment, and I look forward to debating that with my hon. Friend and all hon. Members, even if they are from the other side of the House.

Before the hon. Member for Cotswold got to his feet, I was worried that he would get carried away, and indeed he did. It is very sad. The Conservatives have a history of poor policy in local government, and he needs reminding of that. From 1979, they imposed a whole range of outrageous and regressive measures on local government. They gave the Secretary of State control of spending and introduced rate capping. They abolished the Greater London council and six metropolitan county councils.

The Conservatives introduced compulsory competitive tendering, and who can forget their introduction of section 28? Who can forget the ever popular poll tax? They set aside capital receipts. That was a dark period for local government. The Labour Government changed all that, and the Bill builds on those foundations. The Opposition will fool no one with their lack of grasp; they are out of ideas and out of control, and they will be staying out of power for a lot longer. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 141, Noes 370.

Division No. 38] **[9:59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Curry, rh David
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hermon, Lady
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maples, John
Maude, rh Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, rh Michael
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Laurence Robertson and Mr. Mark Hoban

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, rh A. J.
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, rh David
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Byers, rh Stephen
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, hon. Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*

Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, hon. Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Heath, David
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Holmes, Paul
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr. John
Purchase, Ken
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Short, rh Clare
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'rns & Kincardine)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dan *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Timms, Stephen
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Watts, David
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*

Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Dan Norris and
Mr. John Heppell

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 62 (Amendment on second or third reading):—

The House divided: Ayes 368, Noes 142.

Division No. 39] **[10:15 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, rh A. J.
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Byers, rh Stephen
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, hon. Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Heath, David
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Holmes, Paul
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura

Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr. John
Purchase, Ken
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Timms, Stephen
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Watts, David
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Dan Norris and
Mr. John Heppell

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Curry, rh David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hermon, Lady
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maples, John
Maude, rh Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, rh Michael
Prisk, Mark *(Hartford)*
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Laurence Robertson and
Mr. Mark Hoban

Question accordingly agreed to.
Bill accordingly read a Second time.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT BILL (PROGRAMME)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Orders [28 June 2001 and 29 October 2002],

That the following provisions shall apply to the Local Government Bill—

Committal

1. The Bill shall be committed to a Standing Committee.

Proceedings in Standing Committee

2. Proceedings in the Standing Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Thursday 6th February 2003.

3. The Standing Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

Consideration and Third Reading

4. Proceedings on consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour before the moment of interruption on the day on which those proceedings are commenced.

5. Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on the day on which proceedings on consideration are commenced.

6. Sessional Order B (programming committees) made on 28th June 2001 shall not apply to proceedings on consideration and Third Reading.

Other proceedings

7. Any other proceedings on the Bill (including any proceedings on consideration of Lords amendments or any further messages from the Lords) may be programmed.

The House divided: Ayes 318, Noes 183.

Division No. 40] **[10.28 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, [illegible]
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, [illegible]
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, hon. Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura

Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Timms, Stephen
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Dan Norris and
Mr. John Heppell

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Curry, rh David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hermon, Lady
Hogg, rh Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maude, rh Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, rh Michael
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Whittingdale, John

Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Laurence Robertson and Mr. Mark Hoban

Question accordingly agreed to.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT BILL *[MONEY]*

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)(Money resolutions and ways and means resolutions in connection with Bills),

That for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Local Government Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(a) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any expenditure under the Act of a Minister of the Crown or government department;

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums which under any other enactment are payable out of money so provided; and

(c) the payment out of the Consolidated Fund of any increase attributable to the Act in the sums which under any other enactment are payable out of that Fund.—*[Joan Ryan.]*

Question agreed to.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT BILL *[WAYS AND MEANS]*

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)(Money resolutions and ways and means resolutions in connection with Bills),

That for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Local Government Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment into the Consolidated Fund of

(a) any sums received under the Act by a Minister of the Crown;

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable into that Fund under any other enactment; and

(c) any sums received by a valuation officer by way of penalty.—*[Joan Ryan.]*

The House divided: Ayes 264, Noes 22.

Division No. 41] **[10:44 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, rh A. J.
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Farrelly, Paul
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Heath, David
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hodge, Margaret
Holmes, Paul
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mallaber, Judy
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Michael, rh Alun
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Pearson, Ian

Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Purchase, Ken
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Savidge, Malcolm
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Timms, Stephen
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Watts, David
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Dan Norris and
Mr. John Heppell

NOES

Amess, David
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Burt, Alistair
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Francois, Mark
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Randall, John
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Swayne, Desmond
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Viggers, Peter
Watkinson, Angela

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Douglas Hogg and
Mr. Andrew Mitchell

Question accordingly agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9)(European Standing Committees),

Staffing Needs of Commission in Enlarged European Union

That this House takes note of European Union Document No. 9759/02, Commission Communication on the activities and human resources of the Commission in the enlarged European Union; supports the Government's position that the details of the Communication are timely and that the Commission's commitment to reconsider reassessment prior to each preliminary draft budget is welcome; welcomes the Government's emphasis on the importance of keeping to the Berlin financial agreement; and supports the Government's aim of working to ensure the necessary resources are made available within the agreed ceilings.—*[Joan Ryan.]*

Question agreed to.

Denied Boarding Compensation for Air Passengers

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9)(European Standing Committees),

That this House takes note of European Union documents No. 5129/02, draft Regulation establishing common rules on compensation and assistance to air passengers in the event of denied boarding and of cancellation or long delays of flights, and No. 13312/02, European Parliament Amendments to the draft Regulation; and supports the Government's objective to achieve enhanced passenger protection but without imposing significant new burdens on the airline industry.—*[Joan Ryan.]*

Question agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Tuesday 14th January,

(1) the Motion in the name of Mr David Trimble may be proceeded with, though opposed, until Four o'clock or three hours after it has been entered upon, whichever is the later, and if proceedings have not previously been concluded they shall lapse at that time; and paragraph (2) of Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments) shall apply to the proceedings as if the day were an Opposition Day; and

(2) the Motion for the adjournment of the House relating to the 2012 Olympics may be proceeded with, though opposed, for three hours after it has been entered upon, and the Motion shall then lapse.—*[Joan Ryan.]*

Question agreed to.

COMMITTEES

Ordered,

Accommodation and Works

That Tom Brake be discharged from the Accommodation and Works Committee and Sir Robert Smith be added to the committee.

Treasury

That Mr David Laws be discharged from the Treasury Committee and Norman Lamb be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. John McWilliam, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

PETITION

Natural Health Products

10.56 pm

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): It gives me great pleasure to present this petition on behalf of 380 supporters of Consumers for Health Choice in my constituency and beyond.

The petition of Consumers for Health Choice and its supporters declares:

That consumers in the United Kingdom have for many years maintained good health by choosing to take safe vitamin and mineral supplements and herbal remedies; and fears that the

[Mr. Andrew Turner]

European Food Supplements Directive and the Proposed European Directive on Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products would severely restrict the number and range of such products on general retail sale in the future.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons requires that the Secretary of State for Health does all in his power to protect the rights of UK consumers by ensuring such European legislation does not unnecessarily and unacceptably restrict the availability of natural health products.

And the petitioners remain etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Elmet (Roads)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Joan Ryan.]*

10.57 pm

Colin Burgon (Elmet): Given the previous business, it is a good job that I am not paranoid as there seemed to be a Conservative plot to stop me from speaking. That could be connected with the fact that one of the subjects that I shall discuss is the upgrading of the A1, which the Conservative Government cancelled in 1996. However, truth will out. I stuck to my guns and now is my chance to speak.

May I express my gratitude to Mr. Speaker for allowing me this opportunity to raise an issue of both national and local importance? The debate enables me to deal with two motorway issues in my constituency. As I am a history enthusiast, I shall take them chronologically.

First, there is the M1-A1 link, which cuts through my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Mudie). As the Under-Secretary of State for Transport will know that road was built under a design, build, finance and operate contract during the previous Conservative Government. Although the audit report indicated savings of £80 million compared to more conventional funding, I was roughly correct when I said that success of that commercially driven project should not be achieved at the expense of local people's quality of life.

As soon as the road opened in February 1999, it was clear that the noise levels were unacceptable to many of my constituents in places such as Garforth, Swillington and Aberford. According to research produced by the Library in April 1999, the noise on the newly opened road was about 3 to 4 dB higher than had been estimated at the public inquiry.

It was predicted that, by 2012, the average number of vehicles passing Garforth every day would be between 49,000 and 59,800. In fact, according to Highways Agency figures, the number of vehicles had already reached 59,600 by 2001. What local residents and I find so appalling is that the previous Conservative Government had what can only be classed as a very relaxed attitude—I nearly said "cavalier" but, as we are talking about roads, I changed my adjective—to the impact of road noise on my constituents and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East.

At the public inquiry in 1993, the independent inspector recommended the use of quieter road surfaces and appropriate sound barriers to minimise noise problems near the sensitive locations of Garforth, Aberford and Austhorpe. As a local person, I would have added Colton and Swillington to that list. Unfortunately, his recommendations were not included by the Conservative Secretary of State when the orders were made, so the contractor was allowed to build a virtually maintenance-free carriageway that would see out the 30 years of the contract and, therefore, maximise their profits.

I am pleased to say that, as a result of the pressure exerted by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East and me, the Highways Agency announced within a few months of the opening of the link that a 2.6 km stretch

of the concrete surface adjacent to Garforth would be treated with noise reduction blacktop. I am not quite sure what the technical term is for that, but I think that that description fits the bill for most people. Although this concrete surface, which constitutes the backbone of the M1 link, seems to make good business sense, it does not make good sense for those who have to live near it. I am glad that this Government have given a target for the resurfacing of all concrete surfaces on trunk roads by 2010, according to Transport 2010, the 10-year plan published in July 2000. In the light of that target, may I ask the Minister when my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East and I can look forward to the patchwork quilt surface of the M1-A1 link being uniformly covered with a quieter surface?

Will the Minister also assure me, in the light of the disregard for the well-being of the local residents displayed by the previous Conservative Government, that the fullest possible public consultation will be carried out, and that every reasonable effort will be made to incorporate and address legitimate public concerns in respect of the impending upgrading of the A1? To encourage this process, I have already discussed the project with members of several parish councils that lie along the route of the road, along with Alec Briggs from the Highways Agency. The meeting was very informative, and I am confident that Mr. Briggs and his team will listen to the sensible suggestions that we put forward. I will continue this process of consultation over the coming years, in an effort to ensure that local knowledge can be fed into the process and begin to shape it.

In a project of this scale, a number of details will need to be addressed. If that can be done positively, the communities neighbouring the A1 will derive some benefit from the process. Consequently, I would like to put a number of points to the Minister, and I hope that they will elicit a series of positive answers. Because the design, build, finance and operate contract for upgrading the A1 between Wetherby and Walshford will be completed in 2005—well before the DBFO for the upgrading of the A1 between Bramham and Wetherby in 2006–07—there could be a three-year period of disruption to the local road system. For example, slip roads such as that at York road in Wetherby—near the racecourse, for those who know the area—are due to be closed as part of the earlier Walshford-to-Wetherby DBFO. If left open, those roads would relieve some of the traffic problems caused by the second DBFO.

This second DBFO will start with the construction of a three-lane carriageway to the east of the existing road. On completion, traffic will switch to the new carriageway, allowing the existing road to be closed and converted to a three-lane carriageway and an access road for Wetherby town. The optimum arrangement would be to retain the York road slip roads, so that as many routes in and out of Wetherby town could be retained for as long as possible. What thought has the Minister given to proposals to dovetail the two contracts, so that they could run alongside each other, to delay some of the slip road closures and to bring forward other work, such as the new eastern carriageway for the bypass?

I do not wish to tie the Minister's hands, but it seems only sensible that the company that is awarded the first contract should also be awarded the second. If that cannot be done for reasons of commercial or legal transparency, could the need for dovetailing become a centrepiece of the Highways Agency's thinking in the framing of the contracts?

During the consultations that I have mentioned with the parish councils of the villages of Bramham, Clifford, Boston Spa, Walton and Thorp Arch, they have all expressed their concern that the main route to the Thorp Arch trading estate, which lies to the east of these communities, will become difficult to access, and drivers will look to use narrow village roads like Spring lane in Walton, the high street, which is already heavily congested, and Bridge road in Boston Spa.

I am not convinced that the final road layout will be in place by 2008 will solve the access problem. I agree with Bramham parish council's argument that there appears to be a need for some sort of dual carriageway access road from Walton road to the Grange Moor interchange, so that that route becomes the one that drivers choose. Will the Minister agree that the upgrade, both in its construction, and on completion, should discourage drivers from using the village roads, such as the ones that I have mentioned, to access a major trading estate, which it is rumoured will one day become a large housing development area or even a new town?

I feel strongly that the historic town centre of Wetherby needs to be protected from additional traffic. The layout of the town was built in another era and it is not suited to the 21st century traffic loads that it has to sustain. If all its slip roads to the A1 are removed as part of the upgrading works, traffic in the town centre will increase, as the inspector at the public inquiry agreed. Will the Minister agree that it is desirable to keep to a minimum the amount of traffic that has to be diverted through Wetherby because of the A1 upgrade, and what thought has he given to what could be a difficult and perhaps intractable problem?

In my discussions with the Highways Agency, I was pleased to hear it confirmed that attention is being paid to the problem of road noise. It is a central issue in the construction of new roads. Many of the village communities and Wetherby town residents have expressed their concerns on this issue. The mistakes that were made by the previous Government on the M1-A1 link road look likely, as things stand, to be avoided. However, being sometimes the pessimist that I am, I would like some reassurance on what I consider to be a very important issue. Can the Minister confirm that a low-noise asphalt will be used? Are there to be any stretches where low-noise asphalt will not be specified?

The public consultation document on the Bramham to Wetherby upgrade indicates that mounding, noise fencing and tree barriers will be used to reduce the noise where appropriate. That is welcome, but similar barriers have not been that effective on the M1-A1 link. When it comes to trees, we seem to be planting the smallest that we can get our hands on. Many of us will not be here to see them when they grow to their full size. David Evans, chair of Bramham parish council, was in touch with my office only yesterday to stress the council's view that without about a 4 m high mounding from Bramham crossroads to the Grange Moor interchange, the noise levels will not be reduced to a desirable and tolerable level. I realise—I think that most sensible people realise—that noise can never be eradicated completely,

[Colin Burgon]

but the upgrading is an opportunity to minimise the problem of road noise. I hope that we can take the opportunity with both hands.

Will the Minister therefore agree that noise barriers need to be commensurate to the problem in each locality, and that some flexibility should be built into the specification to allow for any necessary adjustments that should arise during the 30-year period of the contract? There should be no off-the-shelf solution to what could well be difficult and complex problems along the route of the A1 and the upgrading area.

What could be classed as a minor problem is an important matter for Bramham parish council. At present, there is a metalled cycle track that extends from Wetherby to Grange Moor. The parish council put it to me that with the construction of the access road alongside the upgraded A1, there is an opportunity to create a dual purpose pedestrian and cycle track, which could extend to the existing A64 cycle track to York. Will the Minister consider whether that is achievable?

In my talks with the various bodies involved in the project, I have been pleased to hear from senior officers that there has been effective co-ordination between the Highways Agency and Leeds city council, and I hope that that co-ordination continues with the appointed contractor. Will the Minister do all that he can to encourage the closest possible working between the agency and the council so that we have a properly co-ordinated approach?

As I hope the Minister is aware, I am committed to achieving the highest possible public participation in the consultation process. I have been working with the Highways Agency and parish councils to help to achieve that. If, as the work gets under way, major issues arise—let us hope that they do not—will the Minister be willing to meet me and a delegation from the parish councils with which I have been working closely?

I hope that the Minister will accept that my approach is one of constructive questioning, because I want the project to succeed for the benefit of all those involved. On a more positive note, I know that he is aware that there is broad consensus at national level that the A1, as one of our main economic arteries, has to be updated. Completion of the work will mean continuous motorway access between Gateshead in the north-east, through Yorkshire, and on as far as London. I know that the business community welcomes it, and some of my Scottish colleagues, in far rougher language than that used by the business community, have told me tonight that it is about time that somebody did something about the A1.

The upgrading of the A1 will be welcomed also on grounds of safety. On the 29 miles of the road included in the improvement scheme there were 583 accidents in the five years up to 2000, almost a third of which resulted in fatal or serious injury. The safety improvements will be welcomed by those who have long regarded as dangerous the sudden transformation of the A1 from three lanes to two as one drives around Wetherby coming up from Bramham. I myself have witnessed hairy scenes the build-up of large traffic jams at that spot. I am sure that the upgrading will address that problem, and I seek the Minister's assurance on that.

The new route of the A1 heading north from above the York road junction to Walshford will mean that a sizeable number of Wetherby residents to the east of Deighton road will no longer have a major national route running along the bottom of their street, and I am sure that they will very much welcome that.

It is clear that the upgrading of the A1 is a major project, dealing as it does with one of our major stretches of transport infrastructure. Given the scale and importance of the job, we need to get it right. We must make sure that there is effective local input so that local needs, local knowledge and local ideas are fully taken on board. For my part, I will do my best to ensure that that is the case. I hope that the Minister will agree with me.

11.13 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Elmet (Colin Burgon) not only on securing this debate, but on his clear and studied approach to his subject. Since he was elected to the House he has proved to be a relentless and powerful advocate for his constituents, particularly, if I may say so, on transport matters.

As my hon. Friend has said, the M1 and the A1 in his constituency to the east of Leeds are vital links in the strategic highway network. Together with the connections to the north along the A1 and to the south along the A1, M1 and M62, they form the key north-south routes between Scotland and the north-east of England and the rest of the country. At a regional level they represent an important artery providing access between the more rural parts of North Yorkshire and the major towns and cities of west and South Yorkshire. At a local level they perform an essential function in keeping long-distance, strategic traffic away from market towns such as Wetherby and neighbouring villages, and hence minimising environmental impacts.

The volume of traffic using those roads demonstrates their importance. For example, the A1 south of Wetherby is currently used by about 74,000 vehicles a day, and the A1(M) south of Bramham is used by more than 100,000 vehicles a day. We face a major challenge in maintaining the quality of service provided by those key routes in the face of steadily rising volumes of traffic. That is a reflection of economic growth—one of the problems of economic success resulting from our careful and prudent management of the economy is extra traffic wanting to use the roads. However, the Government are committed to an unprecedented programme of investment to upgrade the A1 in Yorkshire to a motorway, which will ensure that that route continues to function effectively in meeting national, regional and local needs. That is essential if we are to support continued growth of the economy and, at the same time, ensure that the impacts on local communities of traffic growth are minimised, as my hon. Friend poignantly pointed out.

Plans to upgrade the A1 form one element in the Government's broader integrated transport strategy, which aims to deliver significant improvements across all modes, including road and rail. I shall put our national approach to road improvements in context, then move on to the specific points made by my hon. Friend. The 10-year plan published in April 2001 set out

an ambitious programme of investment amounting to £180 billion across the decade to 2010–11. The progress report on the 10-year plan published in December last year showed that a good start had been made in the first 18 months, but much more remains to be done. We are committed to reviewing the 10-year plan in 2004 to coincide with the next public expenditure review, and will take account of the progress made so far and the challenges that have to be met in the period to 2015 and beyond.

Such long-term commitment and planning are essential if we are to rebuild and maintain the transport infrastructure that we need for continued growth and prosperity. There are no quick fixes or easy solutions. The 10-year plan made provision for sustained investment year on year, but that will take time. Our approach to tackling congestion and improving safety on the strategic road network is a balanced one. Improving both the capacity and the management of the network plays an important part, particularly in the near term—we must deal with the immediate problems on key corridors and pinch points—but so too do measures to address the growth in demand for road travel and the provision of better alternatives.

In the case of the A1, since the 10-year plan was published, we have made good progress on upgrading the A1 to a motorway throughout much of its length in Yorkshire, as I am sure my hon. Friend is aware. The existing schemes in the targeted programme of improvements have been taken forward and further schemes were added in June 2002. In addition, the South and West Yorkshire multi-modal study has recently reported and recommended upgrading the A1 to a dual three-lane motorway between Darrington and the M18. The Government will consider the study's recommendations together with the views of the Yorkshire and Humber Assembly and other regional stakeholders before making an announcement, I hope, in the spring.

My hon. Friend asked a number of specific questions in our debate, which it would be appropriate to address in the order in which he asked them. I am pleased that he recognises the benefits of the M1 scheme and the use of private finance. I know that the use of concrete carriageways has resulted in noise levels higher than those originally predicted. My hon. Friend will be aware that one section of the route was identified as needing sensitive treatment close to Garforth, and was resurfaced shortly after opening. On the general subject of concrete roads, in October 2001 I announced the first list of concrete roads to be resurfaced as part of the 10-year plan. At the same time, I commissioned studies of 17 routes to establish the actual noise levels against those predicted. Once I have the results of those studies, I can further consider the programme for resurfacing. I hope to make an announcement on that in the next few months.

Turning to the A1 schemes in the targeted programme, the next two sections of the A1 to be upgraded to motorway will be those from Wetherby to Walshford and from Ferrybridge to Hook Moor. Those schemes are to be taken forward as part of the A1 Darrington to Dishforth design, build, finance and operate project—DBFO—to which my hon. Friend referred. The total cost of that project is £250 million. The project also includes the operation and maintenance of the A1 between Darrington and Dishforth. It is hoped to award this major private finance initiative project before the end of this month, with construction of these schemes programmed to start in spring 2003 for completion by 2006. Advance works costing £27 million have already been completed.

The A1 Wetherby to Walshford scheme will provide a new dual three-lane motorway between Walton road east of Wetherby and the existing A1 motorway at Walshford. A new grade separated junction, known as the Kirk Deighton new junction, will be constructed to provide an improved connection between the new A1 motorway and the local road network.

The Darrington to Dishforth DBFO project also incorporates a scheme to upgrade the A1 to a dual three-lane motorway between Ferrybridge and Hook Moor. The scheme will reduce congestion, improve road safety and improve the environment by removing through traffic from local communities, with major new junctions at the A63 and M62. In June 2002, three further A1 schemes were added to the targeted programme of improvements. The dual carriageway sections of the route from Bramham to Wetherby, Dishforth to Leeming and Leeming to Barton will be upgraded to motorway at a cost of £263 million. Together with other schemes in the TPI, this will deliver continuous motorway access between London and Tyneside via the A1(M) and the M1.

All the work taking place on the roads in the area will, I am sure, provide a great deal of employment for my hon. Friend's constituents. I note the level of energy that my hon. Friend has exerted in representing his constituents' interests, and that is to be admired. He can be assured that the Government recognise the need to elicit the views of those living locally to proposed schemes at an earlier stage than has perhaps been the case in the past. He can be assured that consultation with the public will continue. The Wetherby to Walshford scheme is well advanced, and further information will be made available to the public during construction. For the Bramham to Wetherby scheme, public involvement is just starting, with the public consultation exercise currently under way.

My hon. Friend asked about dovetailing the two contracts. It is worth noting that the project management of both schemes is being undertaken by the Highways Agency carefully to manage their delivery. That does not necessarily mean that the two schemes need to be delivered by the same contractor. I do not think that any of us would wish to delay the Wetherby to Walshford scheme. The Highways Agency is fully aware of the need to improve the Bramham to Wetherby section as soon as possible, but of course that cannot be done until the public have been able to have their say as the scheme goes through its statutory processes. Also, attractive though it may seem simply to award the Bramham to Wetherby contract to the same contractor undertaking the Wetherby to Walshford scheme, my hon. Friend will recognise that it would be inappropriate to do so. Proper procurement channels must be followed to ensure best value for his constituents, and to meet the requirements of European legislation on such matters.

My hon. Friend has a more detailed knowledge of the roads in his area than I do, although one would not

[Mr. David Jamieson]

think so, listening to what I have been saying tonight to my hon. Friend. As regards access to the trading estate that he mentioned, I can assure him that neither I nor the Highways Agency would wish to encourage traffic to that successful industrial estate to take routes through local villages. In developing the Bramham to Wetherby proposals, the Highways Agency will take account of the need for good quality access to the site. However, he will understand that the complex layout of the scheme will preclude direct access from the new motorway at Walton road.

My hon. Friend asked about ensuring that the traffic diverted through Wetherby as a result of the A1 upgrade is minimised. I can confirm that the Wetherby to Walshford scheme will include measures such as the new bridge carrying York road to cater for high loads, which will reduce the number of heavy goods vehicles passing through Wetherby town centre. I recognise, of course, that the major benefits to Wetherby will materialise when the new local access road is built as part of the Bramham to Wetherby scheme. I will ensure that during the development and construction of these schemes, the Highways Agency continues to liaise closely with local authorities in the area to monitor changes in traffic patterns.

My hon. Friend asked about low-noise asphalt. All new sections of road on the A1 will be constructed with low-noise asphalt surfacing. I am sure that he will be interested to know that the contract that is currently being negotiated for the A1 DBFO project will ensure that that is the case. The draft contract that is being prepared states:

"the DBFO company shall ensure that all new and resurfaced carriageways on motorways and trunk roads forming part of the project road shall have quieter road surfaces".

In addition, it states:

"Concrete running surfacing shall not be permitted for new construction on trunk roads or motorways".

I am sure that that will bring considerable relief to him and his constituents who have to live near the roads.

Under the current proposals, the existing carriageway of the Bramham to Wetherby section of the A1 will be retained and become the new motorway. It will, of course, be resurfaced with low-noise surfacing when maintenance is due. Its current condition suggests that that will occur between seven and 10 years from now.

My hon. Friend referred to noise barriers, which will be designed to suit the conditions at each locality. They may not always meet the aspirations of local residents, but we will consult further with interested parties on such matters as part of the consideration of order preparation. I believe that our approach of identifying the most serious problems and directing resources to them is the better way forward. I am sure that he will agree that, overall, the A1 upgrading proposals will bring very considerable benefits to his constituents. I have also asked the Highways Agency to take account of the request for a cycleway in the design of the Bramham to Wetherby scheme as it develops.

Finally, I can confirm that if my hon. Friend thinks that it is appropriate for me to meet local representatives, I shall, of course, be delighted to meet him and local residents to discuss any of the matters that have been raised.

I again congratulate my hon. Friend not only on raising such important matters for his constituents, but on the way in which he has done so and the powerful way in which he has represented them here tonight.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-six minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 8 January 2003

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

The Secretary of State was asked—

11-plus

1. **Mr. David Chaytor** (Bury, North): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the future of the 11-plus in Northern Ireland. [89176]

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Jane Kennedy): The decision to end transfer tests was announced by my predecessor, the former Education Minister, Martin McGuinness, on 11 October last year, and I will be working to abolish them as soon as is practicable. Whatever arrangements are made to achieve progress with the education system, I can assure the House that the guiding principle will be the best interests of all the children of Northern Ireland.

In that context, with your permission, Mr. Speaker, I am sure that the whole House will join me in condemning Monday's pipe bomb attack on Holy Cross primary school. Those who carried out the attack must be brought to justice, and I call on anyone who has information to give it to the police. Every child has the right to learn in a safe and secure environment, and it is everyone's responsibility to guard and maintain that right.

Mr. Chaytor: I thank my hon. Friend for her reply. Does she feel that her predecessor's decision was the right decision for Northern Ireland?

Jane Kennedy: The former Minister's decision was based on the outcome of the consultation on responses to the Burns report. The House will be aware that I am continuing detailed consultation on the responses to that report. The meetings have been very fruitful—we are looking to develop a consensus on the way forward and, as hon. Members will be aware, decisions on what will replace the current transfer tests have yet to be taken.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): On behalf of my party and colleagues, I condemn and deplore the criminal act of putting a pipe bomb near a school. However, the Minister should pay more attention to the clearly expressed will of the people of Northern Ireland. Does she not accept that the pupils of Northern Ireland continue to do better than their counterparts in England and Wales in achieving higher qualifications? That is partly due to the effectiveness of our present selection procedure, so will she seek to retain a transfer procedure that commands the widespread respect and support of the people of Northern Ireland?

Jane Kennedy: I have no problem—I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman's last point. The proportion of young people achieving top-grade GCSEs in Northern Ireland is among the highest in the UK, but many young people, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are leaving school with low qualifications. The objective of the post-primary review, as the hon. Gentleman knows, is to raise standards for all pupils and build a modern and fair education system that enables all children in Northern Ireland to achieve their full potential.

Devolved Institutions

2. **Helen Jackson** (Sheffield, Hillsborough): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent discussions he has held with Northern Ireland party leaders about the future of the devolved institutions. [89177]

6. **Mr. Mark Hendrick** (Preston): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent discussions he has had on the prospects for re-establishing the Northern Ireland Assembly. [89182]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Paul Murphy): We had intensive discussions before Christmas with the main political parties in Northern Ireland with a view to restoring the stable and inclusive operation of the Belfast agreement on an exclusively democratic and peaceful basis. We plan further urgent discussions, with a view to reaching agreement before the Assembly elections on 1 May.

Helen Jackson: I welcome my right hon. Friend's response. I am sure that he agrees that devolution encourages all the Northern Ireland political parties to talk together about the ordinary political issues that affect their everyday lives. Will he expand on the process that he envisages to enable further discussions between now and, we hope, the elections in May? In particular, how will the Government of the Republic be brought into the discussions?

Mr. Murphy: I thank my hon. Friend for her comments—she is quite right about the restoration of devolution in Northern Ireland. I believe that every party in Northern Ireland, irrespective of its background, heritage and traditions, wants the restoration of devolution. My hon. Friend the Minister of State has just referred to education, which is properly a matter for Northern Ireland politicians, as opposed to us in Westminster. I hope that we shall reach that position as soon as possible.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Helen Jackson) will be aware that I met the Irish Government before Christmas and that yesterday the leader of the Ulster Unionist party, the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), met the Prime Minister and me. Today, the Prime Minister is meeting Sinn Fein, and tomorrow the Social Democratic and Labour party. Further meetings will be held in Belfast next week, which the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. Browne), will attend, and I plan further meetings over the next two weeks.

Mr. Hendrick: Does my right hon. Friend agree that since the dissolution of the Northern Ireland Assembly there has been no effective medium for discussion between the main political parties and that, to some extent, that has fuelled sectarian violence? There is a clear need to get that dialogue back on track, and I am pleased to hear about the efforts that are being made at the moment. Is he confident that sufficient dialogue will have taken place by May to enable the elections to go ahead peacefully and the Northern Ireland Assembly to be reconstituted fairly soon?

Mr. Murphy: It is certainly my hope that there will be elections on 1 May to the Northern Ireland Assembly, so that devolution and the other institutions can be restored. I also welcome meetings, for example, between the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) and the president of Sinn Fein, and other meetings between political parties in Northern Ireland. Everybody involved in the political process in Northern Ireland is making an intensive effort to ensure that we restore the institutions, but I do not underestimate the difficulties that lie ahead of us. There are important issues at stake, the central one of which, of course, is to ensure that we engage in politics in Northern Ireland through exclusively peaceful means.

Mr. Nigel Dodds (Belfast, North): In the context of restoring devolution, will the Secretary of State join in condemning the association of the Sinn Fein lord mayor of Belfast, Alex Maskey, and two Sinn Fein Members of the House with a calendar that glorifies and promotes IRA activity and that is currently on sale in Northern Ireland? Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that that illustrates the links between Sinn Fein politicians and IRA terrorists, exposes the hypocrisy of Sinn Fein, which talks about peace but is happy to be linked with terror and violence, and proves once again that it is unfit for government in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Murphy: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to say that there is no place for violence in Northern Ireland right across the political spectrum. One of the most important issues that we will address this week and next week is how to ensure that political parties are exclusively peaceful and exclusively democratic. As regards the calendar, that is a matter for Belfast council.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): I assume that the Secretary of State will be at the meeting to be held this afternoon with the leadership of the republican movement. Will he point out to them that a party that is committed or claims to be committed to exclusively democratic means—the standard set out in the Belfast agreement—does not maintain a private army, does not collude with international terrorism and does not operate a spy ring at the heart of government? Will he tell them clearly and unequivocally that all those activities must end before the restoration of devolution can take place?

Mr. Murphy: I understand what the right hon. Gentleman is saying. It is the collapse of trust and confidence that has led to the suspension of the Assembly and the institutions. I repeat what the Prime Minister has said: we want a commitment to exclusively peaceful means—real, total and permanent—and a cessation of any sort of paramilitary activity.

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): The Secretary of State knows that many of us would regard the devolution of policing and justice powers as the most fundamental step in the political process. Does he agree that, for that to happen, there will have to be a proven period of stability and maturity within the political institutions? Does he further agree that, in the present impasse, that issue should not become a bargaining chip with any political party, or between any political party and the Government?

Mr. Murphy: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. It is important that we ensure the stability of the institutions and of the general situation in Northern Ireland before we embark on the devolution of policing and justice. He will, of course, remember, as will many other hon. Members in the Chamber, that the principle of the devolution of justice and policing was enshrined in the Belfast agreement. The principle is right; as to the timing, I agree that the matter should not be a political football, but should be agreed by all the political parties.

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): Why have the Government chosen to pursue the practice of bilateral meetings between the Prime Minister and certain party leaders from Northern Ireland, instead of convening the review group, which is open to the Government under the terms of the agreement? In particular, does the Secretary of State agree that the review group will be needed to resolve the problem of designations, which has been outstanding since November 2001?

Mr. Murphy: May I, first, welcome the hon. Gentleman to his new position in the House? I look forward to working with him in the months ahead.

Two paragraphs of the agreement refer to a review. Paragraph 7, of course, is the paragraph under which we are currently talking in Northern Ireland. The paragraph 8 review is the more general review required under the agreement and will take place four years after it took effect. Therefore, in about autumn this year, there will probably be a major review under the terms of the agreement.

On the hon. Gentleman's points about bilateral meetings, my view is that the more meetings the better, in whatever form. We have to deal with these matters and resolve the difficulties as quickly as possible.

Mr. Tom Harris (Glasgow, Cathcart): I welcome any moves by the Government to discuss with Northern Ireland political parties the re-establishment of the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland, but does my right hon. Friend agree that the House has a role to play in building confidence among the different parties, if only they were all represented here in the House of Commons? In the discussions, have Sinn Fein Members indicated any increase in willingness to come here and do the job that they were elected to do—represent their constituents in the House of Commons?

Mr. Murphy: I shall have the opportunity later to talk to Sinn Fein about various issues. I will raise that issue, but I suggest to my hon. Friend that he may not get an immediate response.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): May I wholeheartedly endorse the Minister of State's condemnation of the appalling attack on Holy Cross school—a wonderful school that I have visited on many occasions? May I also express my hope, which I believe will be felt throughout the House, that the parents of children in that school and everybody else there will be united in their determination to ensure that such intimidation will not succeed in destroying a wonderful educational institution?

Does the right hon. Gentleman share the assessment of the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs, which has now been leaked throughout the press on both sides of the Irish sea, that the IRA remains active and

"remains involved in recruitment, training and intelligence gathering"?

Mr. Murphy: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's words about Holy Cross school. We find what happened yesterday wholly and totally repugnant. I hope that things will get back to normal as quickly as possible.

The Prime Minister has made it absolutely clear, as have I, that there is still activity on the part of the IRA. Indeed, there is activity on the part of paramilitaries across the political spectrum in Northern Ireland. Of course, that does not mean that the ceasefire has been broken, but, as the Prime Minister also said, it is not simply a question of the breaking of a ceasefire, but one of ensuring proper trust and confidence among parties so that they go back into the institutions and the devolved Administration in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Davies: May I make it absolutely plain that the Opposition expect the Government to live up to the brave declarations of the Prime Minister in Belfast in November and to take specific action when there is evidence of continuing breaches, instead of, as before, all too often simply turning a blind eye—a policy that led us to the current crisis?

On a separate matter, will the right hon. Gentleman now establish a public inquiry into the Claudy atrocity in 1972, given that Assistant Chief Constable Sam Kinkaid is reported to have stated that documents exist that provide direct evidence of a conspiracy to pervert the course of justice by the then Government and the Northern Ireland Office?

Mr. Murphy: The hon. Gentleman and I, and everyone else in the House who is aware of what happened at Claudy, regard it as one of the most heinous bombings and crimes of the past 30 years. It was a terrible business. On the question of a public inquiry, he will be aware that that the police investigation is not yet complete. The Government are co-operating fully with that investigation and it would not be appropriate for me to comment any further until it is complete.

Mr. Davies: It is a fact that the atrocity took place 30 years ago, so we hope that the police investigations will be completed reasonably soon and will not take another 30 years. However, may I have the right hon. Gentleman's assurance that, if there is evidence of any sort of cover-up or collusion involving Ministers or the Northern Ireland Office, there will be a public inquiry? *[Interruption.]* I have to say to him that his Back Benchers, who are suggesting that because a Conservative Government were in power—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman does not have to say anything to a Back Bencher. He is putting a question to the Minister.

Mr. Davies: I want to make it clear that Conservative Members believe that the truth should come out, irrespective of who may have been involved in any cover-up, without fear or favour. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will agree that it would be thoroughly deplorable if anything were done that would confirm the sad impression that has already been created that, when an atrocity or a cover-up involves victims from the nationalist community, the Government are prepared to spend any amount of time or money to get at the facts, but when the atrocity involves victims of the Unionist community, they will not bestir themselves.

Mr. Murphy: We make no distinction between the victims of crimes in the troubles over the past three decades: both sides of the community in Northern Ireland have suffered appallingly. I will await the result of the investigation, but I agree with the hon. Gentleman that this should be dealt with as speedily as possible. I also agree that there should be no cover-up, as he puts it, in uncovering the truth. It is extremely important that we get to the bottom of this matter, but we have to await the results of the police investigation.

Criminal Justice

4. **Mr. John Smith** (Vale of Glamorgan): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action he is taking to help the victims of crime in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [89179]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Desmond Browne): The Government remain committed to improving access to justice for victims of crime in Northern Ireland. A key part of that is the implementation of the 16 criminal justice review recommendations on victims, which are

currently being implemented. I intend to publish a renewed and revised criminal justice implementation plan soon.

Mr. Smith: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Does he agree that one of the ways to heal the terrible scars of the troubles in Northern Ireland over the last 30 years is to do all that we can to assist and support the victims of terrible crimes? Will he tell me how much the Government have allocated to fund initiatives that specifically support and assist victims?

Mr. Browne: My hon. Friend is right to point out that we are the first Government to prioritise victims of the troubles in particular, but there has been a long-standing Government policy to support victims in Northern Ireland, certainly financially. He is also right to point out that resources are important in this regard. Not all the recommendations of the criminal justice review require resources, but I am pleased to tell the House that resources have been secured for those that do. For example, we have secured £1.6 million for Victim Support—which provides, among other things, a court witness service for witnesses and young people across Northern Ireland—and a grant of more than £150,000 to Nexus, a charity that works with victims of abuse. The House should also note that all this is in addition to the Compensation Agency's payments of compensation to victims, which amount to more than £45 million in this financial year alone.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): Would not the best help that the Government could give to victims of crime be to ensure that terrorist crimes in Northern Ireland do not happen again? Is the Minister confident that bending over backwards to accommodate the IRA, which is inextricably linked to Sinn Fein, as the Government did before the last election by releasing all prisoners, is the best way to ensure that no more terrorist acts take place, particularly in the light of the spy ring identified at Stormont last year?

Mr. Browne: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that question, because it gives me the opportunity to confirm the Government's commitment to the very objective that he sets out—sustained peace and stability in Northern Ireland. He concentrates on but one issue, that of the release of prisoners. He will, of course, know that that was part of the Good Friday or Belfast agreement, which I understand he supports. There are difficulties involved with the implementation of that at the moment, but the hon. Gentleman will be aware of what the Government are doing because it is being done in a transparent fashion. I am sure that he supports the Government in the current discussions.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Some of the continuing victims of crime are those who have been forced out of Northern Ireland and into exile by paramilitary groups. Will the discussions with Sinn Fein provide an opportunity to ensure that its members put pressure on the Provisional IRA to end those practices? I hope that that can also be extended to the loyalist community.

Mr. Browne: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that question and I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to him for his consistency on an issue that has been a blight on the community of Northern Ireland for three decades. He has been unstinting in his support for those who have been exiled and for those who support them, and he has been able to help me, the Government and the organisations involved. He can rest assured that the issue will be discussed with all parties in the context of the talks. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before I call the next question, the House must come to order.

Weston Park Conference

5. **Mr. Andrew Turner** (Isle of Wight): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on recent progress on decisions taken at the Weston Park conference. [89181]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Paul Murphy): On 5 December, the Government introduced legislation in another place to give effect to the commitments set out in the updated Patten implementation plan published following the Weston Park discussions.

Mr. Turner: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer, but will he confirm that bilateral discussions have been going on with all the parties and that indications have been given to some of them that there may be an amnesty for terrorists on the run? Will he confirm that there is to be no such amnesty?

Mr. Murphy: Let me reassure the hon. Gentleman that no such undertakings have been given. As he will be aware, the UK and Irish Governments said at the Weston Park talks in summer 2001 that they would take steps to resolve the issue of terrorists on the run who would, if convicted, stand to benefit from the early release scheme, but that has also to be set against the Prime Minister's recent comments that the Government would contemplate steps on such issues only in the context of acts of completion.

David Burnside (South Antrim): I wish our new Secretary of State a happy new year and good luck in conducting his important responsibilities in Northern Ireland. Will he perhaps learn from the mistake made by his predecessor at Weston Park, where the Ulster Unionist party agreed nothing, yet deals were done behind the scenes with Sinn Fein? Will he give the House a commitment that no Weston Park-style behind-the-scenes deals will take place under his stewardship of the Northern Ireland Office?

Mr. Murphy: I reciprocate the hon. Gentleman's good wishes for the new year. It is important that we make the discussions over the next number of weeks as transparent as possible so that people are aware of exactly what is being discussed and negotiated. That is why I very much favour the round-table talks in Northern Ireland, but, of course, talks between the parties and the Governments are also extremely important. As he knows, we will not be able to resolve our difficulties unless all parties, including his, agree with the final outcomes of those discussions.

Decommissioning

7. **Mr. John Bercow** (Buckingham): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the decommissioning of arms and explosives by paramilitary organisations in Northern Ireland. [89183]

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Jane Kennedy): The IRA has engaged in two acts of decommissioning. It must now resume its contact with the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning and all paramilitary organisations must now, as the Prime Minister has said, complete the transition to exclusively peaceful means.

Mr. Bercow: I am grateful to the Minister for that helpful answer. Will she confirm that there can be no question whatever of any party serving in a reconstituted Executive unless it has first discharged its obligations to disband militarily and to decommission all arms and explosives?

Jane Kennedy: Broadly, yes. Although we continue to judge that the ceasefire is intact, there is no doubt whatever that the Provisional IRA remains an active paramilitary organisation. That is precisely why the Prime Minister sent the very strong message in his Belfast speech in October that it can no longer remain half in and half out of the process of normalising Northern Ireland.

Mr. Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley): The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) told us that the devolution of policing must not be a political football. Will the Minister give a commitment that the security of the people of Northern Ireland will not become a political football and that so-called normalisation, or the dismantling of security towers in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, will not be bartered for some token gesture on decommissioning?

Jane Kennedy: The security of the people of Northern Ireland remains of paramount importance to the Government. I know that the hon. Gentleman will agree that we regularly demonstrate our commitment to delivering that security and to ensuring that the security services in Northern Ireland have all the resources that they need, as shown by our recent commitment of new funding. The vast majority of the rest of what he said is rhetoric and does not need to be responded to.

Northern Ireland Assembly

9. **Mr. Bill Tynan** (Hamilton, South): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent discussions he has had on the prospects for re-establishing the Northern Ireland Assembly. [89185]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Paul Murphy): I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Helen Jackson).

Mr. Tynan: I thank my right hon. Friend for that response. Does he accept that violence in Northern Ireland is growing, and that that growth could be due to the suspension of the Assembly? Will he redouble his efforts to make sure that we get an agreement that will eliminate violence and restore the Assembly as soon as possible?

Mr. Murphy: I agree that the stability of the institutions is an important factor in ensuring that the stability of society as a whole in Northern Ireland is as good as we can achieve. I assume that my hon. Friend is referring to the recent problems with loyalist paramilitaries in Northern Ireland. The Chief Constable is exercising a great deal of authority on these issues and cracking down on such crime, but my hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that all of us who are involved in the Northern Ireland peace process must redouble our efforts to resolve the difficulties that we face.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [89191] **Mr. James Gray** (North Wiltshire): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 8 January.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others, and in addition to my duties in the House I will have further such meetings later today.

Mr. Gray: The appalling tragedy in Zimbabwe continues, but does the Prime Minister agree that it should be for statesmen and not cricketers to decide whether the world cup goes ahead? What steps will he take to try to have the world cup moved to Kenya or South Africa? If it cannot be moved, should the England team still attend?

The Prime Minister: We have to distinguish very carefully between an ability to order people not to go, and to express our view as to whether they should go. We have expressed our view very clearly that they should not go, but as with the decision on the 1980 Olympics, it is not within our power or ability to order people not to go. However, we have made it quite clear to the cricket authorities that we believe that it is wrong that they should go, and I hope that they take account of that advice. Whether they do so is a matter for them.

Q2. [89192] **Mr. Jim Cousins** (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): The difficult year set out for us by the Prime Minister has clearly begun. [HON. MEMBERS: "More!"] There will be more. Is it his purpose in his policy towards Iraq to secure a democratic Iraq, a settled middle east free of all its weapons of mass destruction, and a safer Britain with new and willing partners against terror? It is by consequences, and not by hopes, that policies in the end will be judged.

The Prime Minister: First, I thank my hon. Friend for the opening part of his remarks—it is always good to be proved right so early in the new year. Secondly, we

believe that Iraq must comply with the United Nations resolutions, and must be disarmed of all weapons of mass destruction. They have a choice: they can do that willingly and abide by the UN's will, or, if they refuse to do it willingly, it will have to be done by force. However, I hope very much that, in times to come—whatever happens in the immediate future in relation to Iraq—we can move to a more stable position in the middle east whereby we resolve the long-running issue between the Israelis and the Palestinians, and all people in the middle east gain the opportunity for greater democratic stability, human rights and liberty.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Was the Prime Minister's Foreign Secretary right to say that the prospects of military action in Iraq are 60:40 against?

The Prime Minister: What is 100 per cent. certain is that Saddam must be disarmed of weapons of mass destruction. That is in accordance with the UN resolution, and that resolution must be abided by. As to whether we will have military action in Iraq, that depends on the choice of Saddam. We can speculate on that, but the fact is that it is his choice: he has to decide whether he disarms peacefully, or is disarmed by force.

Mr. Duncan Smith: I notice that the Prime Minister did not answer the question that was posed to him. The Defence Secretary has contradicted the Foreign Secretary. He said yesterday:

"I don't believe that it helps to make these kind of comments at this stage."

Who is right: the Foreign Secretary or the Defence Secretary?

The Prime Minister: I have just set out what I believe to be the position. I can do so again for the right hon. Gentleman, but I think that he has understood it very clearly. In the end, it is for Saddam to decide whether disarmament happens as a matter of peace through the UN, or as a matter of conflict. The choice is his.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Our armed forces personnel, whose lives might soon be at risk, are entitled to a clear lead from the Government. I am sure that they will have told the Prime Minister that, however much one wants peace—and everyone here wants peace—one cannot half prepare for war. Not for the first time, the Government are sending different messages to different audiences, and Cabinet Ministers are in open disagreement. How can the Prime Minister convince the British people that war may be necessary if he cannot convince his Cabinet?

The Prime Minister: The position is as I set it out a moment ago, but I shall elaborate on what I said to the right hon. Gentleman. We have made every preparation that we should make. That is the reason for yesterday's statement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence. It is completely wrong to say that British troops are half prepared for any action. That is nonsense. However, whether or not we have conflict depends on the circumstances that I have set out. There is a UN resolution, which Saddam must abide by. If he does not, he will be disarmed by force. That is the Government's position. I should have thought that it was absolutely clear, even to the right hon. Gentleman.

Q3. [89193] **Mrs. Anne Campbell** (Cambridge): I am sure that my right hon. Friend is aware of the grave anxieties that many people have about an impending war in Iraq, but does he think that this is a good time to make the US President aware of his wider social and environmental responsibilities towards the rest of the world? Might not this be a good opportunity to raise issues such as Kyoto and trade tariffs, about which we disagree with the US?

The Prime Minister: As I made clear in my speech yesterday, we raise these issues constantly, and it is important that we do so. My hon. Friend is right to say that people have anxieties about the possibility of conflict in Iraq. Of course they do, as we should never put British troops into action unless it is necessary to do so. However, I believe passionately that the issue of weapons of mass destruction and the related issue of international terrorism are the key security threats facing our country and our world today. I believe also that it is only a matter of time before those issues come together. When there is a clear view among the international community that a country—namely Iraq—must be disarmed of weapons of mass destruction, it is essential for the fight against those weapons and international terrorism that the will of the UN is obeyed. That is why, although we have given Saddam the chance to disarm peacefully, we shall—reluctantly—have to disarm him by force if he refuses to do so.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): Given what the Prime Minister has just said, if the UN weapons inspectorate does not produce concrete evidence of weapons of mass destruction but the US nonetheless decides to go ahead with military conflict against Iraq, will Britain be involved?

The Prime Minister: I am not going to speculate on the circumstances that might arise. Both Britain and the US have made it clear that we seek to resolve the matter through the UN. The weapons inspectors are in Iraq to discover whether there has been a breach of the UN resolution. They should be allowed to do their work, and I am sure that they will be.

Mr. Kennedy: The Liberal Democrats have been fully supportive throughout of the role of the UN in this issue. That must remain the case. However, will the Prime Minister be more specific, because, as he rightly acknowledges, people in this country are deeply concerned? Under what circumstances would the US take military action against Iraq that our country would not choose to support?

The Prime Minister: I have made clear the circumstances in which we do support military action. A UN resolution has been passed that states specifically that Saddam must disarm himself of weapons of mass destruction. If there is a breach of that resolution, we will support military action to make sure that the will of the UN is enforced. However, the choice is Saddam's, as

I said a moment ago. He could disarm willingly. I understand the right hon. Gentleman to be saying that, if there is a breach of UN resolutions, the Liberal Democrat party will support us in the action that we have to take. I am glad that we have cleared that up.

Q4. [89194] **Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas** (Crosby): The Saddam Hussein dossier presented to this House last year stated that Iraqi Kurds were still being persecuted. However, when they apply for asylum in this country, the majority of applications are turned down. When that happens, any benefits they receive are stopped immediately and they are left destitute while they wait to be deported, although we will not deport them back to Baghdad at this time for understandable reasons. Many of them therefore have to turn to charity or crime, hence the 27 people in Walton jail who cost the taxpayer £35,000 a year. Will my right hon. Friend find some way to accommodate this group and recover our reputation as a humane and tolerant society?

The Prime Minister: First, I entirely accept the problem that my hon. Friend raises, but let me explain our difficulty in dealing with it. It is not the case that all people in Iraq, particularly parts of Kurdish Iraq, are suffering persecution. Therefore, it does not necessarily mean that simply because someone originates from Iraq, they are entitled to asylum in this country. So we still have to go through a process of deciding who are suitable asylum claimants. For those who are not, we are exploring safe transit routes to return them to parts of Kurdish Iraq where they would not be subject to persecution. It is difficult to resolve this, because if we were to say that anybody from Iraq who claims asylum can automatically be given asylum, that would lead us into considerable problems. We are trying to resolve this difficult situation by ensuring that we distinguish properly between genuine asylum claimants and those who are not genuine and then to find safe transit routes for those who are not genuine back to Kurdish Iraq.

Q5. [89195] **Mrs. Patsy Calton** (Cheadle): In common, I am sure, with other right hon. and hon. Members, I have received hundreds of communications from constituents expressing their concern about the intended action in Iraq. Is the Prime Minister engaging in dangerous brinkmanship with Saddam Hussein or is he seriously telling us that he intends to commit British troops when an overwhelming majority of the public are against this?

The Prime Minister: It is my duty to explain to people why I think it is necessary, in certain circumstances, to commit British troops to war. Let me put this point to the hon. Lady: the United Nations has made its will and its intention very clear that Saddam must be disarmed of these weapons of mass destruction. If, in those circumstances, he was in breach of the United Nations' will and we refused to act as an international community, we would be doing two things: we would send a signal to Saddam that we would do nothing to prevent him from building up weapons of mass destruction—and he, uniquely, is a leader who has used such weapons against his own people as well as others—and we would also send a signal that we were not serious about the issue of weapons of mass destruction.

I understand why people feel that this is a very distant threat. If someone had said in August 2001 that al-Qaeda was a real danger to our country and that Afghanistan was harbouring its members, I suppose that people would have been sceptical about whether we needed to act, but in retrospect, it would have been better if we had. The reason we are taking this position is not some dangerous piece of brinkmanship. What is dangerous is to allow Saddam to develop these weapons in breach of UN resolutions and do nothing about it, because we will rue the consequences of that weakness later.

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): Given the enormous damage that the drugs industry has done to young people and the huge increase in crime that it is creating across the world, should it not be the priority of every Government to come together and act internationally to end that industry? As it also funds terrorist organisations across the world, international action should be taken to wipe it out and deal with the countries where the drugs are produced.

The Prime Minister: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. We are doing two things. Within the European Union, we are working co-operatively across national frontiers to deal with this problem, particularly with how the drugs are imported into the EU from neighbouring states. It is part of the accession agreements and negotiations with each of the new countries entering the European Union that they act on this issue.

The second thing that we are doing—specifically in relation to Afghanistan and, from the United States, in relation to Colombia—is to try to deal with the sources and origins of drug production. The hon. Gentleman is entirely right to say that there is a link. The expression "narcoterrorism" describes the link between drugs and terrorism and it is a very active link.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Does the Prime Minister agree that burglars who are caught and convicted should go to jail?

The Prime Minister: In appropriate circumstances, of course.

Mr. Duncan Smith: But the Lord Chief Justice has issued guidance to the courts that burglars should not normally go to jail and the Prime Minister's Lord Chancellor has said that he agrees with the Lord Chief Justice. The guidance stands, regardless of what the Prime Minister's spokesman said on his behalf yesterday. The message from the two highest law officers in the land is that burglars should not fear jail. Can the Prime Minister answer this question? Four years ago, the Government said that all third-time burglars would get mandatory sentences of at least three years: how many such sentences have actually been given?

The Prime Minister: First, let me correct the right hon. Gentleman about what the Lord Chief Justice said. Burglary is a serious offence that causes enormous distress to people; courts have, and should have, the power in appropriate circumstances—to which I shall come in a moment—to send even first-time offenders to prison. What the Lord Chief Justice actually said was

that there may be circumstances in which first-time offenders, if, for example, they had a drugs problem, should be given a community sentence with drug rehabilitation rather than being sent directly to prison.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Soft.

The Prime Minister: Someone mentioned the word "soft", so let me point out that I have before me the figures for first-time offenders sent to prison under the Labour Government. Almost half as many again first-time offenders are sent to prison under the Government as five years ago. What is more, I also point out to the right hon. Gentleman that according to the British crime survey—he knows the figures almost as well as I do—burglary under the Labour Government has fallen by almost 40 per cent. since we came to office.

Mr. Duncan Smith: What the Prime Minister fails to tell us is that the Lord Chief Justice's letter, following his guidance, states clearly that the purpose of the guidance is to reduce the numbers going to prison. But the Prime Minister did not answer the question about his "Three strikes and you're out." The answer is that of those third-time burglars, only six received any such sentence, so from this Government we have had "Tough on crime", "Three strikes and you're out", on-the-spot fines, night courts, drug tsars, no fewer than 12 criminal justice Bills and countless pieces of meaningless drivel. Is not the Prime Minister's real policy on law and order just a combination of gimmicks and hot air?

The Prime Minister: Let us deal with the two facts that the right hon. Gentleman has stated. He says that we are being soft on first-time offenders going to prison, yet I have just pointed out that half as many again first-time offenders are going to prison as five years ago. What is more, in appropriate circumstances, as the Lord Chief Justice himself said, it is right that even first-time burglars go to prison. Actually, what has happened is that over the past five to six years, there has been—according not to the Government but to the British crime survey—a 40 per cent. cut in burglary. Compare that with a doubling of crime under the Government of whom the right hon. Gentleman was a member.

Mr. Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr): I am sure that my right hon. Friend and the whole House will join me in expressing our condolences to the families of Latisha Shakespear and Charlene Ellis, the two teenage girls so cruelly murdered in my constituency in the early hours of 2 January. We also send our best wishes for the full recovery of Sophie Ellis and Cheryl Shaw who, thankfully, survived the tragic shooting. Those events in my constituency were appalling and have affected and shocked the whole community. I hope that my right hon. Friend agrees that we should take action against the supply and availability of firearms, and that we should look into the root causes of the disaffection that leads young people to that lifestyle.

The Prime Minister: I agree with everything that my hon. Friend said. I offer my most sincere and heartfelt sympathy to the families and friends of the victims of that terrible recent crime in Birmingham—as I am sure the whole House does, too. My hon. Friend is also right to say that we should look carefully at the measures that we take in relation to that. The matter was first raised a couple of months ago at the street crime meeting by senior police officers, when we undertook to consider the possibility of a mandatory five-year sentence for illegal possession of a firearm. We intend to amend the Criminal Justice Bill to bring that into effect, and I hope that the House will support it.

My hon. Friend is also right that we must tackle some of the underlying causes of this problem, which is one reason why we are committing such substantial sums to inner city regeneration over the next few years. People should be left in no doubt that this is a serious issue that we intend to tackle, and I hope that the House will support us in doing so.

Q6. [89196] **Mr. Peter Luff** (Mid-Worcestershire): When the Worcestershire royal hospital opened last year [HON. MEMBERS: "Reading!"] I will be reading later but I am not reading now. When the Worcestershire royal hospital opened last year, the Prime Minister said that it would have teething problems. Every day since, it has been operating at capacity, and it has been on red alert regularly, with patients waiting outside in ambulances, putting a huge strain on its hard-working doctors and nurses. Are those just teething problems or do they provide compelling evidence that the head of the Prime Minister's delivery unit was right to warn that

"there has not been enough forethought and planning"

by the Department of Health, and that much of the extra taxpayer's money being made available to the NHS is being wasted?

The Prime Minister: The money is not being wasted. The extra money going into the national health service is providing new buildings, new equipment, more nurses and more doctors, which means that every single national in-patient waiting indicator is below what it was in 1997. Let me tell the hon. Gentleman that the delivery unit does not say that the position is worse in the national health service; it says rightly that we must make sure that the extra money that we are putting in is used well and wisely. It is being so used. The reason why the Tories want to run down the national health service is that they are opposed to the extra money going in. They will get that every time one of them asks a question on health or education from now until election day. They are not just opposed to the extra money going in: their leader has just committed them to a 20 per cent. cut across the board in public services. The hon. Gentleman can go back to his constituents in Worcestershire and tell them how the health service would be affected by a 20 per cent. reduction in funding.

Mr. Terry Davis (Birmingham, Hodge Hill): Who is better placed to decide whether Saddam Hussein has weapons of mass destruction: President Bush or Hans Blix?

The Prime Minister: A process is set out in the UN resolution, whereby the inspectors go into Iraq. Saddam Hussein has made his declaration of 8 December, and everyone is deeply sceptical about the contents of that. It is for the inspectors to examine whether there is evidence of weapons of mass destruction. If there is such

evidence, that is a breach of the UN resolution. A combination of the judgment of the UN inspectors and the judgment of the international community is involved.

Q7. [89197] **Mr. Charles Hendry** (Wealden): The Prime Minister will recall his meeting in Downing street on 22 January 2001, when he pledged to the leader of Wealden district council and others that the Government would take action to ensure that the devastating floods of October 2000 would not happen again—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Hon. Members should allow the hon. Gentleman to put his question.

Mr. Hendry: Even the Prime Minister did not promise to stop the rain, but he did promise to stop the villages being affected. Is he aware that, while he was away over Christmas and the new year, Uckfield in my constituency nearly faced devastating flooding again, and Buxted was flooded? Not only has no project to prevent flooding been proposed but no action has even remotely been suggested. Does he understand why people in Wealden feel so betrayed? For all his fine words and pledges, their houses are at as much risk today as they were two years ago.

The Prime Minister: I had better be clear as to what I did promise a couple of years ago. I said that we would increase significantly the amount of money going into flood defences, and we have. I extend the deepest sympathy to the hon. Gentleman's constituents whose homes have been flooded. However, investment in flood defence schemes has worked, and without the extra investment over the past couple of years, about 5,000 more homes would have been flooded. We also have much better warning of floods. I shall, of course, look into the situation that the hon. Gentleman described, but I have to say to him that we have done our level best over the last two years to give us better flood defences, and on the whole, although obviously not in every case, they have improved the situation.

Mr. Patrick Hall (Bedford): In the first week of the new year, three significant items were reported in the Bedford and Kempston area, and they are worth listening to. First, Bedford hospital is the most improved hospital in the country. Secondly, successful action has been taken to stop children bunking off school. Thirdly, record numbers of officers have been recruited by Bedfordshire police. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, contrary to claims made by one or two narrow interest groups about his new year message, he has absolutely no need to divert attention from the Government's domestic achievements?

The Prime Minister: I agree. I wish that I myself had studied those press reports in detail. My hon. Friend outlines the extra investment that is going into every constituency. We now have the absolute dividing line between the two political parties, because extra police officers require investment, and there is extra investment in schools and hospitals. We are committed to that investment, and the Conservatives want to make a 20 per cent. cut in each and every area of it.

Q8. [89198] **Mr. Crispin Blunt** (Reigate): The Prime Minister's Lord Chancellor said that the public would understand why burglars convicted for a second time should not necessarily go to prison. As the Lord Chancellor was once the Prime Minister's pupil master and head of chambers, surely the right hon. Gentleman should now take the lead in that arrangement and dismiss the Lord Chancellor, because he is evidently out of touch with the electorate and the wider public.

The Prime Minister: I have already addressed this point, but I point out again that there are now more first-time offenders going to prison than there were a few years ago.

Laura Moffatt (Crawley): Tomorrow, the primary care trust in Crawley will be making a decision about the future health care needs of my town. Will my right hon. Friend assess what a 20 per cent. cut in the magnificent capital investment of over £30 billion will mean to the trust if it is unable to make a decision about a new build hospital for Crawley? Will he explain to the people of the town what the Opposition would do to our health service funding?

The Prime Minister: I will explain what we will do. We shall make sure that the record investment in the health service is maintained. It is important that people understand that in every constituency in the country—certainly in mine and in that of my hon. Friend—that extra investment is paying dividends. When the Conservatives say that nothing is happening in the health system, that is simply wrong, but they have to say it to substantiate the 20 per cent. cut that they want to make. They have to say that the investment makes no difference. However, my hon. Friend's constituency, and almost every constituency in the country, show that although investment in schools and hospitals is not all that is needed, because we need reforms too, it is a precondition for ensuring that our health and education systems improve.

Q9. [89200] **Mr. Mark Prisk** (Hertford and Stortford): Perhaps the Prime Minister could clarify what, under the Government's latest law and order proposals, he thinks a first-time burglar should get for carrying a gun.

The Prime Minister: Actually, under the proposals set out by the Lord Chief Justice, that would plainly be a case in which the person would immediately go to prison. [HON. MEMBERS: "For five years?"] The five-year mandatory sentence is not yet law, but we want it to be law, and of course it would apply to such a person. I hope very much therefore that, when we introduce such a provision, we get support from the Conservative party. What usually happens on law-and-order issues with the Conservative party is that it says that they are very important but opposes in the House the measures necessary to deal with them.

Q10. [89201] **James Purnell** (Stalybridge and Hyde): May I welcome the visit tomorrow of Amram Mitzna,

the new leader of the Israeli Labour party? That shows Britain's continuing commitment to the peace process in the middle east. However, following the murder of 22 more civilians in Israel at the weekend, will my right hon. Friend remind the Palestinians that the only way to the viable state that they so richly deserve is through peaceful negotiations and not through violence?

The Prime Minister: What my hon. Friend says is entirely right. First, we should all express our sympathy at the appalling carnage and barbarous and wicked murder of innocent Israeli civilians. What I said yesterday and repeat today, however, is that the only way of bringing to an end the carnage of innocent Israelis and the appalling suffering of the Palestinians, which is also acute, is to get a proper peace process under way. We have a situation in which the dreadful and tragic irony is that there is agreement in the international community that the only viable solution is a two-state solution—an Israeli state and a viable Palestinian state—so the longer that we delay the process of getting back into peace negotiations, the more fraught the situation becomes.

I look forward to welcoming the new leader of the Israeli Labour party here, and I also point out that it is my practice to meet opposition politicians—whether they are Labour or conservative—from different countries. That is in accordance with normal practice. I believe that it is important that we continue to engage with Israeli politicians from every level and from every political party.

Iraq

12.31 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 24, to debate an important matter that requires specific and urgent consideration, namely

"the urgent need for a House of Commons debate, with a substantive vote, before any more British servicemen and servicewomen are committed to the Gulf."

This three-minute application is certainly not the occasion to parade my own passionately held views. Instead, it reflects requests yesterday from Members in all parts of the House, including the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch) at column 27 and my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) at column 31, that the House of Commons should have an opportunity seriously to consider the many important issues that were mentioned by my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister today and the Secretary of State for Defence yesterday.

For example, we should consider the whole issue of the threat to neighbours by Iraq and the whole issue of effects on the wider Islamic world. We may rue the consequences of going to war, which may be as rueful as those suggested by Ministers in other contexts. We should consider the whole issue of international law and the moral basis on which forces are being sent. We should consider the role of the International Atomic Energy Agency and precisely what the position of a report from the inspectors will amount to.

We should also consider what is meant by non-compliance at any time. For example, we should consider the effect on world oil prices and the whole issue of the requirement for reserves. Indeed, we should consider the issues raised by the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) of the effect on hospitals and the health service of taking doctors as reserves. That is only one of many, many questions.

I come to the crucial issues. Let us suppose that British and American armour gets to Baghdad, what will happen then? Is it contemplated that a regime will be set up under General Tommy Franks along the lines of that set up under Douglas MacArthur all those years ago in Japan?

I have only three minutes to make my point, but we should consider the very crucial question that was asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Lyons) yesterday. If the United Nations decides to take no military action against Iraq, will British troops join American troops in invading Iraq? The House of Commons needs to explore such issues.

I passionately believe that if we send British troops to risk their lives, they are entitled to know that it is the settled and overwhelming conviction of their countrymen that their cause is just and that they are doing something that is urgent for Britain. That settled conviction does not exist at the moment; only by a Commons debate can such a conviction be arrived at.

Mr. Speaker: I have listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman and I have to give my decision without stating any reasons. I am afraid that I do not consider that the matter that he raises is appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 24. I cannot therefore submit the application to the House.

Point of Order

12.35 pm

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. On 1 February last year I wrote to the Secretary of State for Health requesting his assistance with handling constituency issues. I asked whether the Department of Health had a diagram or spreadsheet to show what was happening with health service reforms, who was responsible for each aspect of health care and to whom we should address any problems on behalf of our constituents. I said that such a document would be helpful for us all. In December, I received a reply from the Under-Secretary of State for Health, Lord Hunt of Kings Heath, dated 25 November 2002, a considerable time after I first wrote. I will not reprise for the benefit of the House the stream of verbiage in the Under-Secretary's letter, although you, Mr. Speaker, will have seen it. There was no response to my specific request for assistance, not only for me, but for all Members of the House.

There are two specific issues on which I would be grateful for your advice, Mr. Speaker. Is it acceptable for the Department of Health to take such an inordinate length of time to reply to hon. Members? Is it frankly acceptable for requests for assistance in how we manage complaints on behalf of our constituents to be dealt with in such a contemptuous manner, as you have seen in the terms of the letter?

Mr. Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of his point of order and for showing me the correspondence to which he refers. Members are entitled to prompt replies from Ministers that address the issues raised. In this case, the hon. Gentleman is entitled to feel disappointed on both counts. I have asked the Secretary of State to review the correspondence. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] Order.

BILL PRESENTED

HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK (OFFENCES)

Lawrie Quinn, supported by Mr. Tony Lloyd, Mr. Michael Clapham, Mr. Roy Beggs, Mr. Frank Doran, Mr. Richard Allan, Mr. Bob Laxton, Ian Stewart, Mr. Malcolm Savidge, Rob Marris, Mr. Andrew Dismore and Judy Mallaber, presented a Bill to make provision about the prosecution and punishment of offences which are, or are treated as being, offences under the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 or the Employers' Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Act 1969: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 31 January, and to be printed. [Bill 37].

Opposition Day

[1ST ALLOTTED DAY]

Foundation Hospitals

Mr. Speaker: I must inform the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

12.38 pm

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): I beg to move,

That this House welcomes the principle of Foundation Hospitals as a means of improving and enhancing patient care and giving hospitals the opportunity to operate free from political and ministerial interference; regrets the timidity of the Government, which is restricting application for Foundation status solely to those hospitals enjoying 3-star status; fears that this restriction will create a two-tier health service, to the detriment of patients and staff, and therefore urges the Government to allow all hospitals to bid for Foundation status; calls for clarification of contradictions between ministerial statements and guidance contained in the Department of Health's 'A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts, December 2002' about how Foundation Hospitals are intended to operate; and further calls on the Government to resolve widely publicised ministerial differences, which are likely to deter hospitals from seeking Foundation status.

If anyone had any doubts about the rising panic inside the Government because of their failure to deliver on health, they only had to read the report by Michael Barber, the head of the Prime Minister's delivery unit, in this morning's *Financial Times*. It says:

"the most urgent task is to establish local plans that can take advantage of the unprecedented three-year spending settlement given to primary care trusts . . . This, the document says, is 'being managed to a very tight timetable . . . we are . . . concerned that there has not been enough forethought and planning [by the health department] for this one-off opportunity . . . the risk is immense.'"

It goes on to say that the report

"raises concerns about the health department itself, which it says needs 'to get the right people into the right jobs faster'".

Most of us would drink to that.

There can be no clearer evidence of a split in the Government than to contrast Mr. Barber's report with early-day motion 351. He says that the report

"displays Downing Street impatience with the speed at which Mr Milburn and the health department have pursued the 'choice and diversity' agenda—aimed at bringing in more help from the private sector and giving patients who wait more than six months a choice over where they are treated."

Contrast that with early-day motion 351, which states:

"This House notes with concern the intention by Government to introduce foundation hospitals, which would create a two tier NHS system".

It is signed by 109 Labour Members. The only real omission from the list is the person who is most in sympathy with those objections and most able to block the policy: the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who has put obstructions in the way at every possible point.

The background to today's debate is what Labour promised before it was elected, and what it has done since. Three questions need to be asked. Have Labour's policies actually worked? Is the approach behind the policies correct? What needs to be done to address the

situation? Everyone inside and outside the House will remember hearing, before 1997, Labour's great slogan, "24 hours to save the NHS"—but I doubt that any thinking member of the Labour party, or even the Prime Minister in his embryonic rampant egomania, believed that the NHS could be changed within 24 hours. What they meant was: when they were in office, those wicked Tories starved the NHS of money, and if we only throw more money at the system, everything will be all right.

The Labour Government have spent a lot of money—there is no doubt about that. In the past two years, real-terms spending on the NHS has increased by more than 20 per cent.—but there has been an increase of only 1.6 per cent. in finished consultant episodes, which is one of the main ways in which we measure hospital activity, and last year there was a 0.5 per cent. fall in the number of hospital admissions. The Prime Minister says that schools and hospitals are the priority, but if such a sum has gone into the NHS and activity levels have risen by only a fraction, what has gone wrong?

Mr. Stephen McCabe (Birmingham, Hall Green): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Chris Pond (Gravesham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Fox: I look forward to hearing the answer to my question, but not from the Parliamentary Private Secretary.

Mr. McCabe: Given the hon. Gentleman's concern about health spending, will he tell us what proportion of the Tories' proposed 20 per cent. cut should, in his judgment, be inflicted on the health service?

Dr. Fox: I think that any party that wants to improve health care in this country must first decide what reforms to the system are required; once that has been done, it is prudent to decide what expenditure is required to deliver those reforms. The problem is that the current Government decided how much money they were going to spend before they had the foggiest idea how they would spend it. They have simply thrown money into a black hole, and they are raising taxes to do so, with all the implications that that has for the economy, but nothing is coming out on the other side.

Dr. Howard Stoate (Dartford) *rose—*

Mr. Pond *rose—*

Mr. Tom Harris (Glasgow, Cathcart) *rose—*

Dr. Fox: I will take further interventions in a moment.

The Government's excuse is that they have been working not only within hospitals, but outside them, for example, in general practice—yet there is a record number of closed practice lists, so patients cannot get to see a GP; the waiting time to see a GP is lengthening; and there is a disaster in recruitment to general practice. Simply to meet the Government's target of staying where they were within the national plan, an extra 2,000 GPs had to be recruited between 2000 and 2004. How many were recruited in 2000? Eighteen. How many in 2001? Eighteen. How on earth do they propose to meet their targets when they cannot recruit the basic staff to the health service to do those jobs? The NHS plan is being turned into nothing more than a glorified wish list.

Dr. Stoate: The number of GPs currently practising is at record levels. As for the hon. Gentleman's point about the number of admissions falling in the past year, much of that is due to GPs now having many alternatives to admitting patients to hospital, such as patients being looked after in their home, or being referred to social services or care in the community. The fact that hospital admissions are falling is not necessarily a bad thing—it is a good thing.

Dr. Fox: There is nothing better in a debate than an own goal. As the Labour party constantly points out, it has been in office for six years. It takes nine years to train a GP, so if there is now a record number of GPs, it must be because they began training under the last Conservative Government.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): Is my hon. Friend aware that a few years ago in my constituency, in the town of Hunstanton, one used to be able to see one's GP the following day, whereas it now takes up to three weeks? There is a crisis in primary care in my constituency.

Dr. Fox: That is a serious issue of great concern to our constituents, who, in the real world rather than the virtual NHS that Ministers talk about, are finding it much more difficult to see their GP when they want to, at short notice. That shows how extremely difficult things are in general practice now. We are finding it difficult to recruit GPs, and many are about to retire, which will make the situation worse. The increasing pressure on GPs, not least the huge burden of paperwork that they now face, is making it increasingly difficult for them to spend time with their patients, as opposed to dealing with the red tape.

Apart from the failures in primary care that my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) mentioned, there are many other areas of policy delivery in which the Government have failed, despite what we all agree is a very large increase in spending. The mixed-sex wards, which were to be abolished, are still with us, and hospital-acquired infections are at a record level: 5,000 people died as a result of a hospital-acquired infection last year; that represents 1 per cent. of all deaths. That is a record, and we are out of line with what is happening in other countries. It is an absolute scandal. The number of hospital beds has fallen since Labour came to power, despite what it said it would do, yet the number of administrators has gone up.

The £280 million earmarked for cancer went to clearing NHS debts, and a further £255 million earmarked for cancer did not get through to the front line. The number of patients starting radiotherapy treatment within the Government's four-week target has fallen from 68 per cent. in 1998 to just 32 per cent. in 2000. There are 60,000 fewer care home beds. Last year there were 77,000 cancelled operations—a 54 per cent. increase since the year that the Government came to office.

[Dr. Fox]

One third of all new nursing graduates and a quarter of medical graduates are now failing to practise, and last year the number of nurses choosing to leave the United Kingdom and work abroad was at a 10-year high—hardly a vote of confidence.

Mr. Tom Harris: On 20 December, *The Daily Telegraph* said that the Conservatives had to choose between two aspirations—one was the best possible health service whatever the cost, and the other was the best possible health service given a context of tax cuts—but they could not have both. Which one would the hon. Gentleman prefer?

Dr. Fox: There is not a country in the world that does not have limits on what it can spend on health care. The problem for all western countries is how to get the best value health provision out of a given budget. In the United Kingdom we have quite a divergent range of experience. In England, for example, expenditure has generally been well below the European average, and we have seen the problems related to that. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have considerably higher expenditure, yet do not have higher outputs or better clinical outcomes; in fact, in some of the other parts of the United Kingdom the waiting lists are rising faster.

That raises questions not simply about the amounts of money but about the process. That is what the debate should focus on, and what I want to talk about in the substantive part of the debate is how the Government's plans for foundation hospitals will move the process forward so that we do not simply throw money at the system without substantial reform. I would say to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Harris) that without substantial reform we will simply raise taxes and spend more money, but we will get no delivery, and he will get no thanks from the electorate.

Mr. Richard Bacon (South Norfolk): My hon. Friend mentioned hospital-acquired infections. Is he aware that the rate of death from hospital-acquired infections is higher in this country than in the former Soviet Union? What does that say about the relationship between expenditure and performance?

Dr. Fox: I am not sure that is says a huge amount about the relationship between expenditure and performance, but it says a great deal about process, about the culture within the service, and about the way in which we allocate the available funding in our health care budget to preventive treatment, and basic cleanliness and hygiene. As I have said before, that is largely a matter of culture. It does not cost money or require a handout from the Chancellor of the Exchequer to wash one's hands between patients; it requires a particular approach to clinical care.

We have to ask why in this country the levels of hospital-acquired infection are so much higher than those in other countries. I have heard Labour Members say that that is because we contract out our cleaning—but that is one of the most preposterous ideas I have heard in my life. In Germany recently, when I was with a consultant, someone from the BBC said, "This hospital is so clean, you must have in-house cleaning." The consultant replied, "Of course we don't have in-house cleaning. We contract out our cleaning." The BBC representative said, "But we've contracted out our cleaning, and our hospitals are filthy." The consultant replied, "If you've contracted out your cleaning and your hospitals are filthy, why do you pay the contractors?" We should ask that question far more in this country than we do at present.

The policy is not working because basically the Government have failed to tackle the No.1 problem in health delivery in this country—we have a centralised, bureaucratic and monolithic Whitehall-controlled system. The Government have made matters worse by piling on to that system a ludicrous, almost pathologically obsessive target culture, in contradiction to their rhetoric. They talk about devolving power within the NHS, and the Secretary of State has talked about the fact that primary care trusts can now spend 75 per cent. of the NHS budget. They can handle 75 per cent. of the NHS budget, but they do not have the discretion to decide how they spend it, which limits what they can do in their own locality and their freedom to do what they think necessary for their own health population. Consequently, the Secretary of State is still in control of the entire system, which is a big problem. That approach leads to deprofessionalisation—professionals on the front line, whether medical, nursing, administrative or managerial, with the skills to make appropriate decisions, are prevented from doing so by people in Whitehall who think that they always know best.

That is a recipe for demoralisation and makes recruitment and retention difficult, as we now see. It is also a recipe for distortion and dishonesty. Recently, one in eight hospital managers admitted to distorting figures to fit Government targets. One manager said:

> "All chief executives in the region contrived to make the same 100 per cent. return to the Department of Health on the absence of waits in A and E. This was done with the encouragement of the regional director because we all agreed the requirement was meaningless".

What basis is that for running a health service?

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): Has the hon. Gentleman not missed the point about the most important issue in health? Surely, the biggest issue underlying acute health needs across the country is prevention, and the key matter in prevention is poverty. Do the Conservatives recognise poverty as a cause of ill health or, if we ever had the misfortune of them getting back into power, would they continue to ignore it?

Dr. Fox: There is no doubt that there is at least some truth in what the hon. Gentleman says. Poverty is a contributory factor to a number of disease processes, but in the western world we are also seeing for the first time the morbidity of affluence, such as the huge increase in obesity and type 2 diabetes in this country, which will force us to change our mindset on preventive health care. We must start to weigh those things up, but I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman chose preventive health and public health policy as a means of attempting to attack the Conservative party. Under the Government, there has been a virtual abandonment of public health policy—there has been no proper response

to the huge growth of HIV, TB or the burgeoning cost on the system of type 2 diabetes. Public health has been systematically downgraded by the Government. A Conservative Government would put public health as well as mental health at the top of the agenda, but sadly they have been moved too far down by the present Government.

I like to be fair in these debates when talking about the Government's promises so I should say that it is not long since the Secretary of State told the House that Britain has a monopoly supplier in the NHS. As long as Labour is in power, he said, that is how it would stay. There has certainly been a change in his position, rhetoric and policy in recent months. The best analogy is the programme "Blockbusters". I am sure you know the one I mean, Mr. Speaker—we could, for example, take a "t" and see what it stands for. Let us take a "p". What "p" would describe a Conservative policy to use the private finance initiative exclusively to fund private capital projects; sign a concordat for greater co-operation with the private sector; buy the exclusive use of a private BUPA hospital for patients; bring in private management to run NHS hospitals; give PCTs powers to buy private provision for their patients; and give NHS trusts the ability to borrow private money outside Government limits? What "p" would the Labour party use to describe that Conservative policy? The answer is privatisation.

I do not object to any of the policies that I already have laid out, which are entirely in line with what the Conservative party would like. It is the hypocrisy of the Government's approach, pretending to do one thing, but in fact doing another, that I find offensive and which, I am sure, lies behind the 109 signatures to early-day motion 351, which was tabled recently.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): On the subject of hypocrisy, a concordat for co-operation was signed with the private sector. However, at the same time King Edward VII hospital in Midhurst, which served many of my constituents who needed cardiac surgery, is in danger of closing because the health service no longer sends patients there. What does my hon. Friend say about that?

Dr. Fox: Double-thinking is part of new Labour: it has an Orwellian nature, and the fact that it says one thing and does exactly the opposite should come as no surprise to anyone after six years. However, any loss of capacity in the area of clinical care described by my hon. Friend is tragic when we still have huge waiting lists, notwithstanding the fact that the Government have been throwing money at the health service as if there were no tomorrow.

However, it is only fair that when we support a policy, we should say so. We can take some comfort in the Government's proposals on foundation hospitals. An incoming Conservative Government would feel comfortable with the direction that the Labour Government are taking, as they are moving towards the sort of policies that we want—a dramatic decentralisation of the NHS and a reduction in politicisation. If the proposals are implemented properly, people on the front line would get more freedom and patients would get more choice. However, there must be action, not just rhetoric.

When the Secretary of State made a statement on the foundation proposals, I asked a number of questions. I took note of your comments, Mr. Speaker, to my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) about the delay in answering questions. Since the Secretary of State's statement, I have tabled more than 50 questions on foundation hospitals, to which I have had no reply, which is staggering. Foundation hospitals are one of the Government's flagship health policies, but Ministers are unable to answer some basic questions. I therefore thought that I might take advantage of our Opposition day debate, and use the rare opportunity of getting the Secretary of State to respond by putting some of my questions to him again.

My questions fall into a number of categories. What freedoms will foundation hospitals have? Will NHS foundation trusts be able to carry out work for private patients through the medium of subsidiary companies and public-private partnership arrangements? Will they have the freedom to vary pay and conditions for clinical conditions outside the "agenda for change" arrangements announced by the Secretary of State? Will they be required to charge standard tariffs for each area of activity? Those are important questions about the running of foundation hospitals.

On finance, will borrowing by NHS foundation trusts from the private sector be guaranteed by the Secretary of State, strategic health authorities, PCTs or other NHS bodies? Such a basic question has not yet been answered. What assessment has the Secretary of State made of the willingness of the private sector to lend money for capital projects to NHS foundation trusts in the absence of security on related assets? Will NHS foundation trusts be able to transfer their existing assets as part of a private finance initiative transaction, and can they invest surplus financial assets as they wish? What consultation has the Secretary of State had with the Office for National Statistics about the classification of NHS foundation trusts in the national accounts, and what advice has he received? It is a crucial question whether NHS foundation trusts are truly part of the state sector or not, yet on that fundamental issue there is still radio silence from the Secretary of State.

On the board of governors and management, will the board of governors of an NHS foundation trust be able to remove members of a management board? Will local authorities be able to appoint members to the board of governors of an NHS foundation trust? What provision will there be for election to boards of governors of NHS foundation trusts? There is no answer.

On the regulator—one of the stipulations that the Chancellor made to ensure that there was not profligacy—we have asked in what ways the independent regulator will be independent of the Secretary of State; what freedom the independent regulator will have to interpret the terms "NHS standards" and "NHS values" when deciding to issue and monitor foundation trust licences; and whether the Secretary of State will have the power of direction over the independent regulator for foundation trusts.

On the application, what policy will primary care trusts need to have towards a foundation trust application to allow such an application to go forward? Which PCTs will be entitled to have their views considered? As I pointed out in our last exchange, in my constituency, we have no acute hospital. Will our PCT

[Dr. Fox]

therefore have a right to be consulted, and will my constituents, who are not patients in a constituency where there happens to be an acute hospital, have the right to be consulted? What evidence will be required to demonstrate that local people support an application for foundation status?

As he did in his statement, the Secretary of State will no doubt wrap all that up in public ownership terms and speak of the great progress for the co-operative movement, but ownership implies a financial stake and independence. There will be no financial stake, and the Secretary of State will be able to take back foundation status at will. That is not ownership, in my book.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): Does my hon. Friend agree that if those hospitals are to have true freedom, they must have the freedom to buy and sell assets as they see fit in pursuance of their medical and clinical aims, and they need to be free to borrow on the private markets with or without a Government guarantee?

Dr. Fox: There are a number of basic freedoms that have to be defined to make foundation hospitals genuinely independent. We need to hear clearly from the Secretary of State how far the Government are willing to extend such freedoms or, as my right hon. Friend correctly pointed out, the whole exercise will be a complete sham. There is danger in the Government deciding what the prescription ought to be, but being unable to deliver it, for a number of primarily political reasons.

As well as the unanswered questions, there are several enormous contradictions in the prospectus that the Government have issued on foundation hospitals. They have sent a huge number of confused messages. The prospectus claims that the foundation trusts will be free. It states that

"the new regime will be clearly defined in legislation, independent of the Secretary of State and designed to give NHS Foundation Trusts maximum freedom to operate."

However, as the prospectus also makes clear, the trusts will be restricted in a number of ways—for example, in relation to which patients they can treat. Under paragraph 1.30, the licence will restrict the number of private patients that foundation trusts can treat. Paragraph 1.34 will restrict the services that they can provide. Long-term legally binding service agreements with primary care trusts will restrict the types of services that foundation trusts can provide. That is not freedom.

Whom will foundation trusts be able to employ? The prospectus claims in paragraph 1.37 that an NHS foundation trust will be free to recruit and employ its own staff. However, it also states that

"an NHS Foundation Trust will be expected to use these new freedoms in a way that fits with key NHS principles and does not undermine the ability of other providers in the local health economy to meet their NHS obligations."

In the real world, does that mean that NHS foundation trusts are free to recruit the staff that they want, or that they are not free to do so? The Secretary of State said in his last statement that they would not be able to poach staff from other NHS bodies. Who will define that? Who on earth will make that legally binding? Either they have the freedom to employ the staff that they want, or they have not.

How competitive will foundation trusts be? The national pricing structure will guarantee that NHS foundation trusts will be unable to undercut other NHS providers, according to paragraph 1.34. What is the point of giving them freedom to become more efficient if they are not able to lower their costs and thereby undercut other providers? What is the point of the entire exercise if we restrict what they can do, whom they can treat and the cost at which they can do that? The whole thing smacks of being made up as it goes along. It smacks of a panic response by the Government, who think that they must produce reform because the No. 10 policy unit is extremely unhappy with what the Department of Health is doing.

Sadly for the Secretary of State, it is the Chancellor who is slowing down the process. He is the one who put the restrictions on the regulator. He is the one who wanted long-term binding agreements to make sure that foundation trusts cannot operate in a way that is fundamentally different from the way in which the NHS currently operates. It reflects a fundamental split within the Government between those who believe that they must deliver at any cost and those who believe that the means of delivery is still one of the most important things in the Labour party's creed. That is the debate that will no doubt take place on the Government Benches today.

As I have said on many occasions—although the Secretary of State thinks that he and the *Daily Mirror* have an exclusive on this—the NHS as it is currently constructed and run is not working and will not work, irrespective of how much money is thrown at the system. The one question that needs to be answered is this: if the present NHS model is such a great model, why has it not been adopted by any other country in the world? The Government have at least been clear in laying out their prescription. Whether they can deliver it is another matter.

The Liberal Democrats have four hon. Members on their Benches and have not yet intervened in the debate. The House will be interested to know that in the Register of Members' Interests, the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) tells us that the Liberal party literature in his constituency is sponsored by Denplan. That might explain why the Liberals have such an odd view of private medicine. However, the House would all agree that there is a logical link between the Liberals being sponsored by Denplan and the content of their literature. Most of that is designed for them to lie through their teeth, so I suppose it is only logical that they would want to look after them.

We in the House need to look at what has happened in other countries and where success has come from. I suggest that where there is a genuine mix of public and private provision and public and private finance, the record of health care is better than it is in this country. The Government may be moving towards more mixed provision in their current proposals, but as long as health care is provided irrespective of the ability to pay and free at the point of use, both of which the Conservative party supports, we need have no fear of diversity. Diversity provides innovation, and innovation provides excellence.

Foundation hospitals begin that process of diversity, the break-up of the monolith and the beginning of the end of a centralised national health service. No doubt the Secretary of State will dip liberally into the lexicon of the left when describing his policy today. That is no less than we would expect from a Minister in his position when facing the opposition of his own Back Benchers. However, his real test is not today. If he can keep his nerve and see his policy through without dilution, he just might begin to make a difference in the process of providing better health care in this country, and he would have the support of the Conservative party. It is a direction with which we are comfortable. If he knows what needs to be done, but he does not have the power within the Government or the courage to do so, the patients and the voters of this country will not be forgiving.

1.8 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"welcomes the principle of NHS Foundation Trusts as part of the Government's wider programme to improve services for NHS patients; believes that NHS Foundation Trusts must be part of the National Health Service providing care to NHS patients according to NHS principles and subject to NHS standards and inspection; further believes that there should be no arbitrary cap on the numbers of NHS Foundation Trusts and that all NHS hospitals should get the help, support or intervention they need to improve; recognises that extra resources for the health service are delivering improved services for NHS patients and have to be matched with reforms so that standards in the NHS are national but control is local; supports the Government's efforts to devolve power to frontline services and to strengthen accountability to local communities; and rejects any proposal to introduce top-up vouchers for private treatment, tax subsidies for private medical insurance or cuts in public spending of 20 per cent. in view of the inevitable impact that such policies would have on NHS patients including those treated in NHS Foundation Trusts."

The Government's programme of improvement for the health service, including our proposals for NHS foundation hospitals—

Mr. Bacon: Has failed.

Mr. Milburn: We have not quite got NHS foundation hospitals yet. I know that it is early in the new year, but the Opposition should give us a month or two. Our programme of improvement sets out how best we can get resources and reforms working in tandem to deliver better health care for patients. That is not why the Opposition called the debate today. They are not interested in supporting reform of the national health service, because the Conservatives, as the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) confirmed today, are no longer interested in keeping the national health service. That is why the hon. Gentleman, in his little secret speech to the Conservative party conference in Harrogate last year—at his fringe meeting, where he thought that no one was listening—set out the Conservative strategy, which he described as threefold. Its aims were to persuade the public, first, that the NHS is not working; secondly, that it has never worked before; and thirdly, that it will never work. That strategy is not his alone, but that of the whole Conservative party. Presumably, that is why, according to the 28 December edition of *The Independent*, the Leader of the Opposition has told colleagues to search out another case similar to that of Mrs. Addis, which was raised last year, to prove that the NHS is failing. Whatever our differences of opinion about health care and health services, NHS patients are there to be treated, not used. Frankly, seeking to use NHS patients in such a way is the lowest form of political discourse.

Mr. Andrew Turner: My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition does not have to ask us to search out such cases, because the people affected come to our constituency surgeries every week. They include the resident in my constituency who had to wait 26 weeks for radiotherapy following a mastectomy. There is also the fact that everyone in my constituency who wants to get on to an NHS dental list has to travel to the mainland, despite the promises made by the Prime Minister to the Labour party conference in 1999 that within two years everyone would be able to get a dentist. While the Secretary of State is throwing so much money at the health service, why is he still making promises that he cannot deliver?

Mr. Milburn: I should like to make two points in response to the hon. Gentleman. First, I understand his concerns about his constituents, which are shared in all parts of the House. Of course, there are many problems today in the national health service. That is absolutely true. Indeed, when my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced the NHS plan from the Dispatch Box, there was much criticism and some mirth about the fact that it was a 10-year plan. It was a 10-year plan because it will take 10 years to put right the national health service and we should be candid and honest about that. There are problems in the national health service, but progress is under way, and he would do well to acknowledge the progress that has been made, not least because it has been brought about by hard-working members of staff not only in his area, but in all parts of the country.

Secondly, if the hon. Gentleman genuinely believes that there are problems in the national health service, perhaps he could explain to his constituents why he believes that cutting public spending on it would improve matters. Conservative Members must be the only people in the country who think that they can get more out of the national health service by putting less in.

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): Does my right hon. Friend agree that one way of not improving the health service is to propose, as those on the Opposition Front Bench now do, to cut expenditure on health by 20 per cent.?

Mr. Milburn: I do.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Tell it again.

Mr. Milburn: I will tell my hon. Friend, the hon. Gentleman and the House, as will my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, until they are sick and tired of hearing it, that public spending cuts cannot deliver public service improvement. We had 18 years of cuts in the national health service and five years between 1992 and 1997 in which capital spending on its buildings and

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equipment was cut every year, not only in cash terms, but in real terms. Why do we have today the biggest hospital-building programme that the national health service has ever seen? It is there for a simple reason: we have made the PFI work and we are putting extra investment into the NHS.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): The right hon. Gentleman spoke about the use of individual cases to attack the NHS. He will accept that Opposition parties will do that, as his party did very effectively when it was in opposition to show that the NHS was not working. Are nót two issues important in that context? First, there should be clear knowledge that the consent of the patient who is cited has been sought. Secondly, it must be recognised that individual patients' experiences tell us nothing much even about the hospital in question, let alone much about the health service. We rely on the provision of adequate statistics in which we can have faith. I hope that he will address the concerns expressed by the National Audit Office and others that statistics are systematically falsified in an attempt to meet his targets.

Mr. Milburn: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's points about individual cases. I think that both his party and mine responded positively to the British Medical Association's invitation last year, following the Rose Addis case, that we exercise some discretion in relation to such individual cases. I am not sure that that is true of the Conservative party, but if the hon. Member for Woodspring wishes to confirm from the Dispatch Box that he is prepared to exercise such discretion, I am sure that the BMA would, like me, be delighted to hear him do so.

On statistics, it is obviously important that there is integrity in the collection and presentation of figures. We have done much in that regard. For example, there is more open publication of information about NHS performance than ever before. That includes information about the individual performance of hospitals, primary care trusts and GPs' surgeries and better assessment than ever before of how performance is improving or changing across the national health service. To ensure that that is possible, we have introduced independent inspection through the Commission for Health Improvement, and we hope to strengthen that through the new Commission for Health Care Audit and Inspection. I do not think that it is reasonable to say that we have somehow not introduced precisely the safeguards for which the hon. Gentleman asks.

Mr. Tom Harris: My right hon. Friend may have read over Christmas an article by the Leader of the Opposition in which he said that the Conservative party's aim was to make it completely irrelevant whether a hospital was publicly or privately owned. Does he agree that that might go some way towards explaining why the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) has described the Conservative party's chances of winning the next election as about high as those of finding an Eskimo in the desert?

Mr. Milburn: I shall come to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) later in my speech, which has a special section that is dedicated purely to him and some of his important utterances. I read his interview, but not the article written by the Leader of the Opposition.

Dr. Fox: To get back to reality for a moment, if the Secretary of State needs to answer any question today, it is as follows. The Labour party has now been in office for six years. Health spending has risen by more than 20 per cent. in the past two years. The Prime Minister says that health care is about hospitals, which are the priority. How can it be that a 21.5 per cent. increase in funding in the health service has been translated in the hospital service into an increase in activity of only 1.6 per cent., as measured by the standard measure of finished consultant episodes, and that the number of admissions fell last year? How can those things be?

Mr. Milburn: That is simply not true—*[Interruption.]* If the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends give me a moment or two, I shall explain why. He is citing hospital episode statistics or HES figures, which count certain forms of activity, but not all. They include elective activity, but they do not count, for example, the procedures carried out nowadays with out-patients or primary care that used to be carried out with in-patients.

I know that the continual refrain from the hon. Gentleman and Opposition Members, for self-evident reasons, is that money never works or never gets to the right place in the national health service, so investment simply is not worthwhile. We know why they say that—they must justify their 20 per cent. programme of public spending cuts. However, I ask them to tell that to the 250 million patients being seen in primary care each year, more than 80 per cent. of whom now get appointments within two days, although many used to have to wait for weeks. They should tell it to the extra 750,000 people who get hospital operations each year, the 500,000 cancer patients who are now being seen within two weeks, although many used to have to wait months to see a hospital specialist, or the 30,000 cancer patients who are now eligible for the best and latest cancer drugs while there used to be a lottery in care in cancer drug treatment. Perhaps most importantly, they should tell it to the patients who are waiting for a heart operation and will, by April this year, have seen maximum waiting times halve from 18 months—the position that we inherited from his Government—to nine months, which is the position that will be reached in a few months.

How on earth does the hon. Gentleman think that those improvements have happened? Does he think that they have happened through the invisible hand of the free market, to which he and his hon. Friends are so deeply attached? They have happened not through the free market, but precisely because of the extra resources that the Government voted for and the Opposition voted against.

Dr. Stoate: It is puzzling to hear claims from the Opposition that hospital treatment is not improving when I can tell my right hon. Friend that in the Dartford and Gravesham NHS trust, the Darent Valley hospital has just been awarded a diagnostic and treatment centre worth £9 million and there is expansion in the A and E department. The chief executive wrote to me this week to say that the trust had hit every single target that the

Government had set and that it was very proud of the achievements that it had managed to produce. How can that square with the Opposition's claim that hospital treatment is failing?

Mr. Milburn: Because the Opposition have a story to tell. The story that they want to tell is that investment never works, that the public services can never deliver, and that it is not worth putting extra investment and resources into, or reforming, the national health service. The hon. Member for Woodspring was candid enough to admit in his speech that he does not believe that the NHS has ever worked or can ever work. The Conservatives therefore have to justify their attacks on the NHS and their policy, as set out by the Leader of the Opposition, of a 20 per cent. cut in public spending, not just in the other public services but in the national health service, too.

Dr. Fox: I would like to clarify for the House what I said before, because the Secretary of State will otherwise be misleading us in his interpretation of it. I said that the way that the NHS is currently constructed and run is not working and could not work. That is absolutely true and it is why the Prime Minister is demanding reform. In its current form, the system will result in money being sucked in and nothing coming out the other side.

Mr. Milburn: That is not what the hon. Gentleman said to the Conservative party conference, unless the *Daily Mirror* is wrong. I have not yet seen a letter of objection from the hon. Gentleman in the letters column of that newspaper. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman asks whether it has a letters column; he should do a bit more reading. It would be good for his soul and get a bit of breadth into his life. He told the Conservative party conference—this was faithfully reproduced by the *Daily Mirror*—that his strategy was to persuade the public that the NHS is not working and has never worked before. That is the policy of today's Conservative party.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Milburn: I give way to the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie).

Mr. Andrew Tyrie (Chichester): The Minister has said that the NHS is working, but does he not realise that there are some extraordinary absurdities in the way in which funds are currently allocated? The King Edward VII hospital in my constituency is facing closure because primary care trusts are unable to fund the operations and the work that has been carried out there. Is the Secretary of State aware that many people in my constituency are being sent abroad for orthopaedic treatment when they could perfectly well be treated up the road at King Edward VII? They cannot be treated there because of the absurd budgetary arrangements operating in the NHS today.

Mr. Milburn: As I have said to the hon. Gentleman when he has raised this issue with me privately, I shall be very happy to look into it. He has written to me about it today, and I have his letter with me. I shall respond as soon as I can. I would, however, sound a note of caution. If he believes, as he does, that his local private hospital needs extra resources from the local primary care trust to secure its future and better to secure services for NHS patients—I accept that there will be a relationship between those two equations—he has to be able to answer one difficult but important question. Does he believe that the extra investment that the Labour party voted for and that his party voted against is necessary—yes or no? I know that when he had the opportunity to answer that question, he voted against the extra resources.

Sir Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Will the Secretary of State answer one specific question? I am sure that he will agree that the hospice movement is a vital and excellent part of health care in this country. Will he tell me whether it is sensible for four beds in a 15-bed hospice in my constituency—the East Cheshire hospice—to be closed because it cannot fund the staff to man them, when there is a growing need for remedial and other care in hospices? Are the foundation hospitals going to be able to enter into contracts with hospices to enable them to run efficiently, and to provide the beds that are desperately needed?

Mr. Milburn: On the second part of the hon. Gentleman's question, that will be a matter for the NHS foundation hospital to determine. It will be determined locally, not nationally. The hon. Member for Woodspring has been urging me to see that as the right way forward. On the hospice movement and palliative care services more generally, I want to associate myself absolutely with the remarks of the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Sir Nicholas Winterton). Hospices do a sterling job, which is why the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Ms Blears), who has responsibility for public health, has announced extra resources over the last few weeks specifically for palliative care services, including for hospices not only in the hon. Gentleman's constituency but in constituencies up and down the country.

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): I have no doubt that the extra investment in the NHS is needed or that it is having a significant impact in my constituency. We have NHS dentistry back in Swindon, and we have a walk-in centre, a new hospital, and much more besides. The Opposition are wrong to suggest that 20 per cent. extra money should produce 20 per cent. more activity. If we are going to make up for the supposed efficiency improvements that were in fact cuts after cuts in the Tory years, and if we want to relieve the huge pressure on staff, we need money without a corresponding increase in patient care. This debate is about foundation hospitals, however—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady has not asked a question. She must now stop.

Mr. Milburn: I agree with that part of what my hon. Friend was saying. I am not sure that I would have agreed with the second part, but there we are.

I want to set out, as the Government amendment does, how our proposals for NHS foundation trusts fit into the wider programme of NHS improvement and reform. Today the national health service is the fastest-growing health service of any major country in Europe.

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Six years ago, under the Conservatives, NHS budgets were falling in real terms. By 2008, they will have doubled in real terms. That is the difference between a Labour party committed to a policy of investment in the health service and a Conservative party committed to a policy of cuts in the health service—a policy that would lead not to reform in the NHS but only to its abandonment.

In a world in which health care can do more, but costs more, than ever before, it is an enormous source of strength for our country that we have an NHS based on the right values, namely of health care that is free at the point of use, because none of us knows when we will get ill, how long it will last or what it will cost. There has never been a time when these NHS values have been more relevant. Today's world of medical advances and technological changes occurring almost by the week positively calls for health care based on the scale of a patient's need, not the size of their wallet. And yet, for all its great strengths—most notably its staff and their ethos of public service—the NHS has major weaknesses too.

For more than 50 years, uniformity in health provision has not guaranteed equality of outcome. Indeed, it is sad to say that, over those 50 years, health inequalities have widened rather than narrowed. Most hon. Members know from their own constituency experience that, too often, the poorest services are in the poorest communities. Top-down Whitehall control has tended to stifle local innovation. It has too often ignored the differing needs of different local communities. It is not surprising, therefore, that staff sometimes feel disempowered, local communities are disengaged, and patients have traditionally had little say and precious little choice. Our reform programme—indeed, any reform programme—for the health service should be about addressing these weaknesses so that we can build on the NHS's great strengths.

The idea that the Conservatives support our reform programme is laughable. They are against national standards, even though equity in health care demands precisely those national standards of care. I am proud to have served in a Government who have, for the first time, established national standards of care to tackle the country's big killers—cancer and heart disease. As a consequence, in the last few years, death rates from cancer have fallen by 6 per cent. and from heart disease by 14 per cent.

So, national standards make a difference. That is also why we have targets to reduce waiting times, and why there is more open publication of information about NHS performance, as I mentioned to the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris). That is also why we have introduced independent inspection to guarantee those standards. We reject the internal market idea that NHS hospitals should simply be left to sink or swim as part of a free-market competitive environment. Every hospital—every part of the national health service—needs help, support and, where necessary, intervention to raise standards, whether it is the best performing hospital or the worst.

However, all the national standards and national systems of inspection in the world cannot by themselves deliver improvements. Sustained improvements in local services can happen only when staff feel involved, when local communities are better engaged, and when improvement is something done by local people, not just done to them. That is why devolution is at the heart of the Government's reform programme, and why the new primary care trusts are so important. PCTs are about shifting the balance of power in the health service so that, while standards are national, control is increasingly local. That is why we are now seeking to reconnect local hospitals to the local communities that they serve.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): I welcome what the Government have done on NHS funding, but there is still a problem as between primary care trusts and the hospice movement. For example, Derian House children's hospice works very broadly—way beyond the north-west—yet there is no contribution from primary care trusts, so the hospice is the poor relation when it comes to funding. What help and support can my right hon. Friend give to ensure that the hospice movement gets its fair share of money and that we in Chorley do not suffer?

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend makes an important point, not just for his local hospice, which I know he is passionately committed to, but for hospices in many constituencies up and down the country that are in a similar position. As he knows, a hospice often serves not just one constituency or area, but a broader region, and it may also specialise nationally in particular conditions.

My hon. Friend is right to say that there is a fault line in the system whereby a hospice runs the risk of losing out if decisions are left to local PCTs. That is why one of the proposals that we are taking forward through the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Salford, who has responsibility for public health, aims to ensure that there is a national partnership group involving the national hospice associations precisely to address such problems. I hope that that benefits not just the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle), but the hospice movement nationally.

I want to set out the facts on NHS foundation trusts. I also want to deal with some specific issues raised today by the hon. Member for Woodspring, as well as issues that he raised in response to my statement to the House on 11 December. First, those NHS foundation trusts will be part and parcel of the NHS. They will provide NHS services to NHS patients according to NHS principles. They will be subject to NHS standards, NHS star ratings and NHS systems of inspection. It is that which the hon. Gentleman completely fails to understand. *[Interruption.]* I am not surprised that the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon, who speaks for the Liberals, fails to understand, because he fails to understand most things.

Dr. Evan Harris *rose—*

Mr. Milburn: No, the hon. Gentleman will get a chance in a moment or two.

Indeed, the comments made on 11 December by the hon. Member for Woodspring at column 274 of *Hansard* not only suggest that he is mystified that we

could have foundation hospitals within the NHS, but signal a completely different vision for the future of health care in our country. He says that he wants foundation hospitals, but he will not say that he wants them in the NHS. Indeed, the Conservative motion is striking for the very absence of the words "national health service".

As the hon. Gentleman seemed to indicate on 11 December, he wants hospitals to become free-standing privately run shareholder-led organisations, presumably because he regards the precedent of organisations such as Railtrack as an unmitigated success story, when everyone else in the country knows what an unmitigated disaster that failed Tory privatisation really was.

The hon. Gentleman may want NHS hospitals to be privatised. We want them to remain in public ownership. Indeed, part of the purpose of our NHS foundation trust policy is to usher in a new era of public ownership in which local communities control and own their local hospitals. The legal owners, who will elect the hospital governors of those NHS foundation trusts, will be local people, local members of staff and those representing key local organisations such as the PCTs. So in place of central state ownership there will be genuine local public ownership. That is no more a Tory policy for the health service than the minimum wage is a Tory policy on low pay; nor, indeed, is the Tory party the party of the vulnerable. To paraphrase the hon. Member for Buckingham on the Tories' electoral prospects, that is as believable as finding Eskimos in the desert.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way, although his badinage is a little more downmarket than I had confidently anticipated. It might add to the gaiety of the nation, but it does not improve the quality of his argument. May I put a simple proposition to him? Given that there has been a 28 per cent. real-terms increase in health expenditure in Scotland since 1997, but that that increase has been accompanied by a 25 per cent. rise in average waiting times, does he not recognise that it is grossly complacent of him to delay for two years the introduction of the new audit and inspection arrangements following the announcement of the money for which we need to know we are getting decent value?

Mr. Milburn: I always listen extremely carefully to what the hon. Gentleman says, and I am sure that the Leader of the Opposition does too. I know that they have a warm and meaningful relationship, or at least they used to until very recently.

To answer the hon. Gentleman's points, we shall introduce legislation as soon as we are able to establish the new health care audit and inspection commission. I hope that he feels able to support the establishment of that new Commission for Health Improvement, because it will be an important safeguard to enable members of the public and members of staff working in the NHS to know how well local health services are performing.

On the hon. Gentleman's point about investment, he frequently hears from me and from the Prime Minister that investment must be accompanied by reforms. If we are to get the best value from the money, we have to have both. The problem for him and his party is that he wants only one of those. He talks about reform, but he is not terribly interested in investment.

Mr. Bercow: I am.

Mr. Milburn: The hon. Gentleman may be, but the problem for him is Opposition Front Benchers and, in particular, the Opposition leadership. This is a Labour policy steeped in Labour traditions of mutualism, community empowerment and the history— *[Interruption.]* As far as I am aware as a former student of history, those were never closely associated with the Conservative party, either in the last century or in this. The policy is steeped in the history of co-operation that gave birth first to the Labour party and then to our proudest creation, the national health service.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Milburn: No. Putting staff and public in charge of those NHS hospitals will give them the freedom to innovate and develop services better suited to the needs of different local communities. NHS foundation trusts will be free from Whitehall direction and control so that we can genuinely unleash the spirit of public service enterprise, which so many NHS staff share. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Woodspring asked a series of specific questions, which I am going to answer. Those hospitals will be free to borrow, either from the public sector or from the private.

On those hospitals borrowing against their assets and our discussions with private sector lending organisations, we do not believe that it would be right to allow borrowing against assets, as they are needed to continue to provide NHS services to the local community and to local patients in all circumstances. Indeed, an important point is made by the private sector: it is not sure, either, that they would necessarily want to borrow against those assets. The borrowing will be against the revenue streams that NHS foundation trusts earn if they successfully negotiate agreements with local PCTs.

On classification, I have not had a discussion with the Office for National Statistics, nor would it be appropriate for me to do so. I do not make decisions on public or private sector classification, nor does any Cabinet Minister or any other Minister. The ONS is properly independent; the decision is for the ONS to take.

Dr. Fox *rose—*

Mr. Milburn: I am running through the questions that the hon. Gentleman raised. He asked the questions; I am giving him the answers. *[Interruption.]* I may not be giving the hon. Gentleman the answers that he wants, but I am giving the answers that I want to give.

These hospitals will be free to retain any surpluses and any proceeds from the more efficient use of their assets where that is for the benefit of NHS patients. They will have freedom to recruit and employ their own staff. However, as I told the House on 11 December,

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safeguards will rightly balance those freedoms to ensure that NHS foundation trusts always act in the public interest for the benefit of NHS patients. They will operate according to a licence issued and monitored by an independent regulator, accountable to Parliament. *[Interruption.]* No. They will be subject to no direction from me or from any other Minister. That will guarantee NHS standards and NHS values.

Those hospitals will be bound by a statutory duty of partnership to work in concert with other local NHS organisations. The proportion of private patient work undertaken by any NHS foundation trust will be strictly capped to its existing level. They will not be able to compete for patients by undercutting other NHS hospitals. Also, to prevent any demutualisation or any future Government's seeking privatisation, there will be a legal lock on the assets of NHS foundation trusts and on the purpose for which they can be used.

Mr. Dawson: In concentrating on his speech, my right hon. Friend has obviously not noticed the eloquent facial expressions of the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox). Every time the values and principles of the NHS are mentioned by my right hon. Friend, the hon. Gentleman pulls a face. That shows the difference—the Opposition do not understand the values and principles of the national health service.

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I was about to say that perhaps I am not sorry to hear of the hon. Gentleman's pain, but as it is early in the new year I shall be generous and say that I am very sorry to hear that he is in some pain.

So I say to my hon. Friends: do not be fooled by the hon. Gentleman's argument that NHS foundation trusts further the Tories' agenda—

Helen Jones (Warrington, North): If my right hon. Friend's aim in setting up foundation trusts is to give more power back to the local community, why are we not creating a system in which everyone on the electoral register in the locality is automatically a member of the foundation trust? Why is there an opt-in provision? Who will the electorate be for a regional hospital like Christie hospital, or Walton hospital's neurosurgery unit?

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend makes two very important points. First, automatic entitlement on the basis of the electoral register is an option in terms of becoming a member of an NHS foundation trust. Since people need to demonstrate positive involvement with their national health service, my own preference is that they apply for membership. However, there are two different, although not necessarily competing, ways of doing that, and to tell the truth I have a relatively open mind on the issue.

On the second point about membership that my hon. Friend raises, as we tried to explain in the guide published on 11 December, different hospitals are in different positions. Some serve one town or even approximately one constituency, and others such as the neurosurgery centre at Walton hospital and the Christie hospital serve a broader span of patients. I can think of hospitals in this city, such as the Royal Marsden hospital, which are not really local hospitals at all, but national tertiary centres. In those cases we need a slightly different form of governance, and perhaps people from the local community can apply if they want to become members of an NHS foundation trust. However, in most situations it must be right for the patients who have used those hospitals—they often have a very deep attachment to them, and a long-standing relationship with them—to formalise that relationship through membership. The important point is that principles will underpin our assessment of governance proposals from NHS foundation trusts, but there must also be some flexibility, given the very differing positions that NHS hospitals are in.

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury): I wonder whether the Secretary of State can help me. I am struggling with his concept of an opt-in electorate for foundation hospital boards. His party is always railing against the sharp elbow of the middle classes. How on earth does he expect an opt-in electorate to work? Surely that will increase the power of a small part of the electorate, rather than giving a broad spread of influence to the people whom I think he is trying to help.

Mr. Milburn: Frankly, that is absolute and patronising nonsense of the highest order, and it speaks volumes about the perspective of the hon. Gentleman and his party. Some people managed to join even the Conservative party, so I have heard. and people certainly managed to join the Labour party. If people are passionately committed to an organisation, they tend to want to join it. That is the tradition of mutualism and co-operation that underpins NHS foundation trusts, and it is a perfectly good principle.

So I say to those of my hon. Friends who are concerned about this issue: do not be fooled by the argument of the hon. Member for Woodspring that foundation trusts somehow advance the Tories' agenda, because the reverse is the case. Their agenda is self-evident: to make patients pay in a privatised system of care, and to pass NHS hospitals out of public ownership and into private ownership.

NHS foundation trusts would frustrate both of those Tory ambitions. Any future Conservative Government would not only have to pass an Act of Parliament to dismantle the NHS; they would have to legislate to take away direct ownership from the local communities in which it has been vested. NHS foundation trusts are a means not of weakening public ownership, but of strengthening it.

The hon. Gentleman now says that all hospitals should become foundation hospitals, and in time that may be a laudable enough ambition, but today, as he well knows, NHS trusts have very different starting points. Some would benefit from more freedom, and others from more support; frankly, a few need more central intervention.

As we set out in the NHS plan, the more performance improves among local health services, the more autonomy will be earned. That is why we plan that the first round of NHS foundation hospitals will be drawn from trusts that are rated "three star" next summer. As

more NHS trusts improve, more will be eligible to gain foundation status. There will be no arbitrary cap on the number of NHS foundation trusts.

Over time, NHS foundation trust status will become the norm for many—perhaps most—hospitals in the national health service. These are radical reforms and it is right they be taken step by step.

Mr. Dawson: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Milburn: No, I want to make progress and wind up, because I know that other hon. Members want to get in. It would be folly to believe that reforms can be delivered without resources, and it is self-evident that the NHS needs both. No party can claim with credibility as a reformer of public services if it is not also an investor in public services. The problem for the Liberal Democrat party is that it wants the investment but does not want the reform. The problem for the Conservative party is that it says that it wants reform, but it will not commit to investment. In fact, it is becoming increasingly clear that today's Conservative party appears hellbent not on reform of the health service, but on its wholesale abandonment. What other interpretation can be placed on its twists and turns on tax and spending during the Christmas period?

On the first day of this Tory turmoil—the morning of 22 December—the Leader of the Opposition was reported in *The Sunday Times* as saying that the Tories were going to talk more in 2003 about cutting spending. On the afternoon of the same day, the shadow Chancellor contradicted the Leader of the Opposition in an interview on the BBC. Six days later, the shadow Chief Secretary contradicted the shadow Chancellor with a proposal of a 20 per cent. cut in public services. On 31 December, the Leader of the Opposition contradicted the shadow Chancellor by supporting the position on spending cuts taken by the shadow Chief Secretary, who had himself contradicted the shadow Chancellor only a week before. Simultaneously, the Leader of the Opposition contradicted the shadow Chief Secretary by saying that the Conservatives are

"looking at the target of 20 per cent. savings across the board",

including, therefore, in health and education.

The hon. Member for Woodspring has the nerve to stand at the Disptach Box and talk about policy debates within the Government. There were more episodes of this Tory soap opera over the Christmas holidays than there were of "EastEnders". So where exactly does the hon. Gentleman stand? Does he back the 20 per cent. cuts or not? He is prepared to welcome Labour policy on foundation hospitals, but is he prepared to welcome the Conservative policy of 20 per cent. cuts in all NHS hospitals?

The Conservatives must be the only people in the country who believe that the best way to get more out of the health service is to put less into it. So this "changed" and "modernised" Conservative party—the self-proclaimed caring, sharing party of the vulnerable—offers us nothing but the oldest Tory policy in the book: cut back on public services, force more people to pay privately, provide tax perks for those who need them least, and offer poorer public services for those that need them most. The way forward for the NHS is a programme of investment and reform: high and sustained investment, and bold and radical reform. The Conservatives' programme is cutback and closure, Labour's is investment plus reform. It is our programme that will deliver improvement in the NHS.

1.49 pm

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): The internal Government memo leaked to the *Financial Times* said that there was an "immense risk" that the Government's NHS investment might be squandered. It said that the Department had to do more, that there has not been enough forethought and planning, that there is weakness in the primary care trusts and strategic health authorities set up by the Secretary of State, that the Department needs to get the right people into the right jobs faster—perhaps chilling words for the right hon. Gentleman—and that the Department was understaffed. Downing street has apparently responded saying that that was a sign of the Department's strength. That is a bizarre interpretation of the Department's criticism of itself.

There is no doubt that the NHS needs reform. The Secretary of State has an endearing way of saying that everyone with whom he disagrees is stupid and also that he is the way and the light, so that the only path to reform is through him. He is probably wrong on the former count, and certainly wrong on the latter. The Liberal Democrats have a specific programme of reform. The last time we debated these matters I invited the right hon. Gentleman to read up on the policy. I know that he is a busy man, and he may not be very interested, but he should not say that my party has no reform proposals until he has made the effort to read about them. No doubt he will want to criticise them, but ours is the only party with a clear and rational approach to delivering an accountable and efficient NHS. We want national targets to be abolished and funding, purchasing and strategic decision making to be radically decentralised to the regions and to local NHS bodies that are democratically accountable to people on normal local electoral rolls.

Mr. Milburn: On that basis, does the hon. Gentleman's party support foundation trusts?

Dr. Harris: I am talking about the commissioning side, which is where the power lies. We need democratically accountable decision making and commissioning, delivered through democratically elected local and regional bodies. We believe that NHS funding should be guaranteed through an earmarked NHS contribution that would replace national insurance contributions. The Secretary of State may disagree with those reform proposals, but he should not say that they do not exist.

Dr. Fox: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Harris: In a moment, as I am coming to a matter on which the hon. Gentleman may want to respond.

My party has also proposed that there should be a diversity of providers. I can assure the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) that we do not describe as privatisation his calls for a diversity of providers of NHS services. It is not who provides the service that matters,

[Dr. Harris]

but who pays for it. Equity is delivered best when a service is free at the point of delivery, but the Conservatives are going wrong in two respects. They have called for more self pay, and even for subsidy for more self pay, but that would mean that people with few resources who rely wholly on the NHS having to subsidise people who are well off or people who have at least some resources that they could put towards private health care.

If the better off are to be subsidised by resources that could be used for the least well-off, as the Conservatives propose, that would not be equitable. That is why we are worried about the creeping privatisation of the NHS that the Conservatives have proposed.

The hon. Member for Woodspring also demonstrated his failure to understand equity and health inequality in the way that he described health funding in Scotland. He has said consistently that he supports an increased focus on public health, but that assertion is preposterous unless he accepts that some areas of the country suffer from greater health need and inequality than others. That requires differential funding. The claim that Scotland and Wales receive more funding as a proportion of national wealth than France yet achieve worse outcomes is not reasonable.

Scotland and Wales should properly be compared with the least well-off areas of Frances that have the greatest health need. Every country has pockets of deprivation that have greater health needs and require more resources. In addition, there is always a time lag between making resources available and achieving results. That is why the improvements in cancer survival are due less to the efforts and best intentions of the Government than to changes in lifestyle instigated many years ago. Some of those changes even began under a Conservative Government.

Dr. Fox: I accept that there is always a time gap between investment or change and the outcomes that might be achieved. We have a problem with the standardised methodology for determining outcomes, but my point was that it says something about the process when there is a huge increase in expenditure and also an increase in waiting lists and times. The hon. Gentleman said that his party's policy was to introduce a hypothecated health tax. Which tax would he like to have hypothecated, or would he like a new tax to be levied? If the latter, which tax would that replace? Would it be set at a level that would provide higher or lower funding than the Government are providing at present, according to their own estimates?

Dr. Harris: That is a fair question, and I am grateful for the chance to respond briefly in what is a Conservative Opposition day debate. We propose that existing national insurance contributions should be earmarked for the health service, and that the funding from general taxation currently used for the health service would cover what is currently paid for by national insurance contributions. The proposed levels are in line with current Government spending proposals. If the NHS needs more resources for specific matters, our next election manifesto will describe how they will be made available. In addition, we propose that the national health contribution could vary according to region. People in each region could vote democratically to raise or lower that contribution. Moreover, our proposed system of local income taxation would be fairer than the council tax system and be more directly related to people's ability to pay. It would mean that the health and social care budgets, which we would merge at local level, could be increased—or, conceivably, decreased—through local demand at the ballot box.

Dr. Fox: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way a second time. The problem with national insurance is that one of the largest NHS user groups is made up of pensioners, who do not pay national insurance. Would he extend the new tax to pensioners?

Dr. Harris: The proposal is to modify existing taxation. Pensioners do not pay national insurance contributions, and they would not pay the proposed national health contribution. We do not believe that the people who use the health service should necessarily be the ones who have to pay for it. The Conservative party's psychology is that only those who use the NHS must pay for it sooner or later, directly or indirectly. It is a sign of civilisation that people who are better off should pay more, proportionately, even if they use the NHS less.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Harris: No, I want to make progress.

The problem with the Government's funding measures is one of delay, not with their global level overall. The Government must accept that they could have reached the targets set for five years into their 10-year plan if they had put the significantly increased resources that they are now putting in five years ago. They made the political decision not to tax better-off people more and to let patients wait longer. The elderly have been left to suffer and to linger in hospital beds when that was not necessary. Those patients have paid the price, as has today's health service. A huge amount of resources has been wasted on false economies. For example, agency nurses are paid three times over the odds to bring then back into a health service that they have left. Also, elderly people are kept unnecessarily in hospital beds. That is bad for their health and prevents other people from using the beds. Resources are wasted in many other ways, because the NHS has not been resourced properly.

Earlier, the hon. Member for Woodspring teased me about Denplan. It is a fair point, although he may have taken an opportunity to give that organisation a free advert, as I understand that it is partially based in his constituency. Clearly, that was only a malicious rumour, but he must understand that the Liberal Democrat party is not against private companies. We favour the free market and private enterprise, but we oppose private companies and private provision being supported at the expense of people who are not able to use them. We agree that people who can afford it should have the right to use private health care—and private education—but that right should not come at the expense of people who are less well off. That is the problem with the way the previous Conservative

Government eroded NHS dental care. It led to the growth of private dental plans and dental insurance that the poorest people in our society could never afford.

I have a series of questions about foundation hospitals for the Government. Many of these were rehearsed in an excellent debate secured by the hon. Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown) yesterday in Westminster Hall. I hope that we have an opportunity to hear more from her today.

One of our concerns is that the Government seem to believe that a financial incentive will motivate the NHS to do more. They seem to think that nurses and doctors enter their training and careers, with the long hours involved, in the belief that if their hospital were offered more cash prizes, they would work harder. That simply is not the case, and the right hon. Gentleman and the Government fundamentally misunderstand, in a counter-productive way, the motivation of people who work in the NHS and in public services generally. There is a series of paragraphs in his prospectus about cash payments by results. Bidding for cash prizes is another of his gimmicky policies. Not only does that simply smear the money around in a different way, it undermines morale in the health service. Its workers do not want to chase cash; they want to treat people on the basis of clinical priority.

The right hon. Gentleman talked about the supposed freedom of foundation hospitals, but that freedom is only for the few, not the many. Why should not such freedom—if it exists, and it certainly should not exist on the model of the foundation hospitals—be available to all?

The right hon. Gentleman chooses the lucky few to have what he considers to be this worthy status on the basis of the star rating system. It is hard to think of a worse basis upon which to choose—he would do better drawing lots. Those in the health service recognise that star ratings merely measure the ability of the NHS trust to jump through Government hoops, not their ability to treat patients well.

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that St. Helier hospital, in the constituency of the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Brake) obtained no stars in the first star rating? That was of great benefit to my constituents as, for the first time in years, it was acknowledged that their local hospital was not up to standard and needed to be improved. It was not a question of jumping through hoops but of nobody being able to get that point through to the people who ran the trust at the time.

Dr. Harris: If the hon. Lady looks at the history of the trust, she will see that it was subject to several ratings—the Government's flawed star rating system, which means very little, and, more worth while, a Commission for Health Improvement report which identified significant failures. Unfortunately, the Secretary of State is like a man with three watches. The Dr. Foster performance tables say one thing, the Commission for Health Improvement will say another, while the star rating systems will give an entirely different view. In the midlands and the London area, different ratings have been provided by each mechanism. The correct one, according to the right hon. Gentleman, takes away as much blame as possible from himself and directs it towards the trust.

Mr. Milburn: Which would the hon. Gentleman choose?

Dr. Harris: I would choose the Commission for Health Improvement's in-depth studies. *[Interruption.]* However, unfortunately, the Secretary of State has subverted the commission's studies by forcing it to inspect against his star rating system so even when he had a quality programme of inspection in which the health service could have confidence, he subverted it because of political priorities. The Commission for Health Improvement and the people who work in the health service recognise that as long as they are inspected against his political targets, standards are not being properly measured.

The Oxford Radcliffe NHS trust, which services my area, does not have worse doctors and nurses or poorer outcomes than anywhere else, but it did not achieve any stars. This was specifically because it was unable to admit patients as the local social services could not place people who were ready to leave and because some 120 beds were closed because of an inability to recruit nurses at the wages for which the Government are responsible. Simply to use the people working in the hospitals as a scapegoat misses the point.

Mr. Kevan Jones: Is the hon. Gentleman really suggesting that the people who carry out inspections are under political control? If so, could he give an example of where that has happened?

Dr. Harris: In the latest Bill—and, I suspect in the new Bill—the Commission for Health Improvement will be forced to inspect according to priorities and targets set by the Department of Health. The Secretary of State is not disagreeing with me. The targets will not be set according to public health indicators of general health outcomes—they will be ridiculous, such as the number of people waiting for procedures. That is a measure of activity and of the number of people using the service. It is not a measure of the amount of time that people wait, which is critical.

Furthermore, it is clear that foundation hospitals will not be free from Whitehall control. They will still be subject to Commission for Health Improvement inspections based on the targets and the star ratings. They should be inspected by the commission but should design their own rational, evidence-based and patient-centered outcomes rather than having to use the Government's politically centred and target-based outcomes.

Foundation hospitals will also be subject to performance management by commissioners. That is right and proper, but the commissioners are forced to measure the trust's performance against the Government's star rating targets.

The Secretary of State will have the power to remove foundation hospital status. That Damoclean sword hanging over the trusts gives the Secretary of State yet more power , so even when the right hon. Gentleman talks about freedom, he is not talking about genuine

[Dr. Harris]

freedom. Why has he not talked about devolving and decentralising power to the commissioning side of the NHS? The real power in a service with a commissioning-providing split should be with the commissioning side. Yet, as the hon. Member for Woodspring said, the right hon. Gentleman has refused to give any responsibility other than handling money—not decision making—to the primary care trust. He has failed to provide any democratic accountability even of the sham kind that he is proposing for foundation hospitals to that side of the commissioning-providing split.

Mr. Jones: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Harris: No, I would like to make progress, and the hon. Gentleman has had a go.

Is it right that foundation hospitals should be free to sell land—land that they have not bought but happen to have through serendipity, which really belongs to the entire NHS and therefore the public purse? Why should those foundation hospitals be given specific advantages to sell off land to use in their area?

The other inconsistency surrounds local pay. The Government said that there will be local pay flexibility but that there can and will be no poaching. How will that work? The Secretary of State has never given a satisfactory answer to me, Conservative Front Benchers or his own Back Benchers. Will people have to sign an affidavit when they change jobs for the perks that are available through local pay flexibility that they have not left another NHS employer or that if they have, they are not doing it for the purpose of benefiting from local pay flexibility?

I turn now to the good things about the Government's proposal—well, the good thing about the Government's proposal. *[Interruption.]* There is only one good thing about this proposal—the restriction on pay beds in these hospitals. The problem with pay beds in the NHS when NHS capacity is limited is that part of the capacity is thereby restricted solely to those who can afford to pay. There may be an argument when there is spare capacity for allowing people with resources to choose to have their private treatment in the NHS. It also helps to keep consultants in the NHS, if the Government are unable to get them to stick to their job plans. However, pay beds simply allow people to buy their way in ahead of the queue at the expense of those whose need is more urgent but who cannot afford to pay. Pay beds do not even bring in the extra resources that the Government claim they do.

Mr. Mark Simmonds (Boston and Skegness): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the ability of foundation or other hospitals to treat private patients would generate revenue that could then be transferred to the treatment of additional national health service patients?

Dr. Harris: I have just said that that is not the case. When I asked a hospital in my area what proportion of its operations were given over to paying patients in its private wing, the answer was 20 per cent. I asked what the net income to the hospital was. It is very difficult to find that out from answers to parliamentary questions; if the Government are going to stick to a baseline, they have to publish it sooner rather than later. The hospital said that the net income to the hospital was 6 per cent. So it is sacrificing 20 per cent. of its NHS capacity for 6 per cent. of its income. That does not make sense, even in Conservativeland.

In the Barber memo, the Government state that a productivity improvement of about 15 per cent. is needed. Will the Secretary of State explain the difference between the 15 per cent. efficiency gain per pound spent, currently being demanded by Labour masters, and the efficiency gains that he decried when he was in opposition?

In conclusion, the Government seek, as new Labour always does, to have it both ways—to be all things to all people—*[Interruption.]* I am glad that Conservative Front-Bench Members agree.

On democratic accountability, the Government are choosing weird electorates, based on an opt-in process, instead of using existing democratically accountable local authorities or regional bodies. The Government claim to be devolving, but they are not offering true freedom—they are simply devolving the blame. They are giving new status to the provider side, but they are not decentralising decision making or giving freedom to the commissioning side. On flexibility, they say that, yes, there will be local pay, yet there will be no poaching.

On the one hand, the Government say that these new beasts will be free from Whitehall control while, on the other, they will still be subject to targets and star ratings through the CHI and commissioning performance management. The more that the Secretary of State describes his policy on foundation hospitals, the more muddled and inconsistent it becomes. In trying to please the right-wing free marketeers in 10 Downing street while appeasing Labour rebels loyal to 11 Downing street, the right hon. Gentleman is trying to have it both ways and will end up satisfying no one but himself—and he looks very satisfied.

The fundamental problem is that foundation hospitals are neither truly free nor locally accountable and that, to the extent that they have flexibility, they are divisive. In the light of the memo from Michael Barber expressing concern about the potential failure to deliver on health targets, we can see what a failure the policy on foundation hospitals is: flawed proposals, inadequately defended by a rattled and increasingly desperate Secretary of State.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. May I remind the House that there is a 15-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches, which operates from now?

2.12 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): As we debate this Tory motion, it is worth reminding the House that the national health service is by a long distance the most popular institution in the country. It is certainly at least twice as popular as the Tory party. Indeed, it is more popular at present than the Tory party ever was—even at the height of its popularity. That is why the Tories have two problems when they are talking

about the NHS. First, most people do not believe what the Tories say and, secondly, most people remember their record.

For a start, the Tories opposed the establishment of the NHS. Then, because it proved so successful and popular, they could never dare make a frontal attack on it and resorted, over decades, to a policy of malign interference. The Tories left the national health service short of money, short of staff, short of beds and short of modern equipment. Almost the only thing the NHS was not short of under the Tories was reorganisation, reform and modernisation. The Tories delivered reorganisation to the health service by the bucketload: endless rounds of structural change that achieved little or nothing while consuming resources and distracting staff from the priority of treating patients.

That placed a huge burden on the staff. They became—and remain—sick to death of structural change for the sake of it. The whole country owes NHS staff a huge debt of gratitude, because the health service was kept alive during the Tory years only by the commitment of its staff, their dedication to the public service ethic and their resistance to the Tory introduction of competition.

Now, the Tories are at it again. Not content with a double whammy—as invented by a former chair of the Tory party—they have come up with a triple whammy. They want to cut NHS funding by 20 per cent. They want to go over to a funding system that is more expensive and less cost-effective than the present one and to break up the NHS in preparation for privatisation.

Where do the Tories' ideas come from? They say that we should imitate Europe. That really takes the biscuit. The most anti-European party of modern times, the knee-jerk Eurosceptics, are saying that we must imitate Europe. Apparently, they claim to have been on a European study tour. It is clear that rather more touring than studying went on, because they appear to have missed the fact that while they were in government investment in health care in Europe was far higher than it was in this country.

The Tories have also missed the fact that the level of tax in Britain is lower than it is in most European countries. Never mind that, they say. Spend less on the NHS, they say. British people pay too much tax, they say. Let us force the British people to pay tax and also take out private medical insurance, they say—and they say it as though private medical insurance came free. However, private medical insurance does not come free; it costs money. What people do not pay on the taxation swings, they have to pay on the private insurance roundabout.

The Tories have come up with a real gem of a popular policy for the British people: pay tax and top it up by paying for private health care—in other words, top-up fees for the NHS. What the Tories are talking about means more money being spent on the bureaucracy of insurance cover; an extra burden on business as firms feel obliged to pay insurance cover for their employees, thus eliminating one of our advantages as a centre of attraction for inward investment; and people's health cover being dependent on private insurers—presumably such as Equitable Life or Britannic Assurance.

On top of that, the Tories have seized on the idea for foundation hospitals because they see it as leading to the introduction of competition in the health service and the break-up of the NHS. They see the establishment of foundation hospitals as a big step down their road of privatisation.

That is no surprise, of course, because the Tories want to privatise the NHS. They stand for competition, elitism and privilege. They always have and they always will. However, what surprises and, indeed, saddens me is that it is our Labour Government who are proposing foundation hospitals—a system in which some hospitals will deliberately be given advantages over neighbouring ones, inevitably leading to a two-tier service.

Some of the articles and speeches in favour of foundation hospitals state that they represent traditional socialist values in a modern setting—not just new Labour but new socialism. Some of those articles note that the Tories will not oppose foundation hospitals, which has certainly been confirmed today. The House may call me old-fashioned, but it has never occurred to me that Tory support for an idea was a touchstone of its socialist nature.

I freely admit that part of my objection to foundation hospitals is ideological. That is one reason that my views are shared by most people in the Labour party and, of course, why they are not shared by the Tory party. However, most of my case against foundation hospitals—

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Dobson: No, not for a moment—partly because Wales is not yet threatened with foundation hospitals and my hon. Friend would be talking about theory while we are talking about something that may in practice damage our constituents.

Mr. Jones: In that case, may I again ask my right hon. Friend to give way?

Mr. Dobson: No, I shall not give way.

Most of my case against foundation hospitals is not ideological but strictly practical. That is why that case is shared by most people working in the NHS and opposed by the Tories.

The starting point for any discussion of the future of the NHS must be the recognition that two decades of Tory failure to train enough doctors, nurses, midwives and therapists means that those skilled professionals will be in short supply for many years to come. That is unavoidable. For as long as that shortage exists, to give financial and other advantages to some hospitals can only be at the expense of neighbouring hospitals, because there is no surplus. For example, the chief executive of University College hospital in my constituency is desperate that it should become a foundation trust. If that comes about and the hospital can consequently offer better pay and working conditions, it will inevitably attract scarce staff from neighbouring hospitals that also serve my constituency—perhaps from the Royal Free, the Whittington, Barts or Great Ormond Street. The same will apply in every part of the country in which a

[Mr. Dobson]

foundation hospital is established. The best may get better as a result, but that can only be at the expense of the rest.

Ms Drown: One of the unanswered questions put in the debate in Westminster Hall yesterday related to extra pay being given to foundation trust staff. Does my right hon. Friend think that it would be appropriate for all the neighbouring trusts to have to sign off any differences from the national pay structure to ensure that staff were not pinched by other trusts?

Mr. Dobson: I must admit that that had not occurred to me, but it seems that that is very difficult territory. Let us suppose that University College hospital had a vacancy. I cannot see how, in employment law, someone who wanted to apply for that vacancy could be stopped from doing so, irrespective of whom they were working for. As to the effect of the pay deal, I will need to think about that.

There is a danger that the foundation hospitals will reintroduce competition into the national health service and set hospital against hospital. That is what we promised to get rid of, which we have done. It would not even be fair competition, however, as it would be a handicap race in which the least favoured horses carried the heaviest handicaps, which would be contrary to Jockey Club rules. That cannot be right, which is why I cannot support it.

Besides getting extra funding, the Secretary of State says rightly that foundation hospitals should be free from central direction and control, with fewer Government targets, less interference and less earmarking of extra funds. I agree with that, and I must plead guilty that some of that interference started when I was Secretary of State for Health. I was becoming a little dubious about some of that by the time I resigned, although I must say, from observation, that there has been rather more of it since. My point to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State—he is my friend—is that interference and central direction is not just a burden for the best hospitals; it is a burden for all of them. The argument must therefore be to ease up on all of them, except for perhaps one or two desperate cases. Above all, we should try to let them get on with their job, give them a chance to settle down with the changes that have been made so far, and allow them to concentrate on dealing with patients.

The NHS needs change, but it does not need more structural change; it is sick to death of that. We need local, practical changes to help the clinical staff to do their job that include new and better ways of running clinics and dealing with out-patients; help in reducing cross-infections; relieving clinical staff of necessary clerical work, which the Tories forced on to them when they got rid of legions of clerks in the health service; reducing assaults on staff; and providing what the Tories singularly failed to provide—a modern IT system that serves the needs of patients and staff. Those are vital, local, long-term improvements. Greatly to his credit, my right hon. Friend is getting on with many of those things, and he and all his officials should be concentrating on that. He should ignore the anonymous advisers who have an obsession with continuous change. They are like a collection of Maoists driven by the concept of continuous revolution.

Mr. Milburn: Trotskyists.

Mr. Dobson: I thought that, too. Perhaps the Secretary of State knows more about Trotsky than I do, but I was told that it was Mao who devised that theory. Whoever is the source of that influence, it is out of place among Downing street advisers.

One of the problems with the constant effort towards change is that we are seeing doubts growing about the Government's overall intentions. Foundation hospitals are being linked in the minds of sensible people with the franchising-out of national health service hospitals that are in trouble, or the franchising-out of new diagnostic and treatment centres. That is beginning to look like ending the commitment to a national service and a move towards a mixed economy in health care, blurring what has up to now been a clear distinction between the Labour party and the Tories.

There is no logic in the Tories' position. They say that the present system is fundamentally wrong, but if the best hospitals are doing really well under the existing system, that shows that it is not fundamentally wrong, as it can produce first-rate performances. The Government apparently accept that, but they are saying that they will give new status to the successful while expecting the unsuccessful to catch up using the existing system. It seems to me, therefore, that the Government are placing even more faith in the existing system than anybody else has done hitherto. If they have faith in the existing system, surely we should stick to it.

Many of the problems that we face spring from the adherence to the concept of choice and diversity. There can only be a real choice for everybody if there is a surplus, but there is no surplus of staff or beds. Most patients are not looking for choice. As I have said before, someone who lives in Leicester wants one of the hospitals in Leicester to provide first-rate care; they do not want the choice of going to a foundation hospital in Nottingham.

Mr. Dawson: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Dobson: No. I do not have much time, and I want to make progress.

In addition, the establishment of foundation hospitals will cause great trouble for general practitioners, who will be faced with patients who say, "I do not want to go to the local hospital, I want to go to the foundation hospital down the road." That will not be of overall benefit. I come back to the point that we ought to let people in the NHS get on with their jobs, and ignore the anonymous, Maoist—or Trotskyist—advisers at No. 10. They have not even learned the lessons of the waste of time and money when the Tories were in charge, and of constant, repeated reorganisation on top of reorganisation. They should learn lessons from the Tories, not repeat their mistakes.

I urge my right hon. Friend to carry on with the practical measures that he is introducing, which go right across the board in an effort to improve our health system, and to ignore the option of individualised,

specialised treatment for a limited number of privileged hospitals. Whether he intends it or not, the latter option is bound to bring about a two-tier service, which will damage the national health service and blur the distinction between our party and its wonderful record on the health service and the Tories and their abominable record.

2.17 pm

Mr. Stephen Dorrell (Charnwood): I hope that the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) will not misunderstand me if I say that his speech had an air of familiarity about it. It is fair to say that he and I have exchanged arguments on similar subjects across the Floor of the House of Commons for more than decade; in truth, we have argued about exactly this policy for more than a decade. What has changed this afternoon is that the Secretary of State has swapped sides in the argument.

The right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras has been as consistent as I have been; he has argued against the establishment of, first, NHS trusts and, now, foundation hospitals. I have argued, first, for the establishment of NHS trusts, and I shall go on to argue in support of the principle of foundation hospitals today. In doing so, I shall take the opportunity to welcome the Secretary of State as a turncoat from the arguments that have just been advanced by the former Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, to the arguments that were first advanced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) when he was Secretary of State in 1989.

The reality is that the analysis that has led the Secretary of State to advance the policy of foundation hospitals is exactly the same as that which led my right hon. and learned Friend to advance essentially the same policy through the NHS reforms of 1990. The right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras understands that, as does the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), the Chairman of the Select Committee, who has made clear his opposition to the Secretary of State's policy. What is also clear, although the Secretary of State was less explicit about it this afternoon, is that he understands it.

When the right hon. Gentleman was speaking to a meeting of health service representatives on 22 May last year, he described the NHS trust policy of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe as "a halfway house". If that is the case, the obvious question is what it is halfway between. The truth is that the Secretary of State is being more ambitious in espousing the arguments that led to the establishment of NHS trusts than were the Government of whom I was a member, and I plead guilty to that charge.

The Secretary of State's critique of NHS trusts is that they are not sufficiently free from external centralised control. The system that we set up, which was freer from those controls than the system that went before, is now dismissed as a halfway house. I offer him the thought that the challenge that he should embrace is to show, when he has completed the delivery and implementation of his policy, not that trusts were a halfway house but that they were short of being a halfway house. Let him be more bold. Let him try to get more than double the distance away from the policy as it was before trusts were established.

In short, I agree with the Secretary of State's analysis, and I congratulate him on it, of one of the key problems on what we used to call the provider side of the NHS. It is that one of the major failings of the health service, pre- and post-trusts, is that the degree of central control stifles innovation and the efficient use of resources. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will agree with me that that is true not only of big acute hospital trusts but of the whole delivery of health care within the NHS, including community trusts, mental health care and care for those with learning disabilities. We must not be seduced by the big-budget acute hospitals.

Mr. Dobson: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that there is a huge amount of innovation throughout the health service, and that the biggest problem is identifying good innovation and getting other people to take it up?

Mr. Dorrell: I agree that there is a huge amount of innovation in the health service, but I share with the Secretary of State the ambition to see more innovation because I do not believe that the health service is changing fast enough to keep up with the opportunities that exist in the delivery of modern health care.

From his speeches, the Secretary of State seems to believe that we need a freer regime in the delivery of health care. He understands that that reflects European experience. The right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras was dismissive of that, but it is an important, powerful argument that while almost all other west European countries accept, as we do, the objective of delivering health care on the basis of clinical need without regard to ability to pay, they are better at delivering that policy. The Secretary of State has noticed that and is trying to apply those lessons here. He has a long way to go, but he has started, and I welcome that.

Angela Eagle (Wallasey): Since the right hon. Gentleman is praying in aid Europe, does he agree that European systems have a much higher tax base and spend more money? Does he therefore agree with his Front-Bench colleagues who want to make a 20 per cent. cut in health spending?

Mr. Dorrell: I strongly agree with the proposition that every continental European system spends a larger share of national income on health care than we do. The part of the lesson that the Secretary of State, wherever he is—he has a national health service to run—has not yet learned is that European systems can teach us how to liberalise not only the provision of health care but the demand side of the service, so as to get more resources into health care.

My focus this afternoon is on those parts of the Government's policy on foundation hospitals with which I agree. The Secretary of State has learned from the European experience and from the basic principle that is evident in the management of large organisations the world over: the more that one delegates and gives people responsibility for the services that they deliver, the more innovation and efficient use of resources one gets.

The Secretary of State is also committing himself to the reform of the public sector that the Prime Minister described as one of the most difficult challenges that his

[Mr. Dorrell]

Government faces. He said, and this must have been two years ago, that his back already bore the scars inflicted by the opponents of public sector reform. One result of the Secretary of State's policy is that the Prime Minister can now at least see who his enemies are—the enemies of public sector reform. They are the 109 Labour MPs who do not accept the logic of the Government's policy.

Those Members are a small minority in the rest of the community, because for most people who are interested in the delivery of health care in this country and the rest of the world, the arguments that the Secretary of State has now accepted have been a commonplace for well over a decade. However, there are still 109 Labour MPs who do not accept them. The right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras and the hon. Member for Wakefield have already made clear their opposition, and we are led to believe that the Chancellor of the Exchequer is not persuaded by those arguments. The Prime Minister can now at least know who his enemies are—those to whom he referred as having already inflicted scars on his back.

Moving from the broad strategy to the detail, because the devil is in the detail of this policy, I want to focus on what I believe is the key question that will determine whether the Secretary of State's logic for greater devolution and greater freedoms for NHS foundation trusts will be carried through in practice. The key question at the heart of the policy is whether what we will be asked to introduce is, in the end, simply a different way of running state hospitals or whether it is a genuine commitment to introduce a new type of institution.

The Secretary of State's speech last May, to which I have already referred, is ambiguous on that subject. He said:

"In particular there has been a growing interest in recent years in developing the concept of a public interest company—a middle ground within public services between state-run public and shareholder-led private structures."

How far down the road to a genuinely new type of institution are the Government prepared to go? I strongly believe that the Government need to be bold and to go as far as possible. That is the test that will need to be applied to the legislation when it is published.

The accountability for the new foundation hospitals has to be seen to operate through the commissioning process and to apply to people who are close to the patient, rather than through the bureaucracy and the command and control system inherited from the old health service. Ministers have to ask themselves, and they must have a crystal-clear answer, what is the core activity of the NHS. I am very clear about what I believe it ought to be. It ought to be the delivery to patients of care on the basis of clinical need. The NHS ought to be a commissioning-led service. Frankly, the management of hospitals and of the delivery of health care, including community-based care, is a secondary consideration. If the NHS is to deliver its promise of equitable access to health care, it is the commissioning and the provision of access that is key, not the management of hospitals. That is why hospital management needs to be seen to be freer from the command and control system.

It is still totally unclear where the balance of this argument will ultimately come to lie. The Government's latest publication on the issue was published in December and is entitled "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts", and it says that four clear principles will be set out in legislation. I strongly agree with the principles that there should be

"a primary purpose of providing health and related services for the benefit of NHS patients and the community"

and that the foundation trusts should

"act in accordance with NHS values."

Other activities should be limited

"to those that are conducive to and not detrimental to achievement of the primary purpose",

and we should ensure that

"assets, and any surpluses an NHS Foundation Trust makes, are applied solely to the primary purpose."

Those are four good, strong simple principles with which I strongly agree.

However, we must understand how the balance between those principles and commissioning is affected by the licensing process that the Government are introducing in the middle. The role of the independent regulator can easily undermine to the point of destruction the Government's objectives as stated in their policy. On that point, the December document gives cause for concern.

The first item that the Government have seen fit to identify as being a function of the licensing system is the

"limits on the provision of services to private patients."

We can all agree that it is a statistical fact that private patients are a relatively small part of NHS activity, but I take no comfort whatever from the fact that that is the first bullet point and the first objective listed for the licensing system. I do not understand why that is part of the licensing function at all when one of the basic principles that I have already mentioned says that other activities can be carried on only if they

"are conducive to and are not detrimental to"

the primary purpose of the foundation. Any further limit on the services to private patients is otiose.

The second bullet point is perhaps more fundamental in terms of the concerns that it raises. The licensing system will also deal with the clinical services that the foundation

"must provide to the local community".

If the independent regulator has carte blanche to address all the questions of what is the right type of clinical service to provide to a local community, what is the purpose of the commissioning system? That is what commissioning must be about. I agree with very little of what the Liberal Democrats' spokesman said, but I strongly agreed with him on the point that the key to success of the policy is strong commissioning. He advocated strong commissioning, and I would add that that is the natural partner of greater freedoms for the delivery of health care. The Government need to develop and publish clear thinking about the role of the independent regulator. The policy will be successful in direct proportion to the strength of commissioning and the relatively limited nature of the licensing system.

I am not arguing that no licensing system is necessary, but that the commissioning system, and not the licensing system, must be the principal focus of decision making. That extends to all the points that my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) made about borrowing limits and poaching.

It is not a coincidence that there is a big debate in the Labour party about the introduction of foundation hospitals at the same time as there is a debate about the future evolution of university policy. The freedoms that the Secretary of State has rightly identified as necessary for the delivery of health care in the health service are exactly the same freedoms that need to be introduced in the schools system—indeed, we introduced them into that system through the grant-maintained schools idea—and that need to be developed in the university sector to allow the universities proper freedoms in the use of resources and the delivery of services to their client groups.

The Government must undertake a bold new reform of the delivery of services across the public sector. The gold standard—to use a phrase from the educational world—that the Department of Health should expect is no less freedom for an NHS foundation than the freedom that is accorded to the universities with which many of the foundation hospitals are closely associated through medical schools. I hope that, when the policy is finally implemented, universities and big NHS trusts—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

2.45 pm

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell), who always makes an interesting speech. I did not agree with much of what he said, but he is one of the declining number of Tory Members who believe in the basic principles of the NHS. His time in the Department showed his concern for the health service, and I appreciate that. I recall many happy hours arguing with him about the internal market.

This is an Opposition day debate, but it is worth remarking on the fact that six Conservative Back Benchers are present and three of them are possibly here because they wish to make leadership bids. I wonder what Tory Members do with their time. It is their debate, so I would have expected far more interest in it from them.

Dr. Stoate: They are still at lunch.

Mr. Hinchliffe: They may have had a good lunch. It is not quite 3 o'clock, so they are probably still at lunch. *[Interruption.]* I will get on with it. Conservatives might be embarrassed by the fact that they have to defend their party when it is committed to a 20 per cent. cut in resources.

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Hinchliffe: The hon. Gentleman might try to contradict me, but, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State pointed out, it is pretty clear from the comments that were made over Christmas that the Conservative party is looking at significant savings in the public sector. I listened with interest to the comments of the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox). He referred to seeing the NHS dismantled. *[Interruption.]* He used the term "dismantled" in his speech, so it is interesting that this debate gives us an opportunity to consider where the Tories would go on the NHS.

I start with the basic belief that the NHS was the finest social policy achievement in this country in the 20th century. It established basic principles that are at the core of a decent society. They relate to how we treat the sick, and the NHS was the Labour party's greatest achievement. It is one reason why many of us on these Benches are members of the Labour party. I am proud to be a member of the party that created the NHS.

However, 54 years on from the NHS's introduction, it is worth reflecting on some of its positive and negative aspects. I accept that we have faced problems in those 54 years, and we must consider where we are now. First—this is relevant to the current debate—there has always been a democratic deficit in the NHS and the ownership issue is worthy of debate, even in the context of foundation proposals with which I am not entirely happy. There have been unforeseen medical advances and, consequently, costs and expectations have risen. Another problem that I have mentioned constantly and with which I have bored some of my colleagues to death is the failure to integrate health and social care. That is a factor in continuing difficulties with our health care system.

There has also been a failure to exploit the immense potential of primary care. It is worth remembering that, in the 1940s when the NHS was introduced, health centres were viewed as a key element of bringing the service together locally. We have never managed to deliver on that all these years later. I am delighted that, in my area and elsewhere, that concept is gradually, at long last, coming together.

Throughout the 54 years, one of the problems has been the dominance of the hospital sector. It saddens me that today's entire debate is geared to the hospital sector. We must understand that one of the fundamental failings of our health care system has been the way in which we have allowed ourselves to be drummed into believing that health is about hospitals. The picture goes much wider than that, and it saddens me that the Opposition's motion focuses solely on the hospital sector. That is evidence of a very narrow view of what health is all about.

It is incredible that the motion accuses the Government of creating a two-tier NHS. Talk about brass neck, as they say in my part of the world. The Conservatives are, of course, experts on two-tierism. It was a key concern in some of the debates that I had with the right hon. Member for Charnwood when the internal market was introduced. I compared the treatment available to my constituents in Wakefield with the treatment available in Leeds when we had postcode prescribing. The Government are trying to move away from that and they have achieved a number of successes.

I remember being phoned by a non-fundholding GP. She was concerned because when her patients rang the hospital to find out when they would be admitted, they were asked, "Are you a patient of a fundholding GP or a non-fundholding GP?" The simple fact was that patients of fundholding GPs, with more resources than

[Mr. Hinchliffe]

the health authority, were admitted in advance of their next-door neighbours with similar conditions. So the Tories know all about two-tierism.

Dr. Stoate: On fundholding GPs, before I came to the House I had a patient who was seriously ill with an acute form of leukaemia. When I phoned the hospital to get that person admitted as an emergency, I was asked whether I was a fundholding GP. As I was not, I was told that there would at the very least be severe complications in getting that person treated that day.

Mr. Hinchliffe: My hon. Friend must therefore understand why some of us are concerned never to replicate the experience of two-tierism that we had under the Conservative party. We do not want to return to a situation in which there is competition between NHS providers.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Hinchliffe: No. My hon. Friend is from Wales and has nothing whatsoever to do with the issue because there will be no foundation hospitals—

Mr. Jones: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Can you confirm that the Bill is an England-Wales Bill—*[Interruption.]* It is an England-Wales debate, and as such every hon. Member has an equal right to speak.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: As the hon. Gentleman acknowledged, we are not dealing with a Bill. This is an Opposition motion with a Government amendment. If he waits his turn, he may catch the eye of the occupant of the Chair.

Mr. Hinchliffe: I mean no disrespect to my hon. Friend, but it has been made clear that foundation hospitals will not be introduced in Wales. If a foundation hospital in Bristol takes staff from his hospital in Cardiff, he might understand our concerns. However, if we were debating rugby in Wales, I would be happy to assist him with some of its current problems.

I welcome the serious steps taken by the Government to address the two-tierism that they inherited from the Conservatives. I welcome the advent of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence and its ability to consider the merits of treatment. It also ensures that there is consistency in prescription and the offering of treatments to individual patients. I welcome what is happening with primary care trusts, the collaboration between GPs at local level and the emphasis on primary care, which arises directly from the introduction of the trusts. I welcome the statutory duty of co-operation. My right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) mentioned that. It is exactly what the health service should be about. I also welcome the emphasis on quality, which interestingly has not been mentioned. The Government have taken serious steps to deal with quality problems in the NHS. The Health Committee picks up on quality issues and I appreciate the Government's attempts to deal with some of the difficulties.

There are a number of concerns about foundation hospitals. I am attracted to the discussion on placing NHS governance in the hands of local communities. I have argued for that for many years. If it is okay for foundation hospitals, why not for PCTs? The principle surely applies elsewhere in the health service. We should consider that. NHS governance and the foundation model are two separate issues. I am attracted to one but, frankly, not to the other. The foundation model is inconsistent with the positive broad direction of Government policy, which is travelling towards primary and community care. It is moving away from the dominance and power of the hospital sector towards the grassroots health workers in the community who know what patients want because they are nearer to them. The other direction of travel has been towards co-operation and collaboration and away from the internal market. It strikes me that a Conservative idea has emerged in the Red Box of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in Richmond house.

The Health Committee went to Sweden a couple of weeks ago. We saw its foundation model, which was introduced after a Conservative county council election victory. I should tell the House that the county councils in Sweden run the hospital sector. The foundation hospital was working in isolation and the links that I would expect from the acute sector in this country were not present. The hon. Member for Woodspring welcomed the foundation concept before Christmas. He said that it was

"laying the groundwork for the model which a future Conservative Government would like to see . . . it was a more market orientated approach."

It strikes me as something of a Trojan horse if it is a future Tory market model of health care. I am worried because the NHS began after the second world war, during a time of great reform and concerns about what the country had gone through. At the time, Britain recognised that a market system could never deliver basic decent principles of health care on the basis of need.

The Health Committee has agreed to undertake an inquiry into foundation hospitals. There will certainly be marked differences of opinion among Committee members who approach the problem from different perspectives. There are several key issues. The first is the apparent inconsistency with wider Government policy, most of which I strongly support and commend. The second is the impact on the wider NHS. My right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras illustrated that for London, and I can say the same for west Yorkshire. It is highly likely that the three-star Bradford hospital will become a foundation hospital. That will have an impact on Leeds, Huddersfield, Wakefield and all surrounding areas. We should be concerned about that, especially in relation to staffing. I also fear the impact of the freedoms proposed. They will result in relative deprivation for some areas. I do not expect that from a Labour Government.

The Government do listen to concerns. I can think of many examples of the health team commendably listening to Back Benchers. I hope that they listen to the serious concerns within the parliamentary Labour party and to the outcome of the Health Committee's inquiry.

2.57 pm

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): I have declared my interests in the register.

The test I apply to a health policy is this: will it be good for my constituents? I am a strong supporter of the NHS and its principles. I want all my constituents who need health care to get access to it in a timely way. I want them to receive high-quality care that is free at the point of need and use. I regret the way in which such debates are characterised by Labour Members, who make futile and inaccurate attacks on the Conservatives. Many of us are children of the NHS. We have received our care and attention from the NHS when we have needed it. The Conservatives have a long record in government of increasing money to the NHS year after year. We never privatised it or attacked it in the way that Labour Members claim, yet they are still peddling the same old nonsense.

Nor is it the case that Conservative Front-Bench spokesmen are wedded to 20 per cent. cuts across the board. I have seen a comment by the shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury, who would not be doing his job if he were not looking for ways to improve and reduce spending, that he would like to find examples of wasteful spending that he could cut by 20 per cent. I am happy to recommend one to him from my area. I should like him to get rid of more than 20 per cent. of the regional government that is being foisted upon us. It is totally unnecessary and completely wasteful. I would rather have more nurses and doctors than more bureaucrats in Guildford misrepresenting our views and getting in our way.

I am delighted that the Royal Berkshire hospital, which serves my constituency and adjacent ones, received substantially larger sums in successive years under Conservative Administrations and has received more money under the Labour Administration. I am confident that when a Conservative Government are elected, they will not cut the amount of money going to that hospital, but that they will accept the budgets they inherit and see the need to continue to increase them, as they always did in the past. I wish that that were common ground between the parties.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): The right hon. Gentleman says that the 20 per cent. cut in public services proposed by his party over Christmas would not affect the health service. What does he say to the member of the shadow Cabinet quoted in *The Sunday Telegraph*—

Mr. Burns: It says here.

Caroline Flint: Yes, it does say here, in *The Sunday Telegraph* of 29 December:

> "It is a question of credibility. It is simply not believable to say that we can cut spending by 20 per cent. simply by removing waste and bureaucracy."

Does not that suggest that some of the 20 per cent. cut will attack public services, including the health service?

Mr. Redwood: No, it does not suggest that at all. I repeat my firm promise and expectation that the policy, when announced in the run-up to the election, will not include a single cut to a hospital such as the Royal Berkshire hospital, and that our pledge to increase the number of nurses, doctors and other important medical staff in hospitals will need to be renewed. I am sure that we will want to employ all those whom we inherit, and I am equally sure that we will discover that there are not enough. That is because almost six years into a Labour Government—a Government who came to power pledged to save the NHS—we discover that the Royal Berkshire hospital is still chronically short of beds, consultants and nurses, waiting times are unacceptably long, and sometimes even the quality of care suffers because of the pressures the medical staff are under. I would dearly love the Government to sort that problem out. I thought that the one thing that a Labour Government might do for my local area was get enough money into the hospital to enable it to hire the staff needed, but, unfortunately, they have not done so.

When evaluating foundation hospitals, I ask myself whether they might be the answer. I find that difficult to judge yet, because of the paucity of information and the complexity of and imperfections in the details that have so far come before us. Sometimes, I wake up thinking, yes, foundation hospitals could be the answer—they could be real reform, providing the freedom we need to manage our hospital locally and the opportunity to raise money from private sources if we cannot get enough from public sources. On other occasions, when I hear Labour Ministers and spokesmen and read the conflicting details that emerge, I think that foundation hospitals will be merely an expensive charade.

What is needed to make the policy work? First, I would like my hospital and others like it to be eligible, regardless of star ratings. If it makes sense to free good hospitals, would it not make sense to free hospitals that are not doing well within the current structure, to see whether local management would be better than highly centralised management? I would like foundation status to be available to any group that wanted to improve the hospital and to exercise freedoms, whatever their current star rating.

Secondly, I would like genuine freedom to be given to those that gain foundation hospital status to borrow against their assets as well as against their revenue stream. An artificial distinction has been drawn. Today, we heard the Secretary of State say that it would be quite wrong to allow foundation hospitals to borrow against their assets, because the wicked capitalists might, in certain circumstances, then take the assets away, but it is perfectly reasonable to let them borrow against their revenue stream. I cannot see how that type of technical nitpicking will work in practice.

Dr. Stoate: The right hon. Gentleman believes that all hospitals should be given the opportunity to become foundation hospitals. Is he suggesting that even hospitals that are manifestly failing to deliver a reasonable service should be given those freedoms, without any sorts of checks and balances to prevent their failing their local communities even more than some are doing currently?

Mr. Redwood: I do not think that they would fail their communities more. I think that they would fail them less if they had more freedom. Much of the failure derives from central control, direction, intervention and bureaucracy, which is well above the heads of local

[Mr. Redwood]

management. That must be the Secretary of State's view, because he now wishes to trust local management more.

Next, I want real democracy to surround the idea of members of a foundation hospital. Some Labour Members are on to that real difficulty in the Government's position, and I am sure that they will not be satisfied by the Secretary of State's argument, which is that people should have to volunteer to be members of the hospital. That would mean that small groups of people who are motivated in a certain way—not necessarily by the public interest or the interests of everyone else—could take over a foundation hospital and, through the lethargy and inertia of everyone else, gain control over extremely important assets.

If we are to take the democratic route—there is much to recommend doing so—it must be done as a democracy of all the people in the area served by the hospital. That surely means using the electoral roll and having elections to the board of those institutions. I suggest, for cost reasons, holding them at the same time and in parallel with elections to the local council, so that the normal democratic apparatus can be used without much being added to the cost burden.

It would be far more democratic to provide the chance to cast a vote when making important choices about people who will offer guidance in an important sector of public service, and thus influence the lives of those who need health care, to the electorate as a whole than to give it only to self-selecting and self-interested groups of people. I do not want my local hospital to become a foundation hospital based on a limited number of people who expressed an interest because they happened to be in the right place on the right day to see an advertisement in the newspaper. I want democratic involvement to be extended far more broadly, to all the electors in the area, who are, after all, the paymasters of the organisation because they pay the taxes.

Mr. Dawson: How would the right hon. Gentleman achieve the involvement of my constituents who live in the rural Over Wyre area, who have a great allegiance to and need to use the services of the excellent Blackpool Victoria hospital, but who do not live within its immediate area?

Mr. Redwood: That is an interesting complexity, but I would be democratically generous and give them a vote in the affairs of any foundation hospital that served their area. That might mean their having a vote in respect of more than one foundation hospital, which brings me neatly to my third important point.

In some of the Government's rhetoric I have noted words and phrases that I find a little surprising, but welcome—those attacking what they call "the monolith". When, before I became a Minister, I wrote a pamphlet setting out why I thought the NHS monolith had many defects and was rather old-fashioned, Labour was horrified. Now, we discover that that is language that both the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Health are happy to use, but they must think through what they are saying, which is that it is the monopoly elements of the NHS that are serving patients badly. I agree with that.

One of my disappointments is that amalgamations, mergers and closures under Governments of both parties over the past 20 years have resulted in my area having, in effect, only one hospital offering services. I would prefer a variety of hospitals of different shapes, sizes and styles offering different choices. I deeply regret the closure of many of the smaller hospitals, maternity hospitals and accident and emergency centres. Under Governments of both parties, the argument ran that the health service needed to specialise, concentrate and create those large monopolies, but monopolies are not the normal mode of operation in other sectors of public service. I therefore want the Government to extend their dislike of monoliths and to understand that what we need are foundation hospitals of a variety of styles and sizes serving local communities—a plurality of foundation hospitals.

The Government have not gone that far, because doing so would get them into ideological dispute with many of their supporters. Labour Back Benchers believe that a command-and-control system, with monopoly hospitals guided from the centre and the Secretary of State being responsible for every bedpan, is the way to run the health service, and they are extremely unhappy about the freedoms that are now being offered to local hospitals through this potentially interesting scheme. The Government will not go the distance because they will find it difficult to persuade their supporters that offering real choice—having smaller hospitals as well as bigger ones, and having more than one hospital in an area and a contrast of styles—is a good idea.

I can understand the dilemma. The Labour party desperately wants to create common standards across the country so that everyone has access to treatment that is of the highest possible quality. So do I—if only. However, I happen to think that choice drives that system better than monolithic and central control. Labour Members who are most critical of the Government fear that foundation hospitals will introduce a two-tier health service, but do they not realise that we already have a multi-tier health service? We have a great deal of postcode rationing: certain treatments can be obtained in some places, but not in others, and in others still a long wait is required. Even the distribution of medicines, despite the intervention of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, has an element of local differentiation.

The Labour party has to accept that if it chooses the route of localism there will be variations and diversity—but its document on foundation hospitals does not deal with that central dilemma. The Government say that they want both diversity and common high national standards, both strong central regulation and freedom for individuals to make local decisions. My point is that the Government have to choose; they must decide whether they really believe that a system of diversity and choice delivers the best average results—that is my view—or that a bit more money, or a bit more command and control, will deliver better results. If the latter, they should choose that route.

The danger is that the foundation hospital will fall between two stools, and be neither one thing nor the other. It could end up as an expensive charade. It could spend a lot of money on recruiting members and appointing the board and the new management team, only to discover that it does not have all the powers that

it needs to pledge the assets and borrow the money to negotiate the right contracts and deals, to sell its assets and buy different ones that might be better for its purposes, or to hire the staff that it wants.

Other hon. Members have pointed out the awful contradiction between local terms and conditions of employment, which I strongly welcome and recommend in my local area, and the idea that there must not be any poaching or movement of staff around the former NHS system. Again the Government are demonstrating muddle, and they must make up their mind. I strongly recommend that they go for more choice and diversity and more local determination.

That means foundation hospitals based on a full democratic electorate, with full power to borrow and to pledge their assets. It means allowing foundation hospitals to sell and buy assets as they see fit, in pursuance of their duty to provide health care for their areas. It means allowing them to choose not only the staff they wish to employ but the way in which they remunerate them. Yes, that does mean allowing them the right to attract staff from other health institutions. Where else are health staff likely to come from? That will be good for the staff because it means new ideas and new people spread around—and of course, the better staff will be paid more under that system, which I also happen to think is a rather good idea, which will help innovation and drive higher quality.

My fear is that the Government will do few of those things, and we will end up with another expensive bureaucracy and there will be a multi-tier health service. Foundation hospitals will be given not only greater freedoms but more money to try to make them work, to create a favourable impression. That will leave other hospitals, such as my local hospital, struggling. I would like to see a system open for all and free for all the patients, with many more freedoms for the managers, based on proper local democratic mandates.

3.12 pm

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): Thank you for calling me, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have often sat on these Benches frustrated by my inability to take part in a debate when I wanted to do so, but I have never before found that that had anything to do with my nationality. I am pleased to be able to take part in the debate on foundation hospitals. Although it is true that for the time being the First Minister of Wales has said that he does not wish to introduce foundation hospitals in Wales, their introduction, and their success or otherwise in the rest of the United Kingdom, is bound to have an influence on my constituents.

As a former Health Minister for Wales, I can claim to have some experience of the problems of health service management, and as a Member whose constituents suffer the longest waiting lists not only in the United Kingdom but in Europe, I understand something of the frustration that they feel about the present provision of services. As I represent those people, I may say that the impression that has sometimes been given in the debate, that the present system does not involve more than one tier of provision, is completely erroneous. We have a wide disparity of provision within the United Kingdom, and the present system does not appear to be eroding that disparity—or at least, not at any great pace.

Momentous decisions were taken when the Prime Minister was convinced by a Member of the other place that money needed to be invested in the health service at a great rate, as happens in the rest of Europe, and the Wanless report was commissioned. That report said that the most efficient mechanism for paying for services would be through general taxation, rather than introducing some of the more disparate funding mechanisms used in the rest of Europe. It would also be much less destructive to fund the health service out of general taxation. However, the Wanless report also recognised that there was a downside to that, in that there would be less accountability and choice, and less competition, in the model that we were choosing. To make up for that, the extended audit system, which has yet to be put in place, was recommended, so that the taxpayers could be assured that they were receiving value for money in exchange for the considerable increase in spending on the health service.

If we compare the activity rates of the present health service with the rate of increase in spending, we see that there is a fairly wide gap. That point has been made by the Opposition—for political reasons, and also maybe for better ones. The defence against that argument—I think it is a substantial one—is that there is bound to be a lag between the time when we start putting in the investment and the time when we begin to achieve the full benefit of that investment. The underinvestment that went on for several decades under Conservative Governments will take a considerable time to undo. I agree that that is a substantial defence, and that we should not expect to see in the short term rapid increases in activity rates commensurate with the extra spending.

Nevertheless, hon. Members will acknowledge—it is difficult to prove this, but it will be backed up by the many anecdotes that will be told them in their surgeries—that there are problems inherent in our system that are not simply a matter of investment. I shall tell the House one anecdote that made me think about structures. It is not to do with my constituents; it is about my family.

About a year ago, I had a call at 5 o'clock in the morning from a close elderly relative who was in an accident and emergency unit in a major hospital in south Wales. He had a life-threatening condition and had not seen a doctor. I drove straight to the hospital, and was most distressed. He had not seen a doctor because of a lack of resources, which are now being put in. However, another reason for his distress was the condition of the waiting room he was in and the filthy toilets alongside. Knowing that he was possibly about to have a life-saving operation, he did not have overwhelming confidence in the institution he was in. When he went on to the ward, he received excellent service, and he began to feel far better. On my way out, I went into the toilet next to the lift which had probably not been cleaned for a year.

I was most distressed by my elderly relative's condition. That evening, I had to attend a party meeting in a junior school, and was thinking about what I would tell the party members. I looked at the hall floor, and noticed that it was spotless. I spoke to the caretaker, and told him of my experience. He took me to the toilets, which were also spotless. I thought, "There is no way we are investing money and resources to ensure that the schools are kept cleaner than hospitals. It is not a matter

[Mr. Jon Owen Jones]

of resources." If the school floors and toilets were as dirty as that hospital, the governors would not put up with it. The parent governors in particular have such an investment in the school that they would not tolerate it. However, even if they did, parents have a choice, albeit limited, about which school their children attend, and they would choose not to send them to that school.

That accountability did not exist for my elderly relative in hospital—there is no equivalent of the parent governor there. He had no choice about where he would go. Somehow, we must introduce systems that provide greater accountability, transparency and choice. If we do not, the service will not be as responsive as we wish, never mind the resources that we put in. The right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell) mentioned grant-maintained schools, of which there are none, I am glad to say, in my constituency. However, local management of schools was a good idea introduced by his party. Something like the local management of hospitals would improve the service that is provided.

Mr. Redwood: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman remembers that when I was Secretary of State for Wales I diverted money from elsewhere in the budget to put extra into the health service. I found that with all the command and control that a Secretary of State is meant to have, it was extremely difficult to get the health service to spend that money on the extra nurses and doctors whom I thought it needed.

Mr. Jones: I well remember the right hon. Gentleman's time as Secretary of State for Wales, about which I have mixed views. However, our debates were open, he was always prepared to debate his point of view and was supportive of local hospitals.

I am prepared to welcome the idea of foundation hospitals. I do not think that they will necessarily provide all the solutions, but they are an experiment that we need to look at. However, I am wary of suddenly expanding that experiment without any testing, as the Opposition seem to be suggesting. I urge my hon. Friends, who are reluctant to look at foundation hospitals for understandable reasons, to see the ideological position that needs to be defended—public services, including the provision of health care, must be successful and must be seen to be successful. As a Government, we must successfully deliver good-quality health care. If we fail, that will provide a true opportunity for the Opposition. If we are not prepared to look at the reform of our health service, we will fail.

3.24 pm

Mr. Richard Page (South-West Hertfordshire): Although I usually speak on the trade and industry and manufacturing sector, which has severe problems of its own, I am delighted to be able to contribute to the debate, because of the serious situation that faces the hospitals in my constituency. If those hospitals are facing difficult situations, it means that my constituents are suffering. The complaint ratios coming in over the past three years or so are more severe than for the previous 20 or 30 years. I am not surprised. We are led by a Government whose experience is limited to what I have described as sucking on the hind teat of political experience, rather than knowledge and experience in the real world.

I have a terrible mixture of anger and sadness—anger because I remember vividly the criticisms made by the party now in government when we were in government. We heard how they would make things so much better, and how dreadful we were—24 hours to save the NHS. What have we got now? We have a list of complaints as long as one's arm. I am saddened by the stories that I hear from my constituents. What do I say to a widow who comes to see me and tells me, "My husband was a year on the waiting list for heart surgery, and he died as they were preparing him for surgery, having waited a year"?

What do I say to my constituent who came to my surgery a month or so ago, saying, "I can't get the diabetic treatment in Hertfordshire, although I can get it in Buckinghamshire"? What do I say to the old boy who told me, "I went in for some tests, and I saw how dirty it was under the bed, so I put a £1 coin under the bed. I had my tests and they took a week, and when I left, I bent down and picked up my £1 coin and took it away again"? What do I say to the man who had a stroke and did not receive any physiotherapy for four months? We all know how necessary it is to have physiotherapy immediately. I had a case in this morning of a poor lady who had suffered a stroke, and had already had three bouts of infection from hospital. The list can go on and on.

Dr. Stoate *rose—*

Mr. Page: Of course I give way, as that gives me another minute or so.

Dr. Stoate: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman does not tell constituents who have those problems that the way to solve them is to cut public expenditure and reduce the amount of money going into the health service. He must tell his constituents that the only way to solve the problems is more investment and the reform needed to make that investment work, so that his constituents can look forward to increased rather than reduced health care.

Mr. Page: The hon. Gentleman must stop writing the script for the Labour party and stop starting to believe it. I shall deal with his point in a moment.

I welcome the concept of foundation hospitals. They could be a means of improving the health care of my constituents, but what of the hundreds of other hospitals that are not given foundation status and foundation opportunities? What will happen to the Hemel Hempsteads and the Watfords of this world? The hon. Gentleman speaks of money. The Government muddle up money and management. My hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox)—I hope that he will shortly be my right hon. Friend—commented that more than 20 per cent. more money went in, but there was only a 1.6 per cent. increase in treatment.

I have to smile when I find that there is agreement between my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) and the right hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney)—a sort of

unholy alliance—when they ask how the Government's scheme is to be rolled out for the rest of the acute hospitals. There is a huge gap between the cost and the achievement, as the hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones) pointed out. How true that is. We must examine more effectively the level of efficiency that is being achieved. The Government think that if they throw money at a problem, it will go away. I remind them of their experience with the dome. How many hundred millions of public money were thrown at the dome, and what do we have? A tatty example, instead of a shining example, of what Britain is really like.

Nothing brings things home to people more than personal experience. Just over a couple of years ago, one of my larger four-footed friends deposited me on the ground at a fairly high rate of knots. Being old and unfit and not bouncing like I used to, I hit the ground more with a splat than with the youthful enthusiasm that I had in the past. The ambulance arrived and the staff did their job remarkably effectively. I was taken to a hospital, but the process turned out to be almost an Ealing-type comedy. My total treatment time was about 20 minutes, but I was at the hospital for more than 10 hours.

I had heard that there were now more administrators than beds in the health service, but I did not see my personal administrator standing beside my bed to look after my needs. When one is lying in pain, feeling waves of pain washing over, one is not that interested in the technicalities of funding national health provision or in whether it is private or public or whether the nurses are regular nurses or agency ones. One is looking only for treatment. The staff discovered that I had broken a shoulder, my collarbone and rib or two, and I can tell hon. Members—I can see concern in every face—that I have made a full and happy recovery.

I came away thinking, "Surely we can run our national health service better than this?" I waited 10 hours for 20 minutes' treatment. I cannot see that we will achieve anything else by conducting review upon review and counter-review. In my constituency, shortly before the general election, we had another review of the Watford and Hemel Hempstead general hospitals. Surprise, surprise: the decision was made to keep them both open. Immediately after the election, however, the Government announced the decision to close Harefield and the reviews started again. Interestingly, the decision to close Harefield, a well-known international heart hospital, was made even before planning permission was gained for the move down to the Paddington basin. A leaked report completed a few months ago asked for about £5 million or £6 million more to be spent on Harefield to keep it going for another five years, so some more operations could be carried out there, as delays were occurring in Paddington. I have encountered such trouble in my constituency, where we have spent more and more money on project after project and building after building, only for the projects to be reversed and the buildings knocked down, so that we have to start again.

The hon. Member for Dartford (Dr. Stoate) commented on Conservative party policy, as did the Secretary of State, who also wrote the policy according to his own lights. I share the view of my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham, as I would be appalled if we cut the money that is currently going into our national health service, but I would like us to achieve a higher rate of efficiency. The money should not be wasted and we should not spend 20 per cent. more to achieve only a 1.6 per cent. increase in clinical episodes.

Although the Opposition have been accused of confusion, it is not unknown in the Labour party. I was greatly impressed by the comments of right the hon. Member for Makerfield in *The Guardian* on 2 December. He argued that the creation of foundation trusts represented an example of the "rebirth of popular socialism"—a contradiction in terms if ever I heard one. He had obviously not been listening to the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), who I thought spoke sensibly and eloquently in this debate. I disagreed with him, but I thought that he made a logical point. He went on record in *The Guardian* of 5 November last year as describing the proposals for creating foundation hospitals as an attempt to "establish . . . a Tory consensus". The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) expressed her belief that the plans

"will crystallise the deep unease many Labour MPs have about a Government which appears to have no moral core".

It is transparently clear from the fact that 100-plus Members have signed the early-day motion on foundation hospitals that there is deep concern that we are creating a two-tier system.

I find myself on the horns of a dilemma. I want to see these foundation hospitals up and running; they seem to be the way to go. The new system will retain them within the national health service while giving them greater freedom for individual expressions of management and control. But what about the hundreds of other hospitals that will be left outside, unable to catch up? The Labour party said that there were 24 hours to save the NHS. Suddenly that became 10 years. When did that 10 years start? Was it in 1997? Did it start a year or so ago? Has it started now? When is this 10-year plan going to come to fruition? When will the hospitals in Hertfordshire—in Hemel Hempstead and Watford, and at Mount Vernon—have the chance to take advantage of the opportunities that are being given to the foundation hospitals? When will my constituents have the chance to obtain a better level of service? I have already outlined my concerns about the quality of service being given to my constituents, and I could spend hours going through them, time and again, to the House. We have all had experience of cases in our surgeries; every one of us has a tale of horror burned into us.

We must ensure that we improve our national health service. While supporting the move towards foundation hospitals, I would like to hear from the Minister what is to happen to all the other hospitals that are going to be left out in the cold. What about the Watfords, the Hemel Hempsteads and the Mount Vernons of our society?

3.36 pm

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden): I welcome the debate about foundation hospitals. Perhaps because some part of me is a latent Trotskyist, I believe that every public organisation—including the one that we hold most dear—has to be subject to considerations of how it should be organised and structured. When we are in a position to put large amounts of money into the national health service over the next 10 years, we must consider how best that money should be spent and in which ways.

[Siobhain McDonagh]

I am encouraged by this debate because these measures are about increasing public involvement in our cherished institution, and anyone here who has ever been in a constituency in which a hospital is threatened knows just how fervent the support for the NHS is. Anyone who has ever attempted to get a petition together in such circumstances knows how easy it is to get members of the public to sign it and become involved in their local NHS.

There will be an opportunity within foundation hospitals to allow them more clearly to reflect the needs of the community in which they are based. Uniformity does not guarantee equality. We have a multi-layered and multi-standard NHS. All our constituents know how good or bad their local hospitals are. There is already competition between the teaching hospital and the local district general, for example. Where do people want to go if they have a complicated ailment? There is also competition in terms of how we view hospitals with old or new buildings. The idea that we all believe that everything is equal and the same across the NHS is simply not true. Our constituents do not believe that to be the case either.

I find the idea of diversity exciting. It offers the prospect of real innovation. My feelings about diversity and the opportunities that it presents stem from my experience in my work before I came to the House. I worked in the most exciting, vibrant and innovative part of the voluntary sector in the country: I worked for a housing association. In fact, I worked for both a local authority housing department and a housing association. If people really want to provide more, better housing in exciting ways, housing associations are the place to be. They have core principles, just like the NHS. One core principle is to house those in need, but they do it in many different ways depending on which part of the country they are based in. They represent different ethnic groups and they are formed out of the needs of the local community.

I have read the Department of Health briefing document on foundation hospitals and, for me, it reflects what could be and what is good in housing associations as well as how that might be introduced to the NHS. Housing associations, not local authority housing departments, are at the cutting edge of providing services for the most vulnerable and the most difficult to house. Due to their freedom, housing associations can consider and tackle the needs of groups that local authorities often shy away from.

I understand and fully appreciate why people are concerned about changes in structure, because, for 17 years under the Conservative Government, we fought for the continued existence of the NHS. Any threat or any change to that institution makes us concerned that perhaps it is being undermined, but diversity is not about sacrificing standards, and the Commission for Health Improvement and the National Institute for Clinical Excellence are fundamental in ensuring that we have national standards, although those could be provided in different ways across the country.

Giving foundation status to some will not impoverish the rest. The proposal will provide an opportunity as well as an expression of how and why we can improve. It is not about money, as the Liberal spokesperson suggested. It is about the room to manoeuvre as well as the room to have a good idea and seeing it happen.

Mr. Kevan Jones: Will my hon. Friend explain this example to me? My constituency is in the north-east. If Sunderland general hospital, which is a three-star trust, goes down the foundation route and attracts better staff and if people feel that it is better than the excellent University Hospital of North Durham, how could North Durham and neighbouring hospitals not be affected by that?

Siobhain McDonagh: People already have a perception of which they believe to be the better hospital. My constituency is served by St. Helier, which is a local district hospital that I mentioned earlier, and St. George's, which is a teaching hospital. People already have perceptions. They do not need the word "foundation" to be included to make them have certain feelings about those hospitals.

Equally, it is patently not the case that there are not already different incentives for staff to work in certain hospitals. Staff at St. Helier get outer-London weighting while those at St. George's get inner-London weighting. Those hospitals are a mile and a half apart. Staff at St. Helier get a really good crèche for their children while that is not the case at other hospitals. There are already incentives built into the system to attract staff. I understand the concerns expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr. Jones), but we do not perceive the NHS as our constituents already perceive it.

The proposal is not about assisting a few; it is for the many. The document suggests that every hospital, should it achieve three-star status, will have the opportunity to go for foundation status. That is the key. What we are discussing is not like grant-maintained status for schools, which could only ever be accessed by a few. Foundation status is a possibility for all those hospitals.

Mr. Simmonds: Will the hon. Lady consider the possibility of a hospital that has achieved two-star status being given foundation status as a way to raise its standards and achieve three stars?

Siobhain McDonagh: It seems reasonable that the best standard—three stars—should be achieved before that freedom is given. I cannot understand why no-star or one-star hospitals should have the prospect of more freedom when they are clearly unable to address some of their basic problems. The logic of that is there for me.

The proposal is not about recreating an internal market, because it is clear that different hospitals will not offer different prices for different operations when the NHS reference costs are introduced. I know that there are difficulties there, because the reference costs are quite bizarre at the moment, but if we can get to a stage at which we know the cost of an operation in a particular region we shall achieve much more clarity and openness over contracts with the PCT.

I firmly believe that the NHS is under threat in the long term not from Labour Members or people of my age and older, but because younger people—those in

their 20s and early 30s—will not put up with the system as it is, even when we get the full benefits of the investment. They live in a society and a world in which they enjoy international access within seconds. They want treatment now, and they want to be involved in a system that allows them some control over the services provided for them.

I completely understand why people are concerned about change to a system that we cherish desperately. However, we must ask whether we cherish it because of the way that it is currently structured, or because, based on everything that made us become members of the Labour party and stand for election, we believe that people should have the very best treatment when they need it, at no cost. That is our fundamental belief, and if we need to change the system in some way to ensure that that the wider community continues to cherish that goal, we should consider doing so.

3.45 pm

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): During his first Parliament as Secretary of State for Health, the right hon. Gentleman was obsessed by central control and central planning, and ran the health service in an almost Stalinist style. Some way into his second Parliament as Secretary of State, he is finally taking on board some of the policies of choice and diversity that are truly Conservative ones. According to the leaked memo that is doing the rounds of the newspapers, we hear that extra billions may not sort out the NHS. In other words, throwing money at the problem will not necessarily lead to a solution.

In one particular way—it has already been touched on—the proposal for foundation hospitals is unbelievably divisive. As it stands, it excludes all hospitals in Leicestershire because all of them have two-star status. In other words, the great Leicester royal infirmary, Glenfield hospital and others will be excluded. There is a very strong case for using this proposal as an incentive, certainly in a county such as mine, where not a single hospital has three-star status.

It is perhaps no surprise that more than 100 Labour Members have signed an early-day motion that opposes these proposals. In fact, they are founded on Conservative policies and derive from the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990. As originally passed, that Act gave NHS trusts the freedom to determine staff terms and conditions. Furthermore, the notion of some financial control independent of Government was proposed by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) when he was Secretary of State for Health. No financial control was given—*[Interruption.]* The right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) seems to be trying to intervene—I hope that he is agreeing with me. He is beyond the white lines, so he is out of court and cannot speak. The fact is that my right hon. and learned Friend's proposals did not get past the then Chancellor because the then Opposition complained that they were all about privatisation. So this really is a case of the pot calling the kettle black.

The proposals put much store on governance arrangements giving local stakeholders, patients and people in the local community far greater control. There will be real opportunities for local people through the management proposals, and I certainly welcome that because it is in line with our party's policy. During yesterday's debate in Westminster Hall, the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Salford (Ms Blears) said that we want are new ways of doing things and new governance arrangements. Indeed, according to a press release from the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr. Lammy), there will be a

"new era in patient and public involvement in the NHS".

He said that the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health will not just promote but

"champion . . . the involvement of the public".

Well, that is great news, because one question that the Government must address is what these new people—the local people who will get control, not the apparatchiks or central control freaks from Richmond house—will ask for. What will they ask for? They will ask for services that many already use.

Andy Burnham (Leigh): Complementary medicine.

Mr. Tredinnick: The hon. Gentleman has it in one. He should be promoted.

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Tredinnick: The Minister clearly agrees. Foundation hospitals should be required to move to an integrated delivery of service, which should include the main complementary therapies—osteopathy, chiropractic, homeopathy, acupuncture and herbal medicine. I served on the Standing Committees scrutinising the Bills in the 1987 and 1992 Parliaments that put provision of chiropractic and osteopathy on the statute book; then many doctors still considered them to be beyond the pale. The fact that they are pretty much mainstream now is to be welcomed.

I have always believed that I represent two constituencies in the House. I have been lucky enough to represent Bosworth, a constituency in the middle of England, for 15 years. I have also tried to represent the interests of minority groups who practise complementary and alternative medicine for about 14 years. In that time, there has been a sea change in the House's approach to such matters.

In Bosworth, I have 80,000 constituents. My other constituency consists of 10 million people—the number of people using complementary and alternative medicines every year. Recent surveys report that 4.5 million people see a complementary therapist every year. A BBC poll in August 1999 estimated that 20 per cent. of the public used complementary therapies, double the number of 10 years earlier. I shall not bore the House with statistics, but it also showed that 80 per cent. were satisfied with the treatment that they received.

I checked the Library this morning and found that the country now has a population of 59.1 million. Of that total, between 25 to 35 per cent. of people now buy remedies, such as simple homeopathic preparations, from chemists. The market is expanding exponentially, as is interest. Whenever I ask colleagues in the House to sign a motion, they always tell me—although they sometimes ask me not to quote them by name—that

[Mr. Tredinnick]

they have, for example, relatives who take various remedies for their ills. In fact, the Minister of State, Department of Health, the right hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), went on the record in a debate on complementary medicines in the summer as saying that he used, I think it was, reflexology.

The Government have been on the road to Damascus and now want people to have more choice. They have a wonderful opportunity. In 1981, there were only 13,500 therapists in the complementary sector, but there are now 40,000. That is because of a rise in demand for their services. However, those services are not supplied through NHS hospitals very much. The complementary sector remains the preserve of the middle classes. If the Minister wants a social cause to promote, she should get the range of treatments on offer firmly embedded in the public sector.

Many people come to me on these matters, and I shall cite some reasons why the NHS should embrace complementary therapies. For people undergoing chemotherapy for prostate cancer and other problems, an amazingly effective treatment is the use of Chinese herbs and acupuncture. The chemotherapy is rendered much less painful, and recovery periods are much reduced.

A year or so ago, I was giving awards at the Royal Free hospital to doctors who had studied complementary medicine. A nurse told me that she was not allowed to use acupuncture on transplant patients, even though fewer transplanted organs would be lost if she were given the opportunity to change patients' energy meridians. I do not want to alarm the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge), but powerful steroids are used to treat skin conditions, when there are many ways to treat those conditions with homeopathic or herbal medicine techniques. Simple problems such as tinnitus or the difficulties currently treated with grommets are also susceptible to that approach.

There is phenomenal, exponential demand in the health service for such therapies, yet many people do not have the opportunity for treatment. The Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Barrow and Furness, has done quite a lot of work on this and the Government are coming round to the view that these therapies should be incorporated in the health service. I pay tribute to them for getting Professor Pitillo to work on regulating herbal medicine and Professor Chan on acupuncture. These disciplines will soon be regulated; they will have the stamps in the passport that the doctors want. The march of integrated health care will not be stopped. The Minister of State, the hon. Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith), should grasp the nettle now.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Tredinnick: I give way to my colleague from Leicestershire.

David Taylor: I am fascinated to hear my neighbour's contribution to the debate. However, I would be pleased to know where the motion or amendment contains any reference to herbal medicine. I see references to hospital management but not to herbal medicine. Do I have the wrong Order Paper?

Mr. Tredinnick: It may not be on the Order Paper but it is very germane because the way in which we run these hospitals will affect the treatment that they provide. That is obvious.

The Marylebone health centre has produced guidance. I have no interest to declare, other than the fact that I went to the launch. It has produced guidelines on integrated health—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. First, let me remind the hon. Gentleman that visual aids are not encouraged in the Chamber. Secondly, he should relate his remarks to foundation hospitals, if he can manage to do so.

Mr. Tredinnick: I have no intention of being ruled out of order in the little time left. I want to see the book entitled "Integrating Complementary Therapies in Primary Care" used in foundation hospitals—the subject of this debate. I can say with some pride that it is a good few years since I have been ruled out of order in the Chamber, but I would not want to excite your interest in keeping me in order too much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. However, the guidelines in the book contain policies that I would like to see adopted in foundation hospitals, and explain exactly how conventional managers can integrate and introduce these disciplines and make them work. Many doctors want integrated therapies to be introduced; they cannot cope with conventional treatments. Many surgeons in foundation hospitals would benefit from having osteopaths and chiropractors working alongside them. It is important for the new hospitals that we take the practical steps of integrating complementary therapies into mainstream care.

Doctors are, by and large, keen to have a better understanding of complementary therapies. There are new courses available at the training colleges and universities, but I am afraid that some doctors are still, to say the least, patronising and ill informed about some aspects of these therapies. They resent them, and their attitude is based on fear and insecurity.

The Government should push ahead as fast as they can on two fronts. They should ensure that there is voluntary self-regulation for all disciplines, including aromatherapy, and not just acupuncture and herbal medicine. They should also make it possible for doctors to learn, if they want to, how these therapies work. In that way, the Government will reduce the burden on the health service, make the foundation hospitals more effective and improve the health of the nation.

3.58 pm

Mr. Tony Colman (Putney): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick). Although I do not agree with everything he says, I believe that there is a case for alternative medicines in foundation hospitals and, indeed, all hospitals. I am very pleased that my son is retraining to specialise in chiropractic, acupuncture and Chinese medicine.

I strongly support the amendment in the name of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health. I thank him for his announcement on 11 December last year of a 30 per cent. increase in funding for the Wandsworth primary care trust over the next three years. An extra £77 million will go straight to the primary care trust, which is very good news for my constituents.

Furthermore, I am pleased that we are carrying out the final contract negotiations for the new Queen Mary's hospital in my constituency. The contract is due to be signed next summer and the hospital is scheduled to open in new buildings in 2005. The capital spend for the project amounts to about £45 million.

Recently, the hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) and, earlier in the debate, the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) cast some doubt over the utterances of the shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury—who was formerly one of my constituents in Putney—on the 20 per cent. cuts. I am sure that when the hon. Gentleman made his comments during the recess he meant what he said about the cuts, so I am warning my constituents about what might happen in the future should there be a Conservative Government.

We need to look to the past and remember the 1990s when NHS funding declined every year. My right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) made a strong indictment of that. The death warrant for Queen Mary's district general hospital was signed in December 1996, in the dying days of the last Conservative Government, but now we see the hospital's resurrection, phoenix-like, under the Labour Government.

I welcome the principle of NHS foundation trusts. I emphasise my reference to the principle; in a sense, we are talking about work in progress. It is important to move from Whitehall micro-management to management through regulation and inspection of the best performing hospitals. We already have a two-tier national health service; indeed, some people would say that there are more than two tiers. There is certainly not a single tier at present and it is extremely important to level up all hospitals to the best.

I want to comment on the principles. It is essential that the central management of the NHS concentrate their time on the worst performing hospitals, leaving the best to manage within the regulatory framework. The worst performing hospitals should receive more money than the best, not less. The foundation hospitals should certainly be able to borrow, but that should be on the balance sheet. However, we must ensure that hospitals, such as Kingston hospital and St. George's hospital, which serve my constituents, are not left in a situation where the total pot of money has been diminished because money has been drawn down by foundation hospitals ahead of those that do not yet have a three-star rating.

I was especially pleased to read the words of the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Ms Blears) in yesterday's debate in Westminster Hall. She said:

"Organisations that are not yet at the level of the best need extra help. We want to be able to concentrate on supporting them in order to bring everyone up to the standards of the best. Our policy is about promoting excellence for everybody, not about setting hospital against hospitals"—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 7 January 2003; Vol. 397, c. 22WH.]

I say, "Hear, hear" to that.

We need to listen to the unions as we go forward with the proposals. Some unions have expressed concern, although others have not yet made their views known. I was pleased that the views of Unison were taken into account when adapting the private finance initiative contract for Queen Mary's hospital so as to ensure that NHS staff remained NHS employees under the PFI. It is important to reassure the unions that the proposals are not divisive and that they will not set work force against work force. Now that we have negotiated the agenda for change policy, we need to build on it so that the situation does not fall apart.

The last and most important point on which I want to concentrate is that of governance, to which many hon. Members have returned. I am particularly eager that local patients should elect the boards of their hospitals. I do not wish to see a return to the cronyism under the last Conservative Government in terms of appointments to NHS boards. I very much welcomed the appointment of Sir William Wells as chair of the NHS Appointments Commission. Many excellent people have been appointed as chairs and non-executive directors of trusts over recent years, but they are accountable to only one person—the Secretary of State. I very much want to see a move towards wider accountability to the community.

I share the strong views of my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) in terms of wanting the NHS and social services to come together with local authorities. In fact, that is one of the few matters on which I agree with Edward Lister, the leader of Wandsworth council, in whose area my constituency lies. I have proposed and supported that cause over the past 15 years, but it was not on the agenda for the previous Government, and it is not on the agenda for this Government. It is important to recognise that what is now on the agenda is a level of local accountability to local electors that has not existed previously.

I was pleased to hear the response of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to questions about the nature of the electoral basis of foundation hospitals. He had taken account of the situation that exists in my constituency, where there is not an acute hospital. As a result, my constituents are served by both Kingston hospital and St. George's hospital, and it is important that the electoral roll for voting for governors of such hospitals should include all those within the catchment area. That is something to be expanded and developed. I recognise, too, the caveat in relation to specialist hospitals that cover very large areas, which require an electoral basis that relates to the patients rather than to the whole of London, as that would plainly be absurd.

I support the proposals for election and accountability of governors, chairs of boards and non-executive directors. I particularly like the idea of the

[Mr. Tony Colman]

two-tier board, which takes us back to many of the discussions that the Labour party had in the 1970s about new methods and new ways forward.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): Going back to the 1970s, can my hon. Friend remember a time when councils had the right to nominate an elected councillor to sit on such boards? Would not that be a better way forward?

Mr. Colman: I would certainly like more nomination rights in relation to all hospitals for local authority representatives. Currently, a basis exists on which it is presumed that the cabinet member for social services for the area in which a primary care trust operates should serve on that primary care trust. I would certainly like more representatives of local councils on an interim basis. What attracts me to the proposal, however, is that the majority of the governors for a foundation hospital would be locally elected. That would be the first time in the NHS that power has gone to the people and the patients and moved away from the clinicians, the bureaucrats and everyone else working within the NHS. That is an important initial move.

I support the amendment, but I want to quickly set out my four points. First, management should be freed up within foundation hospitals that have improved themselves, with the key caveat that extra support should go to those that have not. Secondly, there must be more money for the worst performers, but for foundation hospitals there must be less restraint and speedier access to finance. However, that should not drain the pool of resources so that other hospitals lose out. Thirdly, the NHS must work with the unions, as Queen Mary's hospital has done. All good companies and successful organisations work with the unions, and it is important that Health Ministers adopt that practice. Lastly, we must establish a local election process with local accountability within national standards and regulatory frameworks.

I return to the comment with which I started. I warn the people of Putney that the shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury is putting under threat the 30 per cent. increase in funding announced last December. If he had his way, there would be a 20 per cent. cut in funding for public services.

4.10 pm

Dr. Richard Taylor (Wyre Forest): You are being very generous, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in allowing us a certain amount of freedom, and I would like first to make one comment to the hon. Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick). He must know that many conventionally trained NHS anaesthetists are already undertaking acupuncture in NHS pain relief clinics.

Turning to the main subject, I welcome very much the Secretary of State's admission that there are still problems in the NHS and that they will take some years to solve. There are still major weaknesses and health inequalities in the service, but I pay tribute to the improvements in cancer care and cardiac care. It is a shame that a meeting of the parliamentary health forum just before Christmas was so badly attended—I think that only four or five MPs were present—because the tsar of cardiac services told us how waiting lists for cardiac surgery are improving.

The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) said that there is one good point about foundation hospitals, and I agree. That one extremely good point is devolution. Most hon. Members want much more power to be given to local people. I was interested in a recent intervention in the debate because my memory goes back to the 1970s and 1980s and to the old local district health authorities, which in some cases were extremely efficient. They had elected members in that a proportion of their members were councillors. I welcome devolution and the Secretary of State's suggestion that the number of foundation hospitals could increase dramatically in the future. However, the one good point about the policy does not disarm my criticisms.

My first and biggest criticism is the one that has been so ably expressed by the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) and which was addressed yesterday by the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody). I am referring to the two-tier system. My memory of the NHS does not go back to 1948 but it does go back to 1956, when I was training in London, half a mile from here, and we still had many patients coming to London from far afield. There was then a gradual change as medical schools throughout the rest of the country improved tremendously, and the quality of district general hospitals improved.

That happened because the basic tenet of the NHS is that all staff should be on the same pay scale. That means that it is attractive for a high-powered senior registrar from a teaching hospital to apply to a district general hospital if that is where he wants to work. Parity of staff through parity of pay is crucial to fighting for, and maintaining, equality throughout the health service. That point also applies to managers and more and more to nurses, particularly given the proposed extension of their role. That is my first and biggest criticism.

I find it hard to understand one section in the Government's document. Paragraph 1.13 refers to

"inspection to guard against two-tier health care."

I would very much like clarification of that when the Minister replies to the debate.

My next criticism relates to the method of selection. If the policy is implemented and if, as one hopes, the range of foundation hospitals increases over time, their method of selection will be less important. However, as other hon. Members have pointed out, basing selection on the star-rating system would have serious flaws. The star-rating system depends on just a number of key targets, and, as far as I can see, patient opinion points have been disregarded. There are six such points in the ratings, and the no-star trusts scored from seven out of 30 at the lowest to 24 out of 30 at the highest. That covers a wide range. The three lowest of the three-star trusts on the crucial points of patient understanding and perception scored nine out of 30, 10 out of 30 and 11 out of 30. That sums up why I do not have much confidence in the current star-rating system. I hope that the Commission for Health Improvement, under its new name, will be able to improve the value of the ratings considerably.

My next criticism is that the proposal risks a tremendously damaging split between primary and secondary care, which one would like to come together much more. I note that a representative of the primary care trust will be on the board of governors, and I

welcome that. It is a small improvement on the current position in which there does not appear to be any cross-representation between primary care trusts and acute trust boards. I hope that such representation can be increased, because certain conditions, which are not mentioned in the document, depend on better management across the whole system. In particular, I refer to chronic care and to palliative care, which involve a partnership between secondary and primary care.

My next criticism refers to the services to be provided. Paragraph 1.30 on page 11 of the document is obviously fairly vague about that. It states:

"The licence for an NHS Foundation Trust will detail . . . the clinical services which it must provide to the local community".

That is as far as it goes. The document is full of the aim of focusing on outputs. It is relatively easy to have outputs for elective work, but it is far more difficult to have them for emergency work. Emergency work is not mentioned sufficiently in the document. The work of a trust is covered by the blanket phrase,

"the clinical services that it must provide to the local community".

It is easy to run elective services, but not easy to run emergency services. Is there the risk that foundation hospitals will be able to cherry-pick? I can imagine the scene in a big town in which there is a foundation hospital that picks up all the elective work and leaves the neighbouring and probably second-class district general hospital with all the emergency work. I am fully in favour of the separation of elective and emergency work provided that it is done in partnership. If elective work is done entirely in a foundation hospital that is not in partnership with anyone else and that does not provide emergency services, the surgeons, in particular, will be deskilled when it comes to working with emergencies. That is my string of criticisms of the foundation trust idea in its present form. I hope that the Minister will respond to some of them.

The hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) said that the NHS will not work if it continues to be constructed and run in the same way. I have a severe criticism of the Tory party. The way in which the NHS runs stems from the internal market and the purchaser-provider split that it introduced. That was one of the big disasters for the health service. However, I support the Tories in one way. As an independent Member without party allegiance, I am getting fed up with Labour Members' continual attacks on the Tory party purely and simply on the matter of money for public services. Labour Members hide behind the criticism rather than answering questions. There was an example of that in Prime Minister's questions today. An hon. Member asked a legitimate question about the disastrous services in parts of Worcestershire, but the concerns were not addressed.

I finish with an appeal. I agree that freedom for local people to run their services is crucial. I want the integration of primary and secondary care. Most of all, however, I appeal for the retention of common pay scales because otherwise we will have a two-tier system.

4.22 pm

Ms Dari Taylor (Stockton, South): For Labour Members, the NHS is especially important as an ideal. It is an expression of our values and an enduring legacy of the reforming and modernising Attlee Government. We are very proud of that period and will always state that in the House. The idea that something as vital as health provision should be available equally to all fellow citizens on the basis of need, not on the basis of wealth or power, is central to social democracy. For my generation, the operation of the national health service represented social democracy in action. I was four when the NHS was created. [HON. MEMBERS: "Surely not!"] Hon. Members are right: I agree that I do not look that old.

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): That is one of the benefits of the health service.

Ms Taylor: Absolutely. I say it only as it is.

The creation of the NHS was a joy in my family and a joy to the community in which we lived. I am absolutely committed to the NHS, but I am also keen to stress that we must be careful not to mistake a legacy for a monument. There is a crucial difference between them. A monument is a fixed and unchangeable moment in a country's life, important though it may be. A legacy offers us the opportunity to innovate, develop, refresh and reinvigorate. The NHS is a legacy that will always require a high level of reinvigoration and refreshing. It needs new ideas. I do not believe, as many hon. Members do, that there have been enough changes in the NHS. Like all other services that respond to an ever changing community and society, the NHS will always have to change so that it increases its capability of serving people. That is my starting point.

I believe strongly that that process of change will require substantial funding, but although I believe equally strongly that my Government have provided that funding, it is clear that many reforms remain to be achieved. There is a culture of management and control, of delivery of health or illness, and that culture is highly resistant to change. It is incumbent on all Members of Parliament on both sides of the House to persuade and encourage that change to take place.

In that context, I regard foundation hospitals as an important part of a changing approach to the ever-changing needs of our communities. Change must come in response to the problems. Many people say that our health service is good, but it could be better. My belief is that there is no one reform on which we can hang our coat, but many reforms. Foundation hospitals are one part of an enormously complex policy that will be discussed throughout this Parliament. The foundation hospitals policy is valuable, because it will achieve for local hospitals freedom from central direction in the management of their affairs.

Foundation hospitals will be subject to a considerable degree of local accountability. I was unhappy—albeit not surprised—to hear the Opposition health spokesman pour cynicism on the idea of local accountability. The hon. Gentleman misunderstands and underestimates the value of owning a problem. Invariably, those who have ownership of a problem are the ones who drive the solution. Ownership and management of illness, and being central to deciding what change is needed, is important in terms of educative capability and sharing of responsibility. I believe it also ensures good policy.

I strongly support involving local people in the management of hospitals. That is crucial, and I cannot understand why it has not been seen as part of our

[Ms Taylor]

approach to hospitals in the past. My hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) said that councils used to make nominations to local boards. As one of those who were nominated, I can tell him that we were invariably controlled by the consultants who sat on the hospital board. We had no real power. I hope that ordinary local people will have real power under these proposals, because that is what is required.

Whatever Opposition Members say, there is widespread recognition of the fact that the NHS—

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): Will the hon. Lady allow me to intervene?

Ms Taylor: I think it will be taken from my time—[HON. MEMBERS: "No it will not."] In that case, I give way.

Mr. Lansley: The hon. Lady talks about local accountability. Does she not agree that, in reality, the issue is not simply governance arrangements that involve local people, but the degree of freedom—the power of which she speaks—to change services, develop services and introduce flexible services according to local decisions? Can she tell me where those freedoms are? I have looked hard for them. Which freedoms does she think local people will have, independent of the regulator, the commission, and the Secretary of State and all his data requirements?

Ms Taylor: That is an important intervention and I shall do as the hon. Gentleman asks.

I have spoken with the chief executive of my local trust. I thought it was important to do so, because although many of us here would argue in favour of the proposals from a position of principle, I wanted to know how those who will—or might—deliver the policy felt. She told me that discussions had taken place between trust board members, staff and medics, but that no decision had been taken. I want to make that clear. I would not want anyone to believe that a decision has been taken in respect of the North Tees university hospital; it has not.

The chief executive told me that a number of concerns had been raised, but that, to date, a number of opportunities had been outlined and identified as well. Medics—doctors and other members of staff—said that they would value a formal structure of involvement with local people. They believe that that would persuasively change the environment for the management of illness, and establish an open relationship in which difficult questions about new procedures and services could be discussed in a quiet and controlled environment, as opposed to being exposed in a newspaper, which makes people more likely take sides. They believe that there would be a balanced relationship between professionals and people in the community, and that once people understood and accepted the problems, their dynamism and involvement would support achievement.

The chief executive said to me that she had a space problem—a buildings problem—and that investment from capital would be valuable to her. She knows what the local needs are and how she can deliver the services, but she needs capital to do that.

One can be cynical about what that chief executive is saying, or one can choose not to be. I happen to want to believe what she, the trade unionists, the medics and the other staff are saying. They have achieved three-star status and, starting from a very difficult position in 1997, an excellent hospital has developed. The chief executive believes that the best could now lead the rest, and I support that statement. I hope that I have answered the question asked by the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley). I have used what the chief executive of North Tees university hospital said to try to persuade him—although I rather doubt whether I have done so.

My concern is that the innovation of establishing a foundation hospital could be seen as a way of opening the door to privatisation. Again and again the concern has been expressed that more private operators will move in and the service will be less and less nationally owned and delivered. However, unless I am reading the information that has been given to us to date incorrectly, and am not hearing correctly what the Minister says, I am right in saying that according to the papers, new foundation trusts cannot be taken out of the public service. Indeed, there will be a legal lock on their assets to protect national health foundation trusts from the sort of demutualisation that has taken place in the building society sector. That reassures me, but I would still like to hear again from the Minister the assurance that foundation trusts will remain for all time within the public sector, owned by the local staff and local people who comprise the membership community.

The concept of a membership community—the idea of local accountability—is perfectly compatible with social democracy. The old state system was only ever one model of social democracy, and arguably it came to predominance in the Labour party only as a result of the experience of the first world war. Other models have always existed and have always been attractive. Municipalisation, co-operatives and foundations all bring accountability closer to people. That model, with its ability to shepherd, to change and to help a service evolve, should be embraced by all of us.

I recognise the dangers. We have all heard clearly what my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) has said. He was right to warn us that the middle classes have sharp elbows, and we know that the middle classes are more able to work systems, especially health and education systems, than those in the poorer socio-economic groups who often need the services more. I am looking for assurances from the Secretary of State that the elected bodies will not be socially self-selecting.

There is also a fear that the introduction of foundation hospitals will introduce a two-tier system. My local hospital, North Tees university hospital, was definitely a second-tier hospital in 1997, but our investment in it has made it a first-tier hospital. I would like every hospital in the country to adopt the same structure of control and service delivery. None of us wants to duck such concerns—the problem is not the status or names of hospitals, but the shortage of doctors and medical specialists, about whom which we have legitimate worries. Staff shortages are the problem, not changes in hospital structure, which could be positive, innovative and valuable to our communities.

There are also concerns that a two-tier system could be introduced because foundation hospitals have capital borrowing rights. I am seeking assurances that that will not be so. I have read statements by the Secretary of State and the Chancellor of the Exchequer that the funding of foundation and non-foundation hospitals will not become imbalanced. I want reassurance about that. We have all heard worries expressed in the Chamber, and none of us wants any hospital to receive less financial support.

The one critical question that we must answer is: "Are we delivering the best health service to all people all the time?" While we are delivering the best health service to many people much of the time, some people are left outside. While finance and investment are crucial, it is important to acknowledge that other reforms need to be made so that we can achieve the best for everyone at all times.

To conclude, involving staff and local people in the management of hospitals is appropriate, as is freeing up the delivery of service so that it can respond to local needs. We must encourage local innovation and regard doctors and medics as natural entrepreneurs, which many of them are, and give them the opportunity to explore and develop service in their own way. I believe that foundation hospitals will achieve various changes and reforms, and we will see a refreshed and reinvigorated legacy in the NHS which will command public support.

4.37 pm

Mrs. Patsy Calton (Cheadle): The Liberal Democrats have been engaged in a lengthy and detailed internal debate and consultation about the future of the public services since just after the 2001 general election. Our membership debated and voted on the policy paper, "Quality, Innovation, Choice" last September, and I was concerned to hear that the Secretary of State and others have not read it—they would find it a very good read indeed. Many recommendations made by Labour Back Benchers and Conservative Members today can be found within it, so I commend it to the House. It was overwhelmingly passed by our membership and starts:

> "Public services in this country do not deliver the high standard of service that people expect and deserve. They also fail by comparison with services in many of our European partners."

It gives four main reasons—a lack of guaranteed long-term funding; lack of access and choice about services; Whitehall making decisions that can best be made locally; and politicians interfering for political purposes in decisions that should be made by trained professionals.

Liberal Democrats believe that the Government's proposals for foundation hospitals must be measured against those problems, which are at the core of frustrations shared by the public and professionals alike. Before anyone claims that I am anti-health service or the people who work for it, may I say that I am profoundly pro-NHS—I was one of the first babies born in the health service? I pay tribute to the part of the health service that my family needed over the Christmas holiday. On Christmas eve, my daughter mentioned that she could not see properly. Our local optician, Harry Cooke, saw her within minutes and spent more than an hour with her. He referred her to an eye clinic at Stepping Hill hospital in Stockport, where she was seen later that day. She was admitted to the Manchester royal eye hospital on Boxing day and had her retina repaired early the next morning. I cannot speak too highly of the excellence of the care at every stage, the quality of the explanations, the nursing staff and their care, the cleanliness of the hospital, and the aftercare, which is ongoing.

The Liberal Democrats are fully committed to the national health service. Sadly, the streamlined emergency approach that we experienced is not available for all serious conditions everywhere, as numbers of my constituents tell me regularly, as we heard from the hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page), and as the House will hear in the Adjournment debate this evening.

Will the Government's proposals for foundation hospitals make the difference and produce the sort of highly motivated care that we received? I think not, for they fail to address the issues that the Liberal Democrats believe are central to the problems faced by the NHS. As my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) said, we want a decentralised health service where decisions are made at local level, with a guaranteed income and local accountability. We would give all hospitals the opportunity to become public benefit organisations if they wished—a bottom-up approach, rather than the top-down approach of the Government's proposals. Sadly, the Government's proposals do not go far enough and continue the authoritarian Whitehall-knows-best attitude that we have come to expect, particularly from the Department of Health.

The Liberal Democrats will guarantee funding for the health service and hospitals for the long term and make it work. We will do that by earmarking national insurance for the national health service as the people's NHS contribution. We would improve choice, quality and access to health services. There should be greater accountability and transparency, and a diversity of options for provision to put maximum pressure on regional and local politicians and public service managers to deliver efficiently.

The hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) mentioned that the health and social care services need to come together at local level, operating from the same budget. We would support that. We need local people to make decisions about local matters.

Mr. Lansley: Can the hon. Lady explain an apparent paradox in her remarks? She speaks of guaranteed funding for the NHS as a Liberal Democrat policy, yet she says that that would be hypothecated from national insurance revenues. However, national insurance revenues are not guaranteed for the next 20 or 25 years. They can vary according to economic circumstances. How does the hon. Lady reconcile those two things?

Mrs. Calton: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. National insurance contributions are less likely to be a roller-coaster than the roller-coaster produced by politically induced funding. I strongly recommend that he read our document, which sets out the full reasons. He should check the figures.

We want democratically accountable regions to take strategic decisions at regional level, and local authorities and local communities to be involved in the governance

[Mrs. Calton]

of hospitals and PCTs, as the hon. Member for Wakefield described. Whitehall's role should be limited to information gathering, dissemination and persuasion. There needs to be a simplified, comprehensive and authoritative system of inspection that puts the focus on meaningful information for users, voters and local policymakers. We would stop Government interference by limiting their role to functions including public health, regulation, medical research and medical, nursing and other professional training, and allow front-line doctors and nurses to take front-line responsibility. To ensure value for money, we need to make service providers and commissioners locally accountable.

Labour's health service has become a bit of a dog's breakfast of pilots, trials, centrally driven targets, discredited star-rating systems, staff driven to distraction by bureaucracy and patchy provision. I fear that the proposals that the Government are making for foundation hospitals will fail to deliver the service improvements that we need everywhere. Only the Liberal Democrat proposals will set clinicians free everywhere to drive the change forward and place a proper emphasis on prevention in public health measures.

Yesterday, the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Salford (Ms Blears), in winding up the Westminster Hall debate on foundation hospitals, asked the rhetorical question of whether the reform was coming at the right time. I do not think that any hon. Member is saying that reform is not necessary. The question should have been whether it is the right reform. Before I saw the detail of "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts", I thought that the Secretary of State had at last seen the light, was interested and wanted devolution. However, the proposals do not go nearly as far as they should.

The Government's proposals are distinctly unclear, as several hon. Members have pointed out, in a number of areas. What will the freedoms be? How could tariff setting and payment by results work? Will they not produce a distortion of clinical practice in which high value-added, fast-throughput operations and so on are likely to be carried out at the expense of rather slower results, patient time and money? Why should there be only a few foundation hospitals? Hon. Members in all parts of the House have said that they do not understand why foundation hospitals cannot be made available to everybody if they are such a good thing.

The Liberal Democrats are very concerned about the concept of the electorate and who they will be. We believe that it is perfectly possible that the electorate will end up as a very small self-selected group. I echo what the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) said in his eloquent remarks about the need for a broad electorate and not allowing a takeover by a small, self-selected group. The hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Dr. Taylor) said that the only good thing about the proposals was devolution. That is certainly the case, but as I said, it has not gone far enough.

The ability of some hospitals to pay staff more on the basis that they are foundation hospitals will lead to poaching and inequalities, and will definitely lead to a two-tier system.

4.45 pm

Andy Burnham (Leigh): It is a pleasure to follow a fellow Greater Manchester MP. I often agree with a lot of what the hon. Member for Cheadle (Mrs. Calton) says, but if she does not mind, I shall pass on the Liberal Democrat health paper.

David Taylor: My hon. Friend said that he endorsed much of what the hon. Lady has said in the past, but does he agree with her comment just now that foundation hospitals would be freer to pay at local rates? Does he agree that trusts have had that power to negotiate local pay for more than a decade, but only a handful have done so, and that some of those have backed off because of the difficulties? Was that not a flaw in her otherwise quite good speech?

Andy Burnham: My hon. Friend is right that trusts have that flexibility and that few have used it.

Mrs. Calton: The point about the ability to pay more is that it was not there in the past. It will be there in foundation hospitals, as the money will be available.

Andy Burnham: I thank the hon. Lady, but I shall now get on with my speech.

An altogether more important document than the Liberal Democrat health paper is "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts", which was published shortly before Christmas. Having read that document, I find the Conservative party's motion more than a little surprising. Do the Conservatives really now support the creation of a community ownership mechanism in the NHS that will rule out future privatisation and the selling off of assets, unless the members of that new society vote for it? Is that what Conservative Members are saying? Do they also really support local communities owning and controlling their health services? Finally, do they also support NHS staff—porters, cleaners, nurses, the entire hospital staff—being voting members of the organisation in which they work, and being able to influence its policy and leadership? That is precisely what that document proposes.

If the Conservatives do support those things, I suggest that we are witnessing something of a Damascene conversion on the Conservative Front Bench to some of the oldest principles of the Labour movement, namely community and mutual ownership. I do not know whether there is an ulterior motive here—there often is with the Conservative party. Perhaps the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns), who is shaking his head, is seeking sponsorship from the Co-operative party. Perhaps he is not doing that, however, and perhaps the Conservatives' support for these measures is misplaced, because I do not think that they truly understand the full impact of what is being proposed by the Secretary of State.

As a member of the Co-operative party and a strong believer in the virtues of community ownership, I genuinely believe that these reforms have the potential to be among the most revitalising ever introduced in the NHS. Members of our party are proud that we founded the NHS, a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe). Many members of our party have long complained about the democratic deficit

in the NHS, although they love almost everything else about it. They are absolutely right to complain about that. The NHS's lack of accountability and responsiveness to public and patients has always been its Achilles' heel. Because of the way in which the NHS is structured, NHS bodies have always looked up to Whitehall for accountability, rather than downwards to patients and the wider public. The result is that, even today, there persists in parts of the NHS a like-it-or-lump-it culture in the services that are provided to people.

At the creation of the NHS, Bevan trumpeted as one of its chief benefits Whitehall's ability to monitor dropped bedpans. That has now become one of its main weaknesses. It was right in its day, because of the chaotic nature of pre-war health care. That control was necessary in those days, but today it is more and more of a problem. All of us hear that health professionals are finding things more and more difficult, and that they want more local flexibility. As a party, we have to respond to that.

People who can remember pre-NHS health care put up with the like-it-or-lump-it aspect of the national health service, because it is infinitely better than what they had before. My hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) mentioned people in their early 30s. I am happy to confirm that I turned 33 yesterday, so I can probably scrape into that group. People of my generation will certainly not have the same forbearance towards the NHS as the generations before them. For the NHS to survive and thrive in a consumer society, it needs to get better at customer care.

The NHS also needs to get better at listening to local opinion. Ever since it was established, there have been countless examples in all parts of the country—dare I say it, in every constituency represented in the House—of proposed changes in service provision being fiercely resisted by local communities. My colleague, the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Dr. Taylor)—a fellow member of the Select Committee on Health—is perhaps a living embodiment and constant reminder of the NHS's failure to listen and to involve the community in the way in which health services are delivered. Dare I say that the NHS has not always got it right when it has proposed service change, and that, on occasion, perhaps the community has been right instead?

These reforms are radical for the simple reason that they invert the traditional power relationship that has hitherto existed in the NHS. If the proposals in the document finally become legislation, and if assets are genuinely transferred to democratic mutual organisations, the members of those organisations will overnight become more important to trust managers than Ministers are now. That has to be a good thing. To me, that is the key argument for the Government's proposals. It is vital that that ownership and that democratic control be not token but genuine mechanisms that the local community can use.

That key test was rightly highlighted by the right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell). He was wrong, however, about the recreation of the NHS internal market and the proposals being an attempt to recreate the Conservatives' NHS trusts policy. The issue needs to be carefully considered, and we must think about how the introduction of foundation trusts will affect health care provision and whether it will lead to a two-tier service.

The difference between these proposals and those described by the right hon. Gentleman is the question of GP fundholding. The reforms introduced by the Conservative party were pernicious, because how quickly people received treatment was decided on an entirely arbitrary basis. That point was extremely well made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield. What counted when people were admitted to hospital was whether they were patients of fundholding or non-fundholding GPs. Access to treatment was determined not by clinical need, but by the negotiating power of the purchaser. That was entirely wrong, and I see no evidence to suggest that any of it is being recreated by the proposals before us.

People claim that the proposals will create a two-tier NHS, but they fail properly to realise that, even today, the NHS is multi-tiered. The quality of service offered by different NHS providers varies widely from trust to trust, but under the current system there is little that patients can do if they live in an area where the trust is underperforming.

As well as offering local, democratic control, the reforms are about creating a much needed improvement mechanism and a culture of improvement in the NHS. I do not see why our party should be opposed to allowing the good to get better or why we should have any ideological problem with that. What really counts is that we help those who need to improve most to reach a level that we would consider acceptable. That is the explicit aim of the policy—allow the good ones to get on with the job that they are doing and give more targeted help to the ones who need it.

Mr. Simmonds: Has the hon. Gentleman considered the possibility of extending foundation hospital trust status to hospitals that do not have three stars? I put that point to the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh), as it may be a way to improve the performance of hospitals with two or fewer stars.

Andy Burnham: That is a reasonable point. My guess is that the Government are starting with three-star hospitals because the initiative is taking the form of a pilot. Such hospitals are perhaps best placed to go forward with what is, effectively, a new structure. Wigan and Leigh NHS trust in my constituency has two stars and I would very much like it to be able to graduate towards foundation status in due course. I hear the point that the hon. Gentleman makes.

With all respect to my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), I do not see how the policy is being introduced at the expense of the rest. I do not see that it will take anything from the rest. In fact, all it will do is create a system under which they may aspire to do something that they do not do at the moment. I do not see how it will impoverish them in any way.

My main concern echoes the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield—I agree fundamentally with a lot of what he said. Welcome changes have been made in the NHS with the creation of primary care trusts and a shift of resources to

[Andy Burnham]

community level, but I have a small concern that those changes will reassert the primacy of the acute trust in the local health economy. That would risk undoing some welcome progress that has been made in this regard. I wholeheartedly endorse the principle that more and more of the NHS cake should be spent at community and primary care level.

Some—including, I believe, the NHS Confederation—have suggested that foundation status might be applied to a local health system and not just the acute trusts. There is something in that idea that might be worth investigating. Will the Minister touch on that in his remarks?

I want to comment on the rise of mutualism not just in the NHS, but in social policy generally. We have heard a lot of talk in the past few years about the search for a third way, but I strongly believe that community and mutual ownership is the closest that people can ever get to that. We are seeing a welcome revival in the co-operative sector, for the simple reason that it offers solutions to some of today's social problems. I am thinking in particular of estates, for which crucial public services are simply not provided sufficiently well by current providers. Mutual solutions can offer an answer to these gaps in the market.

One example is nursing homes. Conservative Front Benchers go on at great length about nursing home capacity and the quality of care in nursing homes. The option introduced by the Conservatives failed local communities, and the previous system was not particularly good either. The Conservative option failed because it allowed a private nursing home, on which a community can be dependent, to up sticks at will and go, leaving that community high and dry. The lack of sufficient safeguards to maintain the service within a community was a real flaw in the changes introduced by the Conservatives in the early 1990s. The nursing care sector is crying out for a mutual solution whereby people become members of a scheme that they pay into, and which will look after them in old age. Perhaps the Minister and the Government should look into that.

If we get right the planned reforms in respect of foundation hospitals, they could set an exciting precedent in the introduction of community involvement and ownership across the public sector. I chair an organisation called Supporters Direct, which was set up by the Government to promote supporter and community ownership of football clubs. Its aim is simply to help supporters' groups to set up mutual trusts as a vehicle for raising funds, purchasing shares and gaining influence in the clubs that they love. To date, it has helped to set up more than 70 supporters' trusts in England and Scotland, the vast majority of which are mutual societies and industrial and provident societies. They have a range of influences; some have a very small shareholding in a club, others own a club—I am thinking of Lincoln City and Chesterfield—outright.

As hon. Members know, I always try to get the conversation on to football as quickly as I can, but there is a genuine parallel to be drawn here. Football clubs and hospitals are linked. People feel emotional about them; they are a source of civic pride and civic identity. People care about them, and they want to see them thrive and improve. People wring their hands about declining participation in the democratic process, but at launch meetings for supporters' trusts, some 800 to 1,000 people—including young people—are engaged in a community endeavour. I see no reason why that enthusiasm cannot be introduced to the NHS and the provision of hospitals and health services. People would like more involvement in the way that their services are provided.

This must not be a token, paper exercise whereby someone has a vote in a mutual society but they never use it; it must be a genuine, democratic process. I agree with the Secretary of State that people need to opt into the process of becoming a member of a trust; simply giving them membership is not enough. Mutual societies work when there is a groundswell of emotion, and people want to do something about a service that they care about. I urge the Government to keep that principle as part of the forthcoming legislation. I also ask them to look at the industrial and provident society ownership model as a way forward for foundation hospitals. It is a truly democratic, transparent and accountable system, and an excellent vehicle that could be applied to foundation hospitals.

I understand Members' reservations about this policy, and a whippersnapper like me would do well to listen to the likes of my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield and my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras. Their concerns are genuine and need to be thought through, but they should not stand in the way of a potentially exciting reform and a new era for the national health service.

5.4 pm

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): I appreciated the speech by the hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), who was going well until he got onto football. I want to use as my starting point the speech made by the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Ms Taylor), who was kind enough to allow me to intervene on her. She and I both have a three-star hospital in our constituencies: in fact, I have two—Addenbrooke's and Papworth, one a teaching hospital, the other a specialist trust.

I gathered from her speech that the hon. Member for Stockton, South will encourage the University hospital of North Tees to seek foundation hospital status, and I shall encourage Addenbrooke's to do the same. I spoke to that hospital's new chief executive on Monday, and I want to use my speech to influence the Government's policy, as I want Addenbrooke's to have the freedoms that go with foundation status. I want it to be able to respond more effectively to the demands and needs of NHS patients. However, unlike the hon. Lady, I do not believe that the policy has been developed to the point where hospitals have the sort of freedoms that they should have in an NHS that is going to meet patient need.

Addenbrooke's has expressed a broad commitment to apply for foundation status. It wants to expand community engagement and take further its already excellent relationships with local people. Although foundation status will offer local people the chance to engage in hospital governance, I believe that the hospital could achieve much of what is intended to be achieved by means of foundation status without actually securing that status. However, if that is what is required, that is fine.

The Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), is on the Front Bench at present, and he and I have debated elsewhere the "agenda for change" proposals in the NHS. I want to help Addenbrooke's hospital in its aim of accelerating that rate of change, and to that end I shall focus on two important matters—real local accountability, and freedom and financial flexibility.

I listened with care to the speech by the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson). He asked what was wrong with the current system that required the introduction of foundation hospital status. I shall give an example of the way in which the present system is not delivering. Addenbrooke's is a highly successful teaching hospital with an international reputation, and also a district general hospital to which doctors want to refer patients. To be most efficient in operational terms, bed occupancy should be between 82 and 85 per cent., but it is currently running at 98 per cent.

The NHS has rising real resources and rising demand, but constrained supply. That is where the system needs to be changed. We need greater productivity and efficiency from the capacity that exists in the NHS, and we must ensure that increases in capacity respond more effectively to patient demands, as expressed through patients' relationships with clinicians.

I turn now to the issues of local accountability and of freedom and financial flexibility. I am worried that local accountability will remain limited in two respects. First, the Government say that the centre will give up control to people in local areas. The Secretary of State was careful to talk about control from Whitehall, but control does not have to be traceable to Richmond house to qualify as central control. The independent regulator will still be a central control over the activities of foundation hospitals. The proposed Commission for Health Care Audit and Inspection will be a form of central control. As the NHS Confederation has pointed out, the data collection requirements will also be a form of central control. The purchasing relationship with primary care trusts and other commissioners, in so far as they are subject to NHS central guidance, is a form of central control.

All these forms of central control will, in their way, limit local accountability. Only to the extent that those controls can be progressively reduced over time in response to the increasing standards of the NHS foundation hospitals, as one would hope to expect, would one achieve the local accountability that matters.

The second problem with local accountability is structural, and it brings me back to PCTs and purchasing. My right hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell) made the point that if we want to allow local people to change the shape of services and develop innovative, enhanced services in the way that they wish, the most immediate and direct way to do that is to give them more effective control over primary care trusts, because they are the commissioners of services. The implication of the question of the hon. Member for Leigh about foundation status for a locality is in effect that locality commissioning, which was provided for in the legislation before the 1997 election, is a means by which, if local people are involved sufficiently effectively, services that respond to local needs can be delivered.

The other means of delivering such services is to respond to patient choice. It will not surprise right hon. and hon. Members to know that that is the way I wish to go. Instead of setting up a bureaucratic mechanism for providing local interpretation of patient needs, we should allow patients to do that more directly through the reintroduction and extension of patient choice. That is where I think, structurally speaking, there is a large lacuna in the philosophy underlying foundation status.

On freedoms and financial flexibility, Addenbrooke's quite rightly pointed in its document to the opportunity to retain proceeds from asset disposals, to retain any operating surpluses and to access capital from public and private sector sources. That reflects the language of the Government's document published in early December. However, retaining proceeds from asset disposals is an interesting concept for a hospital that is on a constrained site where every bit of land should be used for a medical or biomedical purpose and considering that the Government put a lock on assets so that they cannot be disposed of. Quite what freedom that means for Addenbrooke's, I do not know.

Retaining any operating surpluses is a curious concept. Under the current financial system, although the work load at Addenbrooke's has risen dramatically and it is operating at capacity, it is still running operating deficits. Perhaps the so-called payment by results system and money following the patient will deliver operating surpluses. If so, that is a worthwhile benefit. However, the borrowing proposal is not as obvious a benefit as it looks. My interpretation is that undertaking a private finance initiative investment project with a 25-year profile of repayments and involving the private sector may mean that a five or seven-year long-term agreement with a primary care trust will not suffice for the private sector investor's purposes. That investor will still require the Secretary of State's guarantee in some form. Perhaps a letter of comfort will be provided whenever the foundation hospital receives the assent of the independent regulator to forward business plans. None the less, the money on offer is still essentially public sector underwritten investment for the future and the foundation hospital will be locked into it.

The financial freedoms do not seem as great as they should be unless the revenue—and this is where borrowing is intended to be secured—is sufficiently responsive to the performance and capacity growth of the foundation hospital. If a foundation hospital improves its efficiency, it ought to be able to attract additional activity. If it improves its quality, it ought to be able to attract an additional premium on its price. I do not want to introduce a dogmatic, ideological note but I am worried that, because the Government rail against the so-called internal market, they have, as a matter of ideological conviction, decided that there should be a national tariff with regional variation. In effect, that means that commissioning can only be undertaken on the basis of cost and volume with no discount for efficiency or premium for quality.

Mr. Simmonds: I am taking careful note of my hon. Friend's structured arguments. Has he considered the possibility of money following the patient? If that does not happen, a successful foundation hospital could suck in patients from elsewhere because it provides services

[Mr. Simmonds]

that are not offered by other hospitals. Will foundation hospitals have to use the same financial cake to provide more services to a greater number of patients?

Mr. Lansley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. His point is exact: money ought to follow patients. That is how the system should work. But how much money should there be for each case? The Government's proposals for payments by results ought to work in that direction, but if they are allied to a national tariff that is, in effect, dictated from the centre, even with regional variations, that will remove any possibility that spare NHS capacity can take up the slack, because of pricing at the margin, or that hospitals, such as Addenbrooke's, which can provide additional quality, can meet the cost of providing additional capacity because of the premium they can attract. Such hospitals could demonstrate to the private sector—like a business—that their advantaged position in the general ecology of health care would allow them to secure demand for the foreseeable future. They would not base their case on the Secretary of State's guarantee, but on their own performance, quality and ability to attract patients.

The two essential problems are that if local accountability is not reflected in patient choice and if price cannot also reflect some of the changes in efficiency and quality advantage that foundation hospitals are able to make, the hospitals will not be able to exercise those freedoms to provide both additional capacity and innovative and improving services.

I am in favour of foundation hospitals and share with my colleagues the desire that they should not only start with hospitals with three-star status, such as Addenbrooke's, which received three stars in both the performance ratings that have been carried out, or Papworth. To jog back to the comments of the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris), I am not quite sure on what basis the Radcliffe did not receive its stars as it seems to be very similar to Addenbrooke's. Papworth has demonstrated a three-star performance, allied to a Commission for Health Improvement report that is as good as for any hospital in the country.

Those hospitals should lead the new system because they have the clinical and corporate governance that is more likely to deliver innovation and to influence policy in the right direction. However, their performance cannot influence the policy unless the basic structure of the policy is right. The structure needs to reflect patient choice and financial flexibility—including price—and it needs an independent regulator who not only focuses on high quality and standards but also has a duty to deliver increasing freedom to NHS institutions over time.

5.19 pm

Mrs. Janet Dean (Burton): I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate, which gives the House the chance to discuss the concept of foundation trusts as well as the future of the health service.

Both the motion and the amendment welcome the principle of NHS foundation trusts and hospitals. That might seem to be rare agreement between the Government and the Opposition, yet we know that there has never been a greater gap between the philosophies of the two main parties on the future of our universally available health service, free at the point of use.

The Conservatives have made it clear that they would reduce public spending and encourage private treatment, paid for by the individual patient or by private medical insurance subsidised by the taxpayer—*[Interruption.]* I think that they have made that clear. That would lead to two-tier health provision, in which those who have the money or the insurance cover would have easy access to treatment. Those who are less well off would have to take their turn in what would soon be seen as a second-class service. The Tories' belief that private health insurance is the right way forward is both immoral and flawed. Insurance companies, by their nature, are mainly interested in covering low risks. If one is young and fit, it is easy to insure oneself. If one is elderly or has a chronic disease, the cost of insurance is likely to be prohibitive, or the main chronic condition will be excluded from cover.

I am proud that the Labour party, which founded our national health service, is determined that the principles of a health service free at the point of use should continue. I welcome the changes that have been made over the past five years. The setting up of primary care trusts has brought decision making to a local level. At the same time, the establishment of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence has begun to address the problems of postcode prescribing. The Commission for Health Improvement is helping to raise standards within our health service, and the Labour Government have shown their commitment to the health service by making available an unprecedented level of extra investment, bringing in extra doctors, nurses and other health care staff.

For our health service to have public confidence, we need to be able to offer rapid treatment when it is needed. We need to look at innovative ways to reduce waiting lists and times, and I am pleased that the Queen's hospital in Burton was successful in being chosen as the site for a new £20 million diagnosis and treatment centre. That DTC will be developed alongside the new cancer and endoscopy unit, which is being funded both by Government and by local people through the Queen's hospital cancer appeal. I would like to pay tribute to everyone who has supported that appeal, which has raised nearly £1.5 million. There is already much good will for our local hospitals and for the NHS in general, not only from the general public who are always happy to support such appeals but in terms of the amount of volunteering activity that enhances the well-being of patients. Dozens of my constituents are involved in helping to make the stay of patients in the Queen's hospital more bearable. Nor must we forget the paid staff of the health service: doctors, nurses and all hospital staff work under tremendous pressure, and we should always make sure that they know that they are greatly valued.

Change is not new to the NHS. In the past 20 years, we first saw the health authorities that directly ran the services in their area reduced in size. In my area, the Staffordshire health service was broken up into three health authorities in the early 1980s. As other hon. Members have mentioned, that was a time when local councillors were nominated to serve on those health

bodies, and I served on the south-east Staffordshire health authority at that time. In the early 1990s, health providers were separated from health authorities and trusts were formed, and the internal market was created with its associated divisiveness. I am pleased that the Labour Government dispensed with that internal market and looked to health trusts and providers to co-operate and to spread best practice. I do not wish that co-operation to be jeopardised by the creation of foundation trusts, although I would support greater democracy for all our NHS trusts.

Although my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State provided some reassurances, I am concerned that foundation hospitals may prove to be divisive, creating a two-tier system in which some hospitals, able to pay higher salaries, could poach staff and, ultimately, patients from other hospitals. While we should not follow a pattern of rewarding failure in our NHS by bailing out inefficient trusts, neither should we abandon health providers, as they need the expertise to reform and improve. If the creation of foundation hospitals increases the divide between providers and causes hospitals to close, local people will lose out.

The proposal in the Conservative motion that all trusts should be allowed to bid for foundation status is not practical because it is clear that trusts that are struggling would not be able to go it alone. I am concerned that those trusts with a three-star rating, which will be eligible to become foundation hospitals, may not always remain of three-star quality. If their star rating falls, how will help be given to independent foundation trusts?

Foundation hospitals will not produce more trained staff; only the Government's investment will do that. We need to give that investment and the changes that we have introduced time to bring about the improvements that all Labour Members want. The Secretary of State talked of the progress that has already been made. The NHS should be allowed a period without the further change that foundation trusts would bring. I hope that Ministers will consider delaying the proposals so that there can be further consideration and consolidation.

5.26 pm

Mr. Adrian Flook (Taunton): As the debate has made clear, Conservative Members welcome the principle of foundation hospitals. I rise to support the motion in the names of my right hon. and hon. Friends. We support that principle because it would give control to individual hospitals, and I reject the remarks of the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Ms Taylor), who is no longer in her seat, who was attempting to say otherwise.

The Conservatives' philosophy is dramatically different from that of the Government. The Labour party appears to have borrowed our language, and it has not delivered the substance. It recognises what needs to be done but fails to implement a policy that will deliver on that aim. In his announcement on 11 December, which appears to have been rushed and poorly thought through, the Secretary of State said that he was giving hospitals independence, but is it true independence according to what he believes?

A non-executive member of a health authority told me that the 11 December announcement was nothing more than a political game. It reminded him of the Government's response to the Conservatives' proposals for independence for local health care, which we made just before the last election. The Government rushed to implement strategic health authorities as a panacea. It was an attempt to counter the Conservative party's rather good idea of decentralising power from Richmond house and giving it to local areas, thereby getting rid of regional health authorities.

No one denies that extra money is going into the NHS, and that is good. However, there are two sides to the way in which the Government are raising taxes and then spending. How much one spends is not an indicator of how much one cares. In every other area Labour has raised taxes to increase public spending and imposed national targets with ever increasing interference and centralisation.

I remember in the previous Parliament a senior non-executive member of a health authority telling me that one Monday the authority received a call from on high—from Richmond house—saying that the Minister was demanding a certain amount of information for a meeting on the Friday. The health authority had to approach the Taunton and Somerset NHS Hospital Trust and demand the information that the Minister wanted. That meant that all Tuesday and Wednesday, the hospital's central management staff were involved in trying to compile that information. They delivered it to the health authority on Wednesday evening, as they had promised.

On Thursday morning, the health authority discussed how it would present those figures to the Minister at the meeting on Friday. On Thursday afternoon, the Minister's secretary rang up to cancel the meeting. For four days, Somerset's health authority ground to a halt because central interference meant that figures were demanded that the Minister ultimately did not want. We have heard too much of such interference by central Government, and it has continued.

Mr. Lansley: By way of illustration of the way in which expenditure and quality are not necessarily related, I refer to the fact that the NHS is incurring hundreds of millions of pounds of expenditure as a consequence of the implementation of the working time directive. That will take place, first, for non-medical and then for medical staff. That does not deliver of itself any improvements in the service provided to patients, but it counts as NHS expenditure. If one were simply counting money, one would think that an increase in expenditure would lead to an increase in NHS standards, but it does not do that at all.

Mr. Flook: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making such an important point. No doubt, in April, there will be a consequential rise in the health bill for hospitals and GP surgeries when they have to pay ever higher national insurance charges. It would be a shame for the Government to say that they were putting more money into the health service if that allowed the general population to gain the impression that greater health care was being delivered. That is patently not happening.

The Government see higher taxes and higher spending as a sort of social obligation or as a common morality of citizenship, as they call it. As the leader of

[Mr. Flook]

the Conservative party, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) wrote recently, Conservatives do not believe that the Government have a moral entitlement to other people's money. It is still their own, and the Government have only been entrusted with it. That is why any Government must spend that money wisely and why the Government will fail to meet their 2005 targets, as many of us, including Labour Members, will have read in today's *Financial Times*.

Careful stewardship is the key, and Conservative Members see that stewardship having a twin aim when it comes to reforming public services. We need not just to improve public services. My hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) rightly alluded to the fact that there has been a 20 per cent. increase in funding, but he did not go on to say that that funding has delivered only a 2 per cent. increase in the number of treatments. That means that much work needs to be done.

Mr. Simmonds: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. In Scotland, there has been an even greater increase in public expenditure on the health service, but the service, as measured in waiting list terms, has deteriorated significantly irrespective of the amount of money going into it.

Mr. Flook: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I am also told that the situation is not much better in Wales. It is lamentable that there are 25,000 more administrators in the NHS than there are now beds in the system—225,000 administrators as opposed to not quite 200,000 beds. That is a particular shame.We need to cut the enormous waste that currently occurs in the NHS so that individuals and families can choose where they spend their money. That point applies not to the NHS but to other Departments of state.

In retrospect, I suppose we should welcome an attempt to mimic Tory philosophy with this attempt to create foundation hospitals. Labour Members have spoken much about co-operatives, and the hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) spoke fondly about how keen he is on the notion of the co-operative societies and how they work. However, Conservative Members also see foundation hospitals as agreeing with our base philosophy.

The problem is that the Government do not fully understand the foundation hospitals that they are trying to introduce. They do not understand how to make hospitals locally accountable. From the prospectus that Ministers have published and from the Secretary of State's response to my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring, we do not know whether enough people will be willing to come forward to serve as members of the foundation trusts. Local elections are approaching and we all know that it is quite difficult to find enough local councillors to serve on local councils, and the Government have not yet told us how we will find enough suitably qualified to be members of the foundation trusts. What does "local" mean? Does it depend on a travel-to-work basis, as is currently the case with people who work for local authorities? We do not yet know. Some 3,500 people work in Taunton's hospital and 50,000 people live in the town, but the hospital serves thousands of people beyond Taunton Deane.

I also represent part of West Somerset, which is a different local authority area. The local authority mainly looks to Minehead, but for its acute hospital services it very much looks to Taunton and, to some extent, Tiverton. Will people who live in Dulverton and Withypool in West Somerset look to serve on trusts in Tiverton or Taunton? We do not know. My hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring said that there is no acute hospital in Woodspring and everyone has to travel to Weston-super-Mare or Bristol. We have yet to find out what the Government think. I quite like the idea espoused by the hon. Member for Putney (Mr. Colman) that there should be a catchment area for membership of the foundation hospital trust.

The situation in Taunton is intriguing. The trust is well regarded by many local people. Taunton and Somerset hospital, commonly known as Musgrove Park, was built during the war. The old building, which still stands, has corridors wide enough for jeeps to go down because it was built by the American forces to look after expected casualties following the D-day landings. Fortunately, the hospital had massive infrastructure spends in the 1980s and the mid-1990s which to a large extent matched the population growth in the area. However, there has been a big lull since 1994. I am pleased that recently there has been much talk of spending tens of millions of pounds of taxpayers' money in upgrading the old building, which has structural problems and cannot deliver the needs of modern surgery as well as a new building. Parking is also a problem. Local people, especially the Member of Parliament, strongly welcome the planned investment to match the bigger and now growing population. A cancer unit is on its way. That is welcome but not before time. There is only a small "p" promise of a tertiary cardio-thoracic unit. Somerset residents have been paying for those improvements for some time in ever-rising amounts of tax, but we still have not got that big "P" promise for the cardio-thoracic unit and the huge amount of spending that we need.

How does that relate to foundation hospitals? The Taunton and Somerset NHS Hospital Trust was awarded three stars in the original round when stars were given out, to some extent like confetti. Sadly, it now has only two stars. There are a number of reasons for that and the chief executive is confident that he can rectify the situation. The staff and all his management team are working on that. They consider the trust a rising two star because of their hard work and good management. However, that cannot detract from the fact that the star system is flawed, as the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Dr. Taylor) explained so eloquently.

Where does that leave Taunton's fairly important hospital in the bigger scheme of things if it is trying to get that large infrastructure spend? Its increased needs and expected increased financing means that it must consider whether to go for foundation trust status as spelt out by the Government. A local senior NHS manager described going for foundation trust status as not dissimilar to Dumbo's magic ears. As far as he was concerned, setting up foundation hospitals would provide the same confidence that made Dumbo think that his ears could make him fly. To put it another way,

he meant to say that the foundation trusts are not dissimilar to the original aims of the NHS trusts at the beginning of the 1990s, in which greater clarity and identity is given to the hospital and its local management capability so that there is more delegation, greater responsibility and sharper accountability to the taxpayers who fund it and the local people.

However, there are still too many unanswered questions on whether the hospital could go for foundation trust status and, at the same time, be hopeful that it will get all the money it needs, especially as it will not be in the first wave of hospitals to qualify because it has two stars.

We do not yet know whether the Secretary of State will guarantee any borrowing, or whether the Somerset and Dorset strategic health authority will do so if the hospital achieves foundation trust status. Perhaps the Taunton Deane primary care trust will do so. We do not know whether the private sector will lend to foundation hospitals. We know that the private finance initiative might work for the large building programme, but we do not know whether foundation hospitals will be acceptable to the City. How will the loans be treated in the national accounts? That is not especially relevant to the management of Taunton hospital, but it is relevant to the SHA and, in turn, to the Government.

There are other concerns about foundation hospitals. Taunton hospital has a well regarded private wing, Parkside. It is very small, accounting for only 1 per cent. of the hospital's total activity, and it has to compete with the nearby Nuffield hospital. According to the prospectus—the hastily drawn up plans for foundation hospitals—the licence to become a foundation hospital will restrict the number of private patients a trust can treat. Paragraph 3.16 states that the Government would be keen to see applications that propose to convert NHS facilities wholly used for paying patients. Is that the Government's real wish? We are not sure, but suspect that that is more likely to be mere spin, designed to assuage the concern of sceptics on the Labour Benches, who are, it seems, having to be asked not to speak in this debate.

Mr. Barber's paper, carefully leaked to today's *Financial Times*, states that No. 10 appears to be impatient at the speed with which the Secretary of State and the Department of Health are pursuing choice and diversity. Has the Department just come up with the concept of foundation hospitals, which was poorly thought through and rushed out on 11 December; or are the Government, as they did in the announcements in the summer and on 11 December, borrowing the language, but not delivering the substance? The Government recognise what needs to be done, but have failed to implement a policy that will deliver the aim.

5.42 pm

Dr. Howard Stoate (Dartford): It is always a great pleasure to me to take part in health debates—as one of the few medically qualified Members, I follow with interest issues surrounding health delivery—but I feel that we might be having the wrong debate this afternoon. When constituents visit my surgeries, write to me or send me an e-mail, it is normally to ask what the Government can do to continue to improve health services in the local hospital, or to ensure that there are more GPs in the area and that social services have adequate long-term care facilities for elderly relatives. It is unusual that someone raises issues about who runs the facilities, unless something goes wrong. Most of the time, people are content to see the health service develop and services improve. They are not worried about who is delivering the service—unless something goes radically wrong, in which case they become very interested indeed. If services continue to improve, they are generally happy.

I believe that the debate should focus on how we deliver health care in our society and how we get the best health gain for the money we put in. All hon. Members on both sides of the House have said that there has been a 20 per cent. real-terms increase in health spending in this country and that that is welcome. The important thing is to ensure that that money is spent to the best possible effect and that we get the best possible health delivery and health gain from it.

Broadly speaking, there are two ways in which that money can be used to improve health care. First, it can be used to improve delivery of services. There has been significant improvement in my local hospital, Darent Valley hospital in Dartford, which is part of the Dartford and Gravesham acute NHS trust. The hospital went from no stars to one star now. It has just obtained agreement for a diagnostic and treatment centre to be a built—a £9 million investment that will enable an extra 3,000 elective surgery operations to be carried out each year. Accident and emergency facilities are improving and expanding. This week, the chief executive wrote to tell me that the hospital is now on track to achieve the two-week cancer target, and is well on the way to reaching the targets for both out-patient and in-patient waiting times. In other words, the hospital is making significant improvements in service delivery.

Dr. Evan Harris: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Stoate: No. There is little time and other hon. Members still want to speak.

This afternoon, hon. Members have asked about those trusts that are left out—that are not able to become foundation hospitals. It has been suggested that hospitals with one or two stars will not get a look-in and will somehow miss out. I take issue with that. In my area, where the hospital has one star, it is getting very significant improvements in its facilities, its management structure and its outcomes. It should not be assumed that just because a hospital is ineligible to apply for foundation status, it is automatically at a disadvantage.

In general practice we have the PMS pilots—for personal medical services—and advanced access, whereby patients will be able to see a nurse within 24 hours, or a doctor within 48 hours, of when they wish. That too is a significant improvement. The new GP contract, which I gather will be released sometime next month, will show how GPs can improve their facilities and their patient care, and develop their practices.

All that will, of course, have a major impact on the local health economy. I am pleased to announce that this morning my local hospital trust had a 14.5 per cent. increase in its capital allocation over the next three years, which will significantly increase its ability to improve health care services.

[Dr. Stoate]

I would like to focus on a radical rethink about the way in which we deliver health care, and how we view it. I want to look closely at what we really mean by the terms health, illness and disease. The World Health Organisation's 1968 definition of what constitutes health is about the complete physical, psychological and social well-being, not just the absence of disease. That definition will, I hope, encompass the vast majority of people in this country.

What constitutes illness behaviour? It was defined by Mechanic in 1962 as the actions taken by someone when they perceive themselves to be ill. According to some of the early work done on that idea, most people, when they perceive themselves to be ill, do not go to a doctor or a hospital casualty department; they do other things. They might go to a chemist or speak to their neighbours or their friends, and they will probably wait for a week or two to see what happens. Most people do not automatically rely on the NHS.

Only a relatively small number of people with disease—defined as an abnormality in structure or function of tissues or organs—need the acute services of the NHS. We have an obsession about the health service being synonymous with acute, expensive high-tech care. In fact, acute high-tech care is only one very small part of care delivery. The vast majority of people use informal methods; they go to the chemist, or their friends and family. Only a relatively small number of people use the acute care sector, and it is only a tiny part of the NHS—yet debate after debate in the House focuses on extremely expensive high-tech delivery as if that were the NHS.

NHS figures show that more than 90 per cent. of episodes of illness, as perceived by patients and as taken to medical professionals, are dealt with by GPs, practice nurses and other health professionals in the primary care setting.

Dr. Harris: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Stoate: Only if it is a very short intervention, because I do not have much time.

Dr. Harris: Does the hon. Gentleman think that the slogan "Schools and hospitals first" helps or hinders his attempts to educate his colleagues about the importance of primary health care?

Dr. Stoate: I knew that the Liberal Democrat spokesman would have to score political points, because that is what he does. I am trying to widen the debate away from party politics. I am trying to use the debate to widen the subject as far as possible and to consider other aspects of health care.

As I was saying, more than 90 per cent. of episodes of health delivery are given in the primary care setting; that is where the bulk of health care takes place.

Public health is a subject that we do not debate often, but the biggest cause of ill health in this country is poverty, including relative poverty, which causes diseases such as obesity, diabetes, heart disease and cancer. In 1911 the Registrar General, Stephenson, set up the disease classification by social class, and even as long ago as that, he made it clear that virtually all diseases are related to social class. In those days social class was a good measure, but these days we tend to use socio-economic status, because that is a fairer measure of the way society is now.

Every disease that I can think of, apart from malignant melanoma, is actually a disease of poverty and low socio-economic status. That is where the really big debate needs to take place. Almost all diseases—certainly obesity, diabetes, which is a major drain on the NHS, and heart disease and cancer, which are both major killers—are diseases of relative poverty in this country.

Things are so bad that a child born in some parts of Manchester is likely to live 10 years less than a child born to a similar family in Devon. We should all be concerned about that. What should we do about it? That should be the really big health debate—public health care and what we do about delivering public health in our society. During the recess I was fortunate enough to have a pamphlet about public health in children, which I wrote with my researcher, Bryan Jones, published by the Fabian Society. We looked hard at what constitutes good public health measures for children and young people so that we could try to avoid a major epidemic of obesity in young people. Obesity among children has doubled in the past 10 years and has now reached epidemic proportions. The figures are similar to those in America, where it is becoming a major public health issue. In the pamphlet, we looked at what we should do about food in schools; advertising sweets, crisps and so on to children; what we should do to educate parents to give their children better nutritional advice; what we should do about food poverty; and children and exercise.

The House should look more widely at what we should do as a nation about public health issues, including obesity reduction measures, ways of teaching kids to eat more healthily, teaching schools to provide better nutritional facilities and helping them to provide better sports facilities; and making sure that parents are properly educated about delivering good nutritional advice to their children. In the pamphlet, for example, we suggest tax breaks for shops in food-poor areas to encourage the setting-up of shops in rural or inner-city areas where it is more difficult to make ends meet. We believe that such changes could make a significant improvement to the health of the nation.

In the few remaining minutes, I want to widen our debate. Health care is critical, but we must not focus purely on the high-tech end of the market and assume that it is a marker of the failure or success of Government policy. We must look at the issue far more broadly. I am pleased that the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Ms Blears), who has ministerial responsibility for public health, is on the Front Bench, because she is instrumental in the Government's policies to deliver high-quality public health. It should not be forgotten that this Government are the first to have a Minister with specific responsibility for public health, which is extremely welcome.

We should widen the debate and look at public health in its entirety to make sure that children, the next generation of society, are treated in the best possible way and are given the best possible start in life, as well as the

best educational and sports facilities. That does not necessarily cost a fortune. In fact, if the next generation is brought up to be healthier, stronger, fitter and more able to care for itself, spending on expensive, acute and high-tech hospitals would be reduced. There is a genuine risk that if we do not do something about obesity in children now, they will pre-decease their parents in significant numbers, which should concern us all. I am pleased to have had a chance to contribute to our debate, and I hope that other Members will have a chance to make their contributions.

5.52 pm

Mr. Mark Simmonds (Boston and Skegness): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Dartford (Dr. Stoate), who always speaks with great enthusiasm and passion about health, although I am not sure that his remarks today were pertinent to the motion or the amendment.

I am delighted to be able to take part in this important debate. Foundation hospitals are an essential way forward for the provision of health care, particularly in England. It was slightly cheeky of the Secretary of State to try to persuade the House, even though he did so with a smirk, that the provision of foundation trusts and hospitals fitted comfortably with socialist ideals and the history of the NHS going back to Keir Hardie and others who formulated the ideals of the health service. That was duplicitous and disingenuous, to say the least.

I agree with the principle of setting up foundation trusts and hospitals. I shall come on to specific questions later, but any positive decentralising move that severs Whitehall control and creates greater local control, ownership and accountability must be encouraged. Any positive move to reduce the politicisation of the NHS and devolve decision-making power to people with knowledge of the requirements and priorities of a particular locality is to be encouraged, as is increasing democratisation and democratic control. In my constituency, where I have two hospitals—Pilgrim hospital in Boston and the Skegness and District hospital, of which the former is by far the more significant—there would be definite advantages in allowing much more local control and decision making to determine where money is spent and which services are given top priority.

Before I discuss the detail of the foundation hospital and foundation trust proposals, I want to put on record my admiration for the enormous amount of hard work done by all those who work in the health service, from the top clinicians, through the doctors, the nurses, to the ancillary staff—those who work in the kitchens, and cleaning staff—particularly those in my constituency. I have taken the trouble to spend quite a lot of time in the hospitals in my constituency, and have done a night shift at Pilgrim hospital in Boston, which gave me a far greater understanding of the pressures faced by many hospital staff.

There seems to be a considerable dichotomy between the Government's view of the state of the NHS and the view of most Members of Parliament, who receive in their postbag a great deal of correspondence about the health service. If Labour Members were more honest and were not simply supporting their Government, I expect that they would acknowledge that there are severe problems in the health service. The Secretary of State admitted as much in his comments earlier today.

To my mind, the problems are systemic. It is not possible to provide a successful and flexible service that is controlled from the centre. The Government are right to examine ways of improving the quantity and quality of health care provision, but that can be achieved only by removing central control, which creates a large, unwieldy bureaucracy that cannot cope or react to local priorities. For the sake of making the argument, I shall repeat the two stark statistics that have been quoted by other hon. Members: there are 24,000 to 25,000 more administrators than beds for patients. That is an extraordinary statistic. As was mentioned, I think, by my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) and my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Flook), despite the 20 to 22 per cent. increase in funding that has occurred over the past couple of years, hospital treatments are up by only 1.6 per cent. and admissions are down by 0.5 per cent. or 55,000. In Scotland, there has been a 28 per cent. increase in funding and a 25 per cent. increase in waiting lists.

Those statistics demonstrate clearly that money alone is not enough to improve the provision of health care. I do not represent a particularly affluent area of the country. It is rural Lincolnshire, and many people in my constituency are economically challenged. I know of people on benefit who are so desperate for treatment that they are going private by borrowing money from neighbours next door, which they can never hope to pay back. If the health service allows that to happen and does not look after the worst-off and most vulnerable people in our society, it is clear that there is something fundamentally wrong with the system that is currently in operation. It is right that we look at ways to improve it.

Despite the splits at the most senior level of Government between the Prime Minister and the Chancellor, through to the Back Benches, as we have seen in the debate today and through the early-day motion that has been signed by more than 100 Labour Members of Parliament, the main criticism seems to be that the creation of foundation trusts and foundation hospitals would produce a two-tier system. As other hon. Members have pointed out, we not only have a two-tier system already; we have a multi-tier system.

When I asked my local representatives of various trade unions and the British Medical Association, they made the same point. With reference to the creation of foundation hospitals, the chairman of the BMA said:

> "These freedoms ought to be available to all hospitals. Our prime concern must be to avoid creating a two-tier service in which patients who live near to Foundation Hospitals or are vocal and assertive in pressing to be referred to them, receive better services than those who are treated in other hospitals."

That problem can be overcome only by increasing the number of foundation trusts and hospitals, not by picking and selecting the best.

Mr. Lansley: Does my hon. Friend recall that during the debate, a number of Labour and Liberal Democrat Members referred disparagingly to the experience of GP fundholders? They said that that created two-tier status. Does not that suggest that there should be a larger number of hospitals with foundation status at an early stage, so that there are not some hospitals with that

[Mr. Lansley]

status and some without? The greater freedom would be in the collective interest of the NHS, and everybody should aspire to that at an early stage.

Mr. Simmonds: I thank my hon. Friend for that pertinent intervention. He is absolutely right to highlight that issue. However, the question involves not only controls on the finances of foundation hospitals, of which there should be more, but democratic control, which does not exist as it perhaps should—a point that I shall deal with later.

It is not necessarily important who owns the hospitals, but we should consider every possible way of maximising the beneficial outputs and improving health care provision in totality. Diversity, by its very nature, leads to innovation, so why will so few hospitals benefit from the freedom of foundation status? Surely, if the motivation is to improve the quality of health care, foundation hospitals and trusts should be used as a route to improve hospitals that are already improving. They should be used as an extra incentive, without the best merely being selected in terms of those that have three stars. That would be a major way of improving the service that is already being provided on the ground. One of the main bodies that deals with health care is the King's Fund. Julia Neuberger says:

"foundation status should not be limited to those trusts with three stars. Real power should be devolved to the local NHS and not just superficial autonomy from every central directive."

I intervened to question the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh), who did not seem to grasp the view that I was trying to convey, and the hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), who did. I pointed out that the main problem holding back the development of many hospitals is the centralised bureaucracy that is determining the way in which they operate. Freeing them from that bureaucracy will give them greater opportunity and ability to improve the services that they are giving to patients and the public at large.

One of my greatest concerns—I hope that the Minister will deal with it—is that there will be a tremendous challenge, bearing in mind the volatility of the star system, in trying to maintain a three-star system year on year while also trying to bed down the complexities that will be involved in the transferral to foundation status. What will happen if a hospital loses its three stars because it is trying to move to foundation trust status? Will it lose the opportunity to become a foundation hospital? If that were the case, it would be an enormous waste of time and resources.

Are there problems with guaranteed service provision? There are great concerns that, when the funding is devolved, foundation hospitals will have the ability to decide which service provision to make a priority, so there may be opportunities for them to drop services that are not particularly popular or well used. That point was eloquently made by the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Dr. Taylor) and I do not think that it has been sufficiently dealt with.

Will the argument about population shifts be built into the funding formula calculations? Lincolnshire, especially in my constituency, has an ever-expanding population driven by the many people who are rightly retiring to the beauties of the county. Funding needs to be addressed to take account of that. Many of those who are retiring to Skegness come from the ex-coal-mining areas in the midlands and some of them have serious health problems that rightly need to be addressed. I want to ensure that the funding is available so that foundation-status trusts can cope with that.

I want to deal with two main issues before my time is up. The first relates to the independent nature of foundation hospitals. How can a hospital be independent when it must still meet Government targets, even if there are fewer of them? What happens if there is a clash in which the foundation hospital does not think that it is a priority to meet the Government targets that are still set down? Will that be an excuse for the Secretary of State to withdraw foundation status?

I had a brief exchange earlier with the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) about private patients. They represent a way in which a hospital can generate additional income and use up surplus capacity, thereby also generating income. They may, in extreme circumstances, stave off the closure of part of a hospital. Why are provisions for private patients limited? What would happen if a foundation trust or hospital decided to circumvent the Secretary of State's specifications on this point? Would that be another reason to withdraw the hospital's status?

Will primary care trusts be able to decide which foundation hospital to put their funds into, or will there be detailed contracts drawn up for a period of years? I have heard five or seven years being mentioned. Would that not limit the hospital's decision-making processes and service provision capabilities?

Mr Flook: Does my hon. Friend agree that if such contracts were seven years long, they might arch over the four or five year period of office of the elected membership of the trust, and therefore tie those people in without giving them any flexibility to change any management practices?

Mr. Simmonds: That point had not occurred to me, but it is an extremely good one. I would be interested to know whether the ministerial team has thought through those issues.

How will the issue of not poaching staff be enforced? The right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) made a good point about this; it was the only point he made with which I agreed. He said that we cannot stop people applying for jobs in different hospitals. There do not seem to have been many thought processes devoted to that point.

I totally and wholeheartedly agree that there should be more local accountability and democratic control of foundation hospital trusts, and I believe that that should be extended beyond the levels proposed in the forthcoming Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) made a very eloquent speech on this matter. So many facets have not been explained yet. In my constituency, the Pilgrim hospital in Boston covers an enormous area, not only in my constituency but beyond: north towards Louth, over towards Grantham and south towards Peterborough. There are crossovers: some people go to Peterborough

hospital, some go to the Pilgrim hospital in Boston, some go to Lincoln or Nottingham. What will happen in those circumstances? Who will get a vote? Who will be elected on to the boards? Will people who live in Boston be able to sit on boards in Nottingham or Leicester, if they use facilities there? I would like the ministerial team to explain that.

The foundation hospitals will get into enormous difficulties unless a detailed policy is introduced on how the funding will be allocated when the hospitals gather more and more patients as the services improve over time. Will they all be sharing the same cake? How will the contracts operate, not only with the primary care trusts but with the other primary organisations within a particular geographical location that feed into the hospital? Will they be long-term contracts? Will they be flexible? Will the trusts be able to break them if they prefer to use facilities at another hospital, if indeed there is another foundation hospital that they can transfer to?

While I agree with foundation hospitals, I do not think that the Labour Government are in a position to change the national health service sufficiently. They have too much baggage, both philosophical and ideological, and too many interests in the trade union movement—their friends and paymasters there have an entrenched and self-centred belief that things should stay the same—and, ultimately, there are too many left-wing Members of Parliament who do not want to see even the first foundation hospital come to fruition, never mind seeing the scheme rolled out across the whole United Kingdom.

6.9 pm

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): I welcome the debate and the opportunity to contribute, but I must say that when I saw it listed on the Order Paper I was a little surprised that the Conservative party had picked the national health service as its chosen topic for an Opposition day. I am sure that a lot of my constituents in Wimbledon, if they have been listening or tuning in, will share my curiosity at some of the things that have been said.

I understand that the Opposition are keen to depoliticise the issue of the NHS and to pick individual topics such as foundation hospitals, on which they feel that they may be in some agreement with us, but if they are in agreement with us, it is for the wrong reasons. I shall return to that point.

Most people in my constituency and, I am sure, around the country would recognise that the NHS is probably one of the issues, if not the leading issue, of the day that separates the two parties, as the differences are so stark.

Although the debate has at times had the tone and feeling of a Second Reading due to the development of a cosy consensus around a proposal that everybody favours, we should remember that the Opposition introduced the subject. They should be challenging the Government, and Parliament would not do its job properly if it did not use Opposition day debates to emphasise the differences between us, of which there are many.

My constituents will be surprised that the Conservatives have picked the NHS as the subject for the debate, because, like me, they know that, with few exceptions, Conservative Members no longer believe in its founding values and principles. Those who do are a dwindling number and ever more at the margins of today's Conservative party.

Mr. Lansley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Roger Casale: Not at the moment. The hon. Gentleman has had an opportunity to put his thoughts about the NHS on the record.

I do not say that there are no Conservative Members who see a future for the NHS, but let us not forget that the Conservatives opposed its establishment 50 years ago. We know that many leading Conservatives—perhaps the hon. Gentleman numbers himself among them—including the shadow Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox), want to dismantle the NHS. There is a big debate to be had on the future of the NHS, but, in terms of where the public stand, I believe that the Conservatives are on the wrong side of that debate.

Mr. Lansley: The hon. Gentleman perpetuates a myth that the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Ms Taylor) also sought to perpetuate, which is that we in the Conservative party do not believe in the NHS. The day before the NHS was founded, my father worked for London county council. He then worked for the NHS for 34 years, including the day it was born, and ran a laboratory at East Ham memorial hospital. I was brought up by someone who worked in the NHS. I have always used it and I shall continue to do so. Why is the hon. Gentleman trying to distort and misrepresent the motives of Conservative Members?

Roger Casale: I said that a few Conservative Members believe in the NHS—perhaps the hon. Gentleman numbers himself among them—but I also said that they are a dwindling number and ever more marginal in terms of influence. I do not want to embarrass him, but perhaps he numbers himself in that group as well.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Roger Casale: If I may, Madam Deputy Speaker, I shall finish dealing with one intervention before giving way to take another. I would like to make a little progress, although I am glad to see that I have excited some reaction from the Opposition and nudged them out of their complacent consensus.

If there is to be a future for the NHS, there needs to be an ambitious, imaginative and radical reform programme as outlined in the NHS plan. That comes at a price, which is sustained investment in the NHS—the investment that the Government are putting in, not the 20 per cent. cuts that the shadow Chief Secretary has on offer.

I can only assume that the Conservatives have chosen to debate foundation hospitals because they want to engage in point scoring. They know that a debate is going on in the Labour party, and rightly so, about whether foundation hospitals and the other reforms that we are putting forward are a good thing or a bad thing.

However, so far as I can tell there is no division within the Labour party about the fundamental principles and values of the national health service, about the need to

[Roger Casale]

invest in it, or about the need to reform it if we are to safeguard it for future generations. Nor is there division within the party about the need to rebuild the NHS as part of the political mission that people, including my constituents, elected Labour Members of Parliament to undertake.

By focusing on an important measure that they actually agree with—although important, it is just part of an overall strategy and package of reforms—perhaps the Conservatives hope that people will think that we agree on everything else as well. However, nothing could be further from the truth. We certainly do not agree with Conservative plans for the national health service, and this proposal is not the first step down the road that they would like to take us down. There are two very different approaches at stake here. The fact that both Labour and Conservative Members think that the current proposal for foundation hospitals may be a good thing does not mean that we both approach it from the same direction. A foundation hospital is not some kind of shareholder-led, privately owned, market-driven hospital. Foundation hospitals are a new experiment in community-led, but still very much public, ownership. The proposal to establish foundation hospitals must be set in a much wider context than our overall strategy to reform and rebuild the national health service, important though that is. It must be set in the context of the changing balance between public and private that we need in today's world to secure and safeguard the public good.

These debates can sometimes seem rather sterile, in part because of the temptation to engage in inaccurate stereotyping, which we have had plenty of today from the Opposition. Apparently, we are all Stalinists because we believe in some form of central monitoring and standards for the national health service. However, let us not forget that it was this Government who introduced national standards for the NHS in 1997, and that in 18 years of Conservative Government we had no national standards of any kind. Is introducing such standards Stalinist? There has to be some form of central monitoring and control.

We should not engage in such sterile and inaccurate stereotyping of each other's positions, and I am not going to give hon. Members the chance to do so again.

However, the idea that state ownership and state control always equates with the public good, and that individual input into health and other public services is always bad—or indeed, vice versa—is no longer the most valid way to think about these issues, and we need to recognise that. The potential importance of this innovative proposal for foundation hospitals is that there may be ways of better balancing local accountability with national standards, innovation and public enterprise to serve the public good. We must think afresh about how we define the public good in relation to public services. There must be ways of safeguarding the public good, and some of the strongest proposals relating to foundation hospitals are those for an independent regulator, for important local and democratic input, and for regular inspections. The national framework and national standards will remain, along with—I hope—a great deal of national and local democratic control.

If the Conservatives think that foundation hospitals are a good thing because they will be completely free from any mechanism or framework of national control and inspection, or if they think that this is a step towards privatisation, they are going to be disappointed. I also hope that my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson)—he is indeed my friend—will take on board those remarks, and that they will help to cheer him up. He made some important points, and we would be wise to listen to what he says. He articulated fears and apprehensions felt by many people in the party and outside it about the new proposals.

One can oppose the proposals for ideological reasons, but I am not sure that that is why my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras opposes them. He raised many practical objections to the proposals, and that is where the core of the debate now lies. However, how can it be contrary to the public interest and good to allow a system to develop that is more flexible in terms of delivery, that can give more choice to the user—although I take his point that there needs to be a surplus capacity—and that helps to liberate the talent, energy and innovative potential of the people who work for the public good in the NHS?

Mr. Dobson: If the proposals are going to liberate people, why is there such a lack of enthusiasm for them among those who represent doctors, nurses, midwives and therapists?

Roger Casale: My right hon. Friend is a former Secretary of State for Health, and is in regular contact with his local hospitals. I am in very regular contact with my local hospitals and with the people who work in them. I take issue with him as to whether there is a lack of interest in the proposals. I believe that people are keen to take on more responsibility. We must recognise that there has been a great deal of change in the NHS, and the way in which we manage change is very important.

St. Helier hospital in my constituency got a no-star rating two years ago. It appointed a new chairman and new chief executive and was given the resources that it needed, with the result that this year it achieved a two-star rating. All the staff in the organisation were involved and believed in the need for change. We must win the hearts and minds of people in the NHS. We cannot work against them. They have to work with us. If we can get them to do that, we can really transform things, as I have seen happen with St. Helier hospital.

Angela Eagle: Will my hon. Friend admit that people who are worried about whether foundation trusts are the right answer to what is a very effective analysis of some of the difficulties in the NHS are also afraid that the proposals will lead to the unleashing of competition and fragmentation in the system, despite the assurances about co-operation? There is a danger that that will be the result of the reforms, to the detriment of the NHS as a whole.

Roger Casale: I agree that that danger exists, and it is a valid and fair apprehension for people to have. We

must deal with it, but our priority must be to create levers to improve the quality and standard of the health service as a whole. No one says that that will be easy, or that other problems will not arise. My hon. Friend has highlighted the very important difficulties that will be encountered when we implement the policy, but I believe that, on balance, it is right to go down this route.

I believe that allowing hospitals to be foundation hospitals will accelerate the development of excellence in the provision of their services. The key is how that is linked into everything else and how the improvements are spread around. For example, the Sutton and Merton primary care trust in my constituency was one of the first to be set up. It is an example of best practice and I am in very regular contact with the staff there. The PCT has received extra resources and is doing very well. I always ask staff what they are doing to stimulate, support and help other trusts. As with beacon schools, for instance, it is no good for people to rest on their laurels and say, "We are the best, everyone should come to us." Staff must recognise that they have a duty and responsibility to spread best practice around.

We have to start somewhere, and it is right to start with the three-star hospital trusts. They are the best, and will be the easiest to deal with. However, there is a special responsibility on those hospital trusts and on the Government to do everything possible to improve standards in the NHS. They are simply not high enough today.

Caroline Flint: My hon. Friend will be aware that the Government have recently passed legislation to allow the best performing schools to have greater freedoms. Local authorities were recently assessed by the Audit Commission, and those found to be of good standard will also be given greater freedoms. Why should we not be able to consider reforms to the NHS similar to those that have helped to improve education and local government?

Roger Casale: I agree with my hon. Friend—I think that we can learn from successful approaches in other parts of the public services. We cannot automatically transfer such approaches, but we can be encouraged by the success of beacon schools and spreading best practice around. We should do everything we can to ensure that if we go ahead with this proposal of foundation hospitals, we share best practice in the health service as well.

These are valid fears and apprehensions, but that is what they are—fears and apprehensions. With the money that is being invested, we have a historic opportunity to be much more bold, ambitious and imaginative. Of course we must avoid having a two-tier system. If the Conservative party were returned to Government, we would have not a two-tier system but a no-tier system.

We do not want a system that produces inequality; we want one in which there is both greater equality and quality. Three hospitals serve my constituency—Kingston is in the more prosperous, middle-class area, St. Helier is in a poorer area and St. George's in Tooting, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) referred, is in more of a mixed area. When the star rating system was introduced, Kingston had two stars, St. George's had one and St. Helier had none. Many have asked me why there is a superior level of service in Kingston compared with St. Helier. As a result of our reform package, our investment and the changes in St. Helier that I have talked about, St. Helier, Kingston and St. George's all had two stars this year. I believe that we can uprate the service, improve quality and bring everybody up to the same level, but we have to start somewhere, and we need the levers to do it. I believe that that is what the foundation hospitals proposal will provide.

The Labour party set up the national health service—that is our proudest achievement. We are rebuilding it today because we want it to be there tomorrow. We are determined to succeed and I believe that radical proposals such as foundation hospitals will allow us to do so.

6.27 pm

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): I am not sure whether it is the third way or the new way forward in a new year, but it will not have escaped the notice of the House that the Opposition have chosen a debate in which we welcome the principle of the Government's policy of introducing foundation hospitals. I shall elaborate on that welcome in greater detail later in my remarks.

We have had an extremely good debate, to which eight of my right hon. and hon. Friends contributed. My right hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell), with his experience as a former Secretary of State for Health, gave an extremely lucid and interesting speech on the concept of foundation hospitals and how they can improve and enhance patient care. I strongly recommend any hon. Member who was not in the Chamber to read his speech at their leisure.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) also gave an extremely good and thought-provoking speech. He reiterated an abiding principle, which I wholeheartedly agree with, of a national health service free at the point of use for all.

My hon. Friends the Members for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) and for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) highlighted, in their different ways, problems in their constituencies in Hertfordshire and Leicestershire. My hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth asked why hospitals in his county could not seek foundation status from the outset and also gave us the benefit of his knowledge of complementary medicine.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) spoke eloquently about local accountability and patient choice. My hon. Friends the Members for Taunton (Mr. Flook) and for Boston and Skegness (Mr. Simmonds) both raised valid points with regard to their constituencies and spoke about the benefits of improving and enhancing the national health service through the independence of foundation hospitals.

My right hon. and hon. Friends had the pleasure—I suppose that it could be described as such—of listening to classic Liberal speeches. At one point, the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) had the audacity to complain that the Government were

[Mr. Simon Burns]

trying to have things both ways. For a party that wants first one thing and then something else, I found his gall and nerve staggering.

We now turn to the Labour party. In his Fabian Society speech last year, the Secretary of State said:

"Nye Bevan's shadow hangs over every Health Secretary, especially Labour Health Secretaries."

What would Nye Bevan have thought of the contributions from the Government Benches? Throughout the whole debate, notwithstanding the keenness of the Parliamentary Private Secretary in the Foreign Office, the hon. Member for Wimbledon (Roger Casale), the spectre of old Labour has been lurking with menace on the Labour Back Benches.

The Secretary of State already had an inkling of what he could expect as he has no doubt seen early-day motion 351, which was signed by more than 100 of his right hon. and hon. Friends. That early-day motion includes some interesting names; not only the usual suspects—to use Whips' parlance—but 13 former Ministers, including two former Secretaries of State, one of whom was Secretary of State for Health and the boss of the current Secretary of State. Amazingly, the list includes the name of a former Deputy Chief Whip, which suggests that the gamekeeper has finally turned poacher.

What is the cause of so many problems to a quarter of the parliamentary Labour party? The early-day motion notes

"with concern the intention by Government to introduce foundation hospitals, which would create a two-tier . . . system".

That is a significant accusation, especially as the Secretary of State himself—in his speech to the Fabian Society—stated:

"A one nation Britain cannot be built on two-tier health care."

Sadly, the Government's proposals set the framework for a two-tier system, although not for the reasons given by those who signed the early-day motion, but because they would allow only a small group of 34 three-star hospitals to apply for foundation status, rather than all hospitals. By that act, the Secretary of State will indeed set hospital against hospital and will create the two-tier system that so many of his hon. Friends do not want.

The contributions of Labour Members were interesting. I give credit to the Government Whips Office. There were speeches in support of the Government. I was interested, albeit slightly perplexed, when I heard the contribution made by the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh). She spoke from her brief—adequately. I was not convinced that she fully understood what she was saying but she did the business.

Rather like Nelson turning his blind eye to the telescope, the hon. Member for Wimbledon—a loyal PPS—had the audacity to reassure the House that there was no validity in the claims that the Labour party was divided on the issue. The hon. Gentleman cannot have been reading the newspapers or early-day motions, or listening to the remarks made by some of his right hon. and hon. Friends during the past month.

Roger Casale: I said that there was a debate and that it is right that there should be such a debate, but that there was no division about the fundamental values and principles of the NHS, by contrast with the clear divisions in the Tory party.

Mr. Burns: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman; that intervention really has clarified the situation.

The hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) supports the Government, but if the narrow party political points are stripped from his speech, I give him credit for an extremely interesting and positive contribution on the whole subject of foundation hospitals. The House will have benefited from that, and I look forward to working with him on the Health Committee when we consider the whole issue of foundation hospitals.

The hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones) gave what can best be described as grudging support for the proposal, but support it was. Finally, the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) made an excellent and classic speech of opposition to a policy. I did not agree with the points that he made, but I respected his clarity and his commitment to his point of view. What particularly interested me, given that, just over two years ago, he was a senior member of the Government, was that he had the courage to accuse this Government and No. 10 of being Maoist. He was wrong, because, immediately, the Secretary of State—I am surprised that he is so knowledgeable, or I was before the matter was researched further—claimed that the correct description was Trotskyist, not Maoist. I wondered why he had such an intimate knowledge of the matter, until I realised that, in the early 1980s, before he joined the Labour party in 1983, he shared a house with local members of the International Marxist Group—of which he was not a member, I hasten to add, so as not to slander him—and he was active in Newcastle in a left-wing bookshop called "Days of Hope". I am sure that he will be able to tell the House the pseudonym of that shop. We then heard the contribution of the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), who remained a trenchant critic of the Government's proposals.

Those Members are the tip of the iceberg of their more than 100 colleagues who are wedded to the idea that what is best for the improvement and enhancement of the national health service should not go ahead, because they are locked in a time warp of an ideology and philosophy and an archaic realisation of needs. Society has moved on, as have the demands of the national service. As my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) said at the beginning of the debate, we welcome the principle of foundation hospitals. That principle will provide freedom and diversity in the provision of health care, and will significantly advance patient care. While we favour the principle of foundation hospitals, we believe that freedoms for hospitals to borrow and set their own priorities should be given to all hospitals and not simply to a chosen few at the outset. That is the way forward, and that is the way in which the Government should move forward. The principle should be universal.

The Secretary of State and the Prime Minister should have the courage of their convictions:

"At our best when at our boldest."

That was what the Prime Minister proudly proclaimed at the Labour party conference last year. If the Government really wish to be bold, they should not seek

to limit the number of foundation hospitals or the principles underpinning them. That is not boldness but timidity and weakness. I would have hoped that the message would strike a chord with the Secretary of State. In a speech to the new health network a year ago, he said:

"For patient choice to thrive it needs a different environment. One in which there is greater diversity and plurality in local services which have the freedom to innovate and respond to patients needs."

He went on to say that he would be the man who would redefine the national health service,

"changing it from a monolithic, centrally run, monopoly provider of services to a values based system"

with

"different health care providers in the public, private and voluntary sectors."

I suspect that I am more in agreement with the Secretary of State than are many of his colleagues.

To take the Secretary of State's rhetoric to its logical conclusion, he should not pass up the opportunity to be bold, as the Prime Minister so proudly proclaimed. He should allow all hospitals to seek foundation status from the outset. The trouble is that his announcements so far smack of fudge surrounded by confusion. Sadly, the publication of "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts" has added little clarity.

We have found during this debate, starting with the points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring and continuing with the remarks of almost every Conservative Member who has spoken, as well as some Labour Members, that there is confusion about exactly what the Government intend to do. The framework and guidelines that have been provided are full of glib expressions and do not give details about how free hospital trusts will be. What powers will they have? What will they be able to do with their money and with the funds that they borrow? We must have greater clarity and detail on those matters before we can be expected to sign up to a principle to which we are not opposed.

I urge the Secretary of State to make available as soon as possible, preferably before the Committee stage of any legislation that emanates from his Department, the details that have been requested during the debate, so that we know exactly what the Government are doing. We need to know whether the reality of what they are planning will live up to their rhetoric. For that reason, I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to join me in the Lobby tonight in support of the motion tabled by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition and other colleagues.

6.42 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): I warmly congratulate all right hon. and hon. Members who have spoken in what the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) was right to describe as a very good debate. We have heard excellent speeches from hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber, all of them certainly delivered with passion and conviction.

There have been strong speeches from my hon. Friends the Members for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones), for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh), for Putney (Mr. Colman), for Stockton, South (Ms Taylor), for Leigh (Andy Burnham), for Dartford (Dr. Stoate) and for Wimbledon (Roger Casale) in support of the Government's intention to create NHS foundation trusts, and I welcome that support. A number of perfectly fair and reasonable concerns have also been raised by some of my right hon. and hon. Friends. Those concerns are valid; I understand them, and I shall deal with them in a moment.

Our debate started with the contribution from the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox). It was his usual dismal diatribe of doom and gloom, which has become familiar to all of us in the House because we have come to know what his real objectives are. They are, first, to undermine the NHS rather than to support it and, secondly, to characterise the brilliant work done by staff, day in day out, as failure rather than success. It was clear to us all that the hon. Gentleman was too embarrassed to talk about his party's policies on the NHS because he knows just how unsavoury the British public will find them.

The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) also made a familiar contribution. It was genuinely hard to see what reforms his party favours that would genuinely help to improve NHS performance. With the greatest respect to the hon. Gentleman, I have to say that I found his contribution utterly incoherent, and it was one of his better ones. He has come to propagate an excuse culture, not a problem-solving one. He has nothing to say of any relevance.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) made a very effective speech. He will know that I have huge respect for him, and I enjoyed enormously the time that I spent working with him as one of his junior Ministers. However, I have to say to him and to the House that I think that he is fundamentally wrong in his view of foundation trusts and about our intention behind introducing these proposals. I shall return to his comments and to those of my hon. Friend the Member for Burton (Mrs. Dean) in a few moments.

The right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell) is a distinguished former Secretary of State for Health and he made a skilful and careful speech. However, I would be interested to hear his views about his party's policies on health. As they have emerged over the past few weeks, I cannot bring myself to believe that he has any support whatever for the varied contributions that we have heard from those on the Opposition Front Bench recently. I assure him that foundation trusts will be a new type of institution and not another vehicle for state ownership.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) will not mind my saying this, but I listened to his speech and I genuinely feel that he might be open to persuasion about the merits of foundation NHS trusts. I very much look forward to working on him—or rather with him—to convert that indication of implicit support into more concrete support in the future.

Although this point was made by a number of right hon. and hon. Members, I do not believe that the establishment of NHS foundation trusts will or should undermine primary care or the role of primary care

[Mr. John Hutton]

trusts as the commissioners of local health care services. Exactly the opposite can be the case. I shall refer to that again in a second.

The right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) believes heroically and against all the odds and evidence that the Tories would stick to this Government's health budgets if they ever returned to office. Of course, that is a pledge that none of his Front-Bench spokesmen has been able or willing to make. I suspect that we will wait long and hard before we hear such a commitment from anyone who speaks for the Tories on health. The right hon. Gentleman talked about his commitment to ensuring maximum democratic involvement in the local NHS, and I welcome that support. The only problem that we have with that comment is that I can never recall him doing anything about it when he had the opportunity to do so in all his long years in government. I suspect that we will therefore probably treat his support with a hefty pinch of salt.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Central made local accountability the main theme of his speech. I welcome his comments on that. He graciously said in relation to the speech of the right hon. Member for Wokingham that he remembered the time that the right hon. Gentleman was Secretary of State for Wales. I remember it too. I hate to bring it up—the right hon. Gentleman probably cringes every time this is referred to—but I remember his singing the Welsh national anthem. I have to be honest and say that I have no idea what the words are, but it was probably not a pleasant experience for him or for the rest of us. Let us not dwell on that any longer.

The hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) made an impassioned speech. By his own admission, it was a rare foray into our debates in the House on health. I will not say anything more about that, but his support for his local NHS would probably count for a lot more if he were prepared to support the extra investment that the Government are putting into it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden made an excellent speech, and I congratulate her on her ambition for the NHS. It is one that we share in government. My hon. Friend the Member for Putney also made a very useful contribution, emphasising the need for the Department to continue to deal with the performance of poorly performing hospitals. We will certainly continue to do that.

The hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Dr. Taylor) made a contribution that was essentially a long string of criticisms, so no change there. My hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South made a powerful speech and I warmly congratulate her on her contribution. In a telling phrase about the NHS, she said that we should not mistake a legacy for a monument. She is absolutely right. If that is her own comment, I shall quickly grab the copyright because I want to use that phrase in some of my speeches.

The hon. Member for Cheadle (Mrs. Calton) talked at length about internal health policy documents that had been produced by the Liberal Democrats. She helpfully proceeded to read most of them out. In the process, she did not really have anyone listening to her. Her contribution and those of the hon. Members for Taunton (Mr. Flook) and for Boston and Skegness (Mr. Simmonds) showed that none of them had actually read the Government's proposal to establish NHS foundation trusts. They raised a number of questions. I shall simply send them the document so that they can find the answers for themselves.

Labour Members are agreed on the need for extra investment in the NHS so that we build up the capacity of our public health care system, putting right decades of neglect, as many of my hon. Friends said. As a result of the action that we are taking, the NHS is the fastest growing health care system in Europe. By contrast, the Opposition oppose the investment in the NHS. They prefer the route of subsidising private health insurance, of top-up vouchers for those who can afford to go private and, we now discover, of 20 per cent. across-the-board cuts in public expenditure.

Mr. Burns: Before the Minister continues to perpetuate a myth, the 20 per cent. cut relates to cuts in administrators, bureaucrats, spin doctors, clerical staff and public relations managers so that the money is spent on health care.

Mr. Hutton: What a load of cobblers. The people the hon. Gentleman describes as managers are cooks, cleaners and porters. If he wants to sack those people from the NHS, it will be interesting to hear his proposition expounded.

Six years in opposition and all we get is the old Thatcherite agenda. No wonder there is talk among sensible Conservatives—there are still one or two of them—about getting rid of the Leader of the Opposition. Labour Members agree on the need for the Department of Health to continue to take action to deal with poor performance and poor management in NHS hospitals. We do that because we are absolutely committed to a universal and comprehensive health care system. We will not tolerate or make excuses, as others would, for poor performance anywhere in the NHS. By contrast, the Tories and the Liberals are opposed to that intervention. They have opposed the national standards that we have established, they have complained about the new inspectorate to monitor performance and the Tories opposed the establishment of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, which has helped to tackle the postcode lottery that we inherited.

Dr. Fox: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hutton: No.

The Opposition are wrong on the great issue of principle that should govern the debate about health care in our country, and so they are wrong on the detail of the reforms that are needed to improve the NHS. That is the Tory record on health and it is how we should judge their performance today.

The Tories have nothing sensible to say about the future of the NHS. That should not come as a surprise to Labour Members. The truth is that under the Tories, the NHS does not have a future. That is clear from everything they said today and what the hon. Member for Woodspring spelt out last year. The Government, however, believe in the NHS. It can become the service

that we want it to be, offering more choice to patients over where and when they are treated, greater access to higher quality care and faster, more convenient treatment.

Mr. Andrew Turner: If the Minister is in favour of those things, will he explain why my constituents who need cardiac treatment were told a year ago that they could not go to King Edward VII hospital, Midhurst, which would treat them quickly? Instead, they were sent to Brighton, which delays their treatment and takes longer. Indeed, Brighton is now sending them back to Midhurst after a six-month wait. Is not that an absurdity?

Mr. Hutton: What is absurd is the fact that the hon. Gentleman complains about the shortage of capacity in the NHS, but will not vote for the means to redress those problems. Until he does, we are not interested in anything he has to say.

Three basic concerns have been raised about foundation trusts. Some hon. Members argued for no more change in the NHS. They thought that we should maintain uniformity across the NHS, in terms of both structures and performance and operation. That is very much the point that my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras made. Some hon. Members argued that unless there is such uniformity, there will be competition rather than co-operation across the NHS and ultimately a two-tier health care system. They drew attention in particular to staff recruitment, financial freedoms and the commissioning process. Others, however, put forward a different argument. They were not opposed to the principle of NHS foundation trusts and wanted the freedoms intended for them extended to all NHS trusts at the same time. Several Conservative Members made that point.

Finally, concerns have been expressed that the freedoms we are proposing for NHS foundation trusts are not extensive enough, and that the Government should be prepared to go even further than they have already proposed to do.

In relation to the first of those three main areas of concern, it is important that all my right hon. and hon. Friends bear it in mind that NHS foundation trusts will be an integral part of the NHS. They will be set up to provide NHS services according to NHS principles and NHS standards. They will work under a clear statutory duty of partnership with other NHS organisations. NHS care will remain free at the point of use. As for pay and the terms and conditions under which staff will work, all the candidates for NHS foundation trust status will be signed up to implement the new NHS pay system.

Borrowing can be fairly and properly managed through the new prudential borrowing code, which will be operated by the independent regulator. That will prevent any explosion in unsustainable borrowing, or any unfair redistribution of capital borrowing across the system. In addition, we will establish proper safeguards around the use of public assets to protect the public interest.

The details will be set out in the forthcoming Bill, but our intention is crystal clear. NHS foundation trusts will be an addition to the NHS family, not a subtraction from it. They will strengthen public ownership, not weaken it. They will help to encourage local delivery of high-quality services by giving greater power and responsibility to local staff and local people. In doing all those things, NHS foundation trusts will help to sustain public support for NHS values and NHS principles.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has repeatedly made clear, establishing NHS foundation trusts will not diminish our efforts to support poorly performing hospitals to improve their performance. On the contrary, we remain absolutely committed to improving the services provided in every NHS hospital at the fastest possible rate. Establishing NHS foundation trusts will not deflect us from that objective. No NHS hospital in any part of the country will simply be left to sink or swim—that is the Tory approach. Action will be taken to improve standards where that is necessary, but where standards are already high, Whitehall should be prepared to stand back and let local staff and management get on with the job at hand. That is the principle that underlies our approach.

That is the right approach, but it is equally right that we should look again at the historical model of public ownership in health. Why should public ownership be synonymous with state control? A model that was right for 1948 cannot, for that reason alone, continue to command unquestioning support today. It is right that we aim to design a new model that can genuinely enhance the concept of public ownership, the values of public service and the principle of democratic accountability. That is what NHS foundation trusts are designed to do.

That is precisely why we have made our proposals. We can carry them out in a way that will entrench and deepen the concept of public ownership in our society, not undermine it in the way that some have suggested. In my view, a model of public ownership in which the public feel they do not own anything at all, which is our present model, does more to undermine the concept of public property and public service than anything else, and makes it easier for the privatisers on the Conservative Benches, if they ever get into power again, to realise their aspiration to sell off the NHS. We can and should look to other models of public ownership, drawing on the experience of mutual and co-operative societies as a way forward. Those are good Labour traditions and I believe that we can apply them successfully to the NHS.

Let me make three brief comments on the second argument advanced today. First, we should begin the reforms in the right place and we should start them carefully. There is a judgment call to be made—I accept that—but I think it sensible to consider the best performing hospitals as the first possible candidates for NHS foundation trust status. They have an established track record of outstanding performance, so they are the logical and prudent starting point for the reforms—but others can follow. There will be no arbitrary limit on the number of trusts that can become an NHS foundation trust—the more, the better.

Secondly, to separate the proposed new ownership model from the freedoms that we propose should accompany it would create a formula for confusion.

[Mr. Hutton]

With our proposed new model of ownership for NHS foundation trusts should come new responsibility. If poorly performing hospitals—

David Maclean (Penrith and The Border) *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Mr. Speaker: Is the Minister finished?

Mr. Hutton *indicated assent.*

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Question put accordingly, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 144, Noes 381.

Division No. 42] **[6:59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Curry, rh David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Fox, Dr. Liam
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, rh Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, rh Michael
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Mark Francois and Mr. David Wilshire

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, rh A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, hon. Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John

Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Heath, David
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Holmes, Paul
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, rh Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr. John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Timms, Stephen
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Watts, David
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil

Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Jim Murphy and Charlotte Atkins

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments):—*

The House divided: Ayes 282, Noes 150.

Division No. 43] **[7:14 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, hon. Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Healey, John
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hodge, Margaret
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Illsley, Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, rh Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, rh John
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*

Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Timms, Stephen
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jim Murphy and Charlotte Atkins

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Curry, rh David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Fox, Dr. Liam
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, rh Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, rh Michael
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Wilshire and Mr. Mark Francois

Question accordingly agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House welcomes the principle of NHS Foundation Trusts as part of the Government's wider programme to improve services for NHS patients; believes that NHS Foundation Trusts must be part of the National Health Service providing care to NHS patients according to NHS principles and subject to NHS standards and inspection; further believes that there should be no arbitrary cap on the numbers of NHS Foundation Trusts and that all NHS hospitals should get the help, support or intervention they need to improve; recognises that extra resources for the health service are delivering improved services for NHS patients and have to be matched with reforms so that standards in the NHS are national but control is local; supports the Government's efforts to devolve power to frontline services and to strengthen accountability to local communities; and rejects any proposal to introduce top-up vouchers for private treatment, tax subsidies for private medical insurance or cuts in public spending of 20 per cent. in view of the inevitable impact that such policies would have on NHS patients including those treated in NHS Foundation Trusts.

PETITION

Natural Health Products

7.27 pm

Mr. Patrick Hall (Bedford): I have pleasure in presenting a petition signed by 320 people on behalf of my constituent, Isabel Wood-Ayub, proprietor of the Pumpernickel health food store in Bedford.

The petition states:

To the House of Commons

The petition of Consumers for Health Choice and its supporters declares that consumers in the United Kingdom have for many years maintained good health by choosing to take safe vitamin and mineral supplements and herbal remedies; and fears that the European Food Supplements Directive and the Proposed European Directive on Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products would severely restrict the number and range of such products on general sale in the future.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons requires that the Secretary of State for Health does all in his power to protect the rights of UK consumers by ensuring that such European legislation does not unnecessarily and unacceptably restrict the availability of natural health products.

And The Petitioners Remain, Etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Autism Services

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Joan Ryan.]*

7.28 pm

Mrs. Patsy Calton (Cheadle): I am grateful for the opportunity to bring this issue to the House so soon after the end of international autism awareness year. Important contributions have been made by speakers in earlier debates, and I have read the remarks of the hon. Members for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), for Ilford, North (Linda Perham), for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing) and for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman), who is chairman of the all-party group. Although I fully recognise the advances made last year, the guidelines on good practice, the good practice in many places and the Government's increased disability funding, there are still families who have extreme difficulty in accessing and obtaining the services that they need.

Autism is more usually referred to these days as ASD—autistic spectrum disorders—and that term covers a number of conditions. People with ASD range from those who may have a learning disability, to those with average or above average intelligence. The condition may be linked to other disabilities and conditions. Despite their wide-ranging differences, everyone with ASD has difficulty with social interaction, social communication and imagination. It is estimated to affect more than 500,000 families in the United Kingdom. One in 86 children are thought to have ASD, but only one in 152 schoolchildren have had a formal diagnosis.

There is little understanding about what causes ASD, but it is likely that genetic predisposition and environmental factors are both involved. No medication can correct the condition, but there is evidence that dietary changes can assist in some cases. It may be that biochemical differences, based on fatty acid metabolism or sulphate levels, provide a partial scientific explanation for differences in membranes and chemical transmitters involved in neural functioning. Interesting articles on the subject may be found in *The Nutrition Practitioner*, volume 3.3, dated November 2001, and in the *You!* edition of 25 February 2001.

The National Autistic Society provides services, support and information to its 11,000 members. I am grateful for the briefing that it provided to me, and for the many references to the "ignored or ineligible", which were also kindly sent to me by the all-party group. A common theme mentioned by the NAS and other organisations is that although the conditions are increasingly being diagnosed, the provision of any sort of diagnosis depends on where one lives. Moreover, services after diagnosis are patchy, incomplete or non-existent.

The NAS says:

"Unfortunately, the likelihood of a child obtaining a diagnosis of autism is very much dependent on where they live . . . Without an accurate early diagnosis, children with ASD are likely to receive inadequate provision, leaving their special needs unmet. It is vital for families to receive early support from outside as soon as possible. This reduces stress within the family and enables them to understand and support the needs of their child."

I would add that that is particularly important in cases where parents themselves may be undiagnosed with ASD. The national initiative for autism screening and

assessment—shortened to NIASA—consists of a panel of health and education professionals who aim to address the challenge of screening diagnosis and early intervention for children with autism. The NAS says that it is crucial that the Government fully support NIASA, and that they ensure that it is rolled out to benefit all children with autism, wherever they live.

There are sound economic reasons for the country to take this condition seriously. Health economists have estimated an average lifetime cost to the state of £2.93 million per person with autism. The rising numbers being identified make a compelling financial argument for the provision of services to facilitate employment and independent living for this group.

On Monday of this week, I visited a resource school in my constituency. The head teacher described how a young boy with ASD had had his potential "unlocked" with appropriate teaching. The NAS says that LEAs should plan to train all teachers, assistants and specialist professionals in the awareness and understanding of autism, as part of the accessibility planning duty introduced by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001. However, teaching with trained teachers and assistants, important as it is, is not enough. Families will often need ongoing health care and social care support, and it is rare to find this offered as a streamlined service. They will need transition planning as their children start school, when they move to secondary school, and as they leave school.

I want to pay tribute to a constituent of mine, Mr. Carroll, who has fought every inch of the way to gain appropriate provision for his seven-year-old son, and support for his family. He is not there yet. I asked for this debate because he brought this condition to my attention, because I know how difficult things are for him and his family, and because I know how difficult things will be for others, some of whom will lack Mr. Carroll's determination.

I want to quote from a letter that I received from Mr. Carroll. I cannot quote all of it, as it runs to four pages, even though it covers only the six months from June last year. Mr. Carroll has written many letters and been in communication with many people, and is simply unable to access the services that his son needs.

The letter begins by referring to letters written in 2002, dated 13 June, 16 October, 6 November, 18 November, 18 December, 19 December, and 23 December. That indicates how much Mr. Carroll and his family are having to do. He talks about the difficulty of obtaining specialist health service appointments, and says that he has not been able to get an appointment since June. He writes:

"To clarify our situation we would like to, again, list our child's, and our, difficulties.

Alexander is the second child of 3"—

the family actually has a new baby as well—

"and suffers from severe autism. The difficulties we have are associated with his autism and health".

Those difficulties are:

"Very poor sleep. Alex disturbs the family sleeping, he is hard work to get to sleep."

Mr. Carroll goes on to describe a range of typical behaviours associated with severe autism, and a range of other related problems:

"Alexander needs a very high level of care to keep himself clean . . . but we his parents need help and advice on how to manage his behaviour, health, sleep patterns etc.

We currently get no help with this.

Also, although we now have a Social Worker for Alex (after a battle) we and Alex have not yet obtained any services for him ie outreach, referrals, respite, etc."

Alexander was described on 12 June 2002 by his consultant as having "severe autism" and "difficulties of poor sleep." Mr. Carroll says:

"the family are worn out."

There then followed difficulties because Alexander was not being properly followed up with a range of medications. The medications do not work but Mr. Carroll has not able to access the people with whom he needs to speak because the medication—Melatonin—can be prescribed only by a consultant. If the consultant cannot be accessed, the medication cannot be changed. The letter contains a page of problems to do with the medication.

Mr. Carroll says that the family by chance heard of sleep clinics through the health centre. This was mentioned to the GP, who said that Alexander had to be referred to a child psychiatrist to access the service. He has not been able to get to a child psychiatrist, so he has not been able to access the service.

Mr. Carroll writes that he needs immediate help from a psychiatrist or psychologist

"to help us and Alexander to manage his problems and to discuss our difficulties with."

Mr. Carroll goes on to say that he has been referred to another hospital in Manchester, but has been told that that hospital cannot treat Alexander because he should be treated by his home hospital. That home hospital then wrote another letter to say that the Manchester hospital might be willing to see Alexander if a referral was made. That shows how the matter is being sent backwards and forwards all the time.

Mr. Carroll says that he has written to ask how he can get in touch with a child psychiatrist as he needs

"help and advice and referrals to appropriate clinics/consultants ie sleep clinics, gene specialists, hormone specialists etc. This help is needed now and our son and family should not be denied the services we require!"

The family has received a leaflet from Alexander's school about the Treehouse centre in Stockport. Their GP made a referral, but the family has heard nothing yet. Mr. Carroll says:

"We are very disappointed that information on this service has not been volunteered to us . . . Why hasn't any health professional brought this to our attention? . . . We are concerned about the medicines being prescribed to Alexander, as nothing seems to work, if anything they seem to have the opposite effect . . . We are fully aware, (as our MP . . . is) that there are no specific autism services in Stockport, and haven't been for some time now."

He talks about another two letters that he has had to write. He says:

"On that note, as Alexander already has a diagnosis why . . . the CAMHS team not been involved, is it because they are not aware of Alex? (he is on the database!)"

[Mrs. Patsy Calton]

The letter is heartbreaking because it shows the sort of difficulties that the family suffer.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): The hon. Lady kindly asked me to support her in this debate, and I am happy to do so. I suggested to her and the Minister that there are three key issues here. There must be better co-ordination among the agencies at county level. Secondly, there needs to be better evaluation of the existing treatments, particularly dietary treatments and assessments of the effects of vitamin C, vitamin B6 and magnesium and some of the specialist treatments. Thirdly, given the hon. Lady's eloquent plea on behalf of her constituent and the work that has been done on both sides of the House, does she agree that the Government should now take a more direct interest in these problems?

Mrs. Calton: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's intervention. Of course I agree that the situation cannot be allowed to continue, for my constituent or for others.

I have permission to read a letter from the constituent's general practitioner to the chief executive in Stockport. The GP says:

"I should like to complain in the strongest terms about the apparent lack of help and advice with regard to child and adolescent psychiatry in the Stockport area. I write on behalf of my patient . . . who is aged 8 and suffers with Autism. (There have been several other cases that would benefit from a referral to the service, however Alex is the most severe and pressing problem.)

For the last 3-4 years he has presented his parents with severe problems with regard to sleep disturbance and the parents are getting to the limit of their tolerance. I have referred him twice in the last 12 months to CAMHS and to the Tree House . . . and according to Father there have been no appointments coming forth.

In this situation, the family and primary medical care services need help and assistance from secondary care units and it is completely unacceptable that this service is absent or lacking in the Stockport area."

I wrote to the chief executive of the acute trust in November and received a reply just a day or so ago. He acknowledges:

"Services for children with Autism Spectrum Disorders are probably not comprehensively co-ordinated—they are scattered throughout Health, Education, SS and Voluntary and Independent Sector."

He says that a task group has been set up but it is still at the stage of scoping.

Where does this lead us? First, early diagnosis is clearly needed. Secondly, support, like the Early Bird and Help services from the National Autistic Society and Portage, which is available through some local authorities, needs to be there to support and educate parents immediately the diagnosis is made. Parents need the support to help them help themselves.

Thirdly, the family needs a named person to assist them to access the package of services required by the family. Local authorities should establish a clear route for families to access support. Services and support at an early age will increase the person's likelihood of living independently when older and contributing positively to the community.

Fourthly, the child needs to be educated in an environment that is autism-aware and responsive to the needs of individual children. There needs to be recognition that those with Asperger's syndrome who are not learning-disabled nevertheless have significant needs.

Fifthly, transition planning should be in place in a timely fashion. All Connexions personal advisers should receive training in autism spectrum disorders. Joint Department for Education and Skills and Department of Health guidance should be issued to social services departments highlighting their responsibility to all young people with ASD during transition.

A great deal is happening in Stockport. Some 146 young people are on the award-winning disability database. It is run by a friend of mine, Elaine Mounter, who received a "Getting the Message Across" award in the House of Lords before Christmas. That work is excellent, but she tells me that families still fear the lack of respite care and the transition to secondary and further education. Too often, they are sent out of area, which costs more and leads to the statutory agencies battling it out over who pays—while the family waits. There is too little supported housing. The voluntary agencies cannot meet all the needs for respite and short-term care. Supported leisure activities or activity-based breaks can prevent the crisis that happens when the family is worn down by the condition of autism.

The National Autistic Society tells us that current services for disabled adults are not designed with autism in mind. People with ASD fall between learning disability and mental health teams. Only 38 per cent. of adults with ASD receive a community care assessment and of those only 45 per cent. receive the services specified as needed. People with Asperger's but without a learning disability are unlikely to receive a service.

The NAS wants the Department of Health to produce statutory guidance on the social care needs of people with autism spectrum disorders. It wants a named senior manager in each local authority to be responsible for the commissioning and delivery of services to that group. Only 10 per cent. of adults with ASD are in paid employment, while 24 per cent. do nothing, or help around the house. The Department for Work and Pensions should provide a national employment support scheme tailored for people with ASD.

The NAS says that there should be explicit recognition that people with ASD are eligible for the whole range of disability benefits and consideration should be given as to how they can be supported into work without risk to their benefits. Forty-nine per cent. of adults with ASD live at home with their parents. They need help with meals, housework, paying bills and personal care. Only 3 per cent. of adults with Asperger's syndrome live fully independently. The NAS wants local agencies to collaborate to provide a range of sheltered housing and supported accommodation in each local area, designed specifically for adults with autism spectrum disorders.

I have used up more than my share of the time for the debate, but I am grateful to the House for listening with such keen attention. I very much hope that the Minister will be able to tell us that something will be done to co-ordinate the services. They are undoubtedly available in bits, but it is impossible for families to access what they need.

7.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. David Lammy): I congratulate the hon. Member for Cheadle (Mrs. Calton) on raising such an extremely important issue. The debate comes shortly after a year in which all of us tried to raise awareness of autism in our constituencies. That is an indication of the importance of the issue for carers throughout the country and the hon. Lady spoke eloquently in bringing to the attention of the House the circumstances for the parents of Alexander, her constituent.

It is likely that in the time available I shall be unable to address all the issues raised by the hon. Lady. However, if I do not deal with all her questions, I will write to her to follow them up.

Autism is a complex and distressing condition both for those directly affected by it and for their families and carers. Children and adults with autism often lead very isolated lives. Their social and communication difficulties often put great stress on their families.

I acknowledge the tremendous efforts made by families and carers who support children and relatives with autism. The Government are committed to giving them more support. We accept that in the past there have been frequent delays in the diagnosis and identification of the condition. There has been too little family support and services have been dogged by fragmentation. Like me, Members will know from their constituency casework that carers of autistic children and adults sometimes find themselves in a maze of different assessment processes carried out by different agencies and that they often do not know where to turn for help. The starting point must therefore be to provide services and support in ways that suit children and adults with autism and their families. Adults and children with autism want early diagnosis, intervention and support from agencies, as the hon. Lady suggests: agencies that speak to each other and that make their families' lives easier. They want straightforward, readily available information and access to local community facilities and activities.

The Government are responding to that context and those concerns by ensuring that our policies and programmes reflect those issues. Where needed, the Government have brought in new legislation. The Health Act 1999 introduced a "duty of partnership" making it clear that co-operation between health and social services is no longer an optional extra. The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 strengthened the support given to parents of children with special educational needs. The Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000 introduced direct payments for carers. The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 supports disabled young people leaving the care system. I acknowledge that we started from a poor baseline, and it will take time for those Acts to bed in and to address a patchy picture across the country. More needs to be done within the Department, and I hope that I can address that in moving forward. One of the most important aspects of that is the children's national service framework, which I hope will bring together coherently much of that to which the hon. Lady referred for children with this condition.

As the hon. Lady mentioned, one of the key issues for children with autism is to provide early intervention and early support. The evidence is that the earlier support is given, the better the long-term outcome is for the children and their families We are therefore taking a close interest in the work of the national initiative for autism screening and assessment, which she mentioned. We have appointed Dr. Gillian Baird, the secretary of NIASA, as a member of the disabled children's external working group, which is helping us develop the children's national service framework. That will build on the "duty of partnership" in the Health Act 1999 and set national standards for the health service and social services to work in partnership with education and other agencies.

The national service framework will include exemplars setting out how the NSF should be implemented for particular groups of children. It will show how families should receive multi-agency early intervention and support based on their needs. We have already announced that one of those will be on services for children with autism. Dr. Baird is leading on this area of work and is actively involved with the interested voluntary sector groups, such as the National Autistic Society and the Parents Autism Campaign for Education. The NIASA guidance will inform that work. The bottom line is that we hope that the NSF will raise the game in this area for children and families with autism.

The children's NSF will build on the work of the Government's "Quality Protects" programme, which focuses on improving children's social services. Under "Quality Protects", £60 million over three years has been allocated since April 2001. That has been earmarked for spending on services for disabled children and their families, which has provided more family support services, particularly home-based short-term breaks and sitting services. Nearly every single "Quality Protects" management action plan gave details of how local authorities were improving services specifically for children with autism and their families, including providing services such as the Early Bird service and Portage services that the hon. Lady mentioned. For example, Surrey, the Wirral, Reading and Windsor and Maidenhead have all introduced new Early Bird schemes to support children with autism. Sutton, Tameside and Thurrock have introduced new Portage schemes, and Somerset and Southampton are planning and developing new key worker support services.

The "Quality Protects" money will double next year from £15 million to £30 million. However, I recognise that much more needs to be done to ensure that all autistic children and their families receive high-quality support from social services, from education and from the health service wherever they live. That is why, as I said, we will publish the children's national service framework later this year, and I hope that it will drive up standards throughout the country.

I turn now to special educational needs. Children with autism are also benefiting from the improvements and resources that we are promoting to meet special educational needs. The hon. Lady rightly points out that, as a result of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001, local education authorities and

[Mr. David Lammy]

schools must now plan to increase accessibility to school premises and to the curriculum. The revised SEN code of practice also strengthens the guidance on identifying and meeting children's special educational needs.

We are backing our drive to improve provision for those children with significant resources. For example, this year's SEN standards fund is supporting expenditure of £91 million. The hon. Lady mentioned in particular the training of teachers and others in autism awareness. She will be pleased to hear that in-service training is one of the main activities financed by that fund. Guidance from the Department for Education and Skills recommends autism training as an area that LEAs may want to support. We are also making available smaller grants to encourage innovative developments in special educational needs. The SEN training and development fund for 2002–03 aims to increase in-service training and development opportunities offered by higher education institutions for teachers and others, and that includes three projects focusing on autistic spectrum disorders.

Last July, my Department and the DFES published good practice guidance for schools and LEAs on supporting pupils with autism. The guidance is based on the key principles that underpin good provision, including early identification and intervention, family support, and partnership and co-operation with other agencies. The autism working group, which developed the guidance, included not only officials from the Department of Health and the DFES but experts and practitioners in the field, including the—

The motion having been made after Seven o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at two minutes to Eight o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 9 January 2003

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Grammar Schools

1. **Sir Teddy Taylor** (Rochford and Southend, East): To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many grammar schools exist in England and Wales; and what the number was a year ago. [89206]

9. **Dr. Stephen Ladyman** (South Thanet): To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has for reviewing standards in LEA areas with selective secondary education systems. [89215]

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Charles Clarke): There are 164 maintained grammar schools in England—the same number as one year ago. Wales has none.We continue to look at ways to support an increase in standards in schools in all local education authorities. That is an important matter for local education authorities to consider in their own local circumstances, and reach conclusions on how standards can best be improved. The House may be interested to know that a couple of months ago I asked Ofsted to send me a paper on the educational standards in the local education authority of Kent. I am considering that paper now.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Is the Secretary of State aware that whereas the grammar schools felt more secure than for many years as a result of the policy initiatives of his predecessor, they are just a little worried that he might not be quite so positive about the matter? Before he contemplates changes, would he at least accept that grammar schools provide a unique opportunity for able children from working-class homes? Will he pay a visit to Southend on Sea, where our four grammar schools were in the top 100 achievers in the whole of England and Wales in the A-level results, and where, despite this, we find that the other schools performed extremely well?

Mr. Clarke: I know that this has been a matter of concern to the hon. Gentleman for some time. The assurance that I can give him is that my fundamental focus, and that of the Government, is on pursuing the best possible educational standards in every part of the country for every pupil in every way that they operate. That is the approach that we will follow. Grammar schools can be confident that there will be no ideological attack from me or my party on these matters. They can also be confident that we will look carefully at the educational standards for the whole population in each of the areas that they serve.

Dr. Ladyman: I was extremely encouraged, both by my right hon. Friend's answer today and by his comments to the Select Committee. Does he agree that we must judge the matter on the facts? The facts as gathered by people such as Professor Jesson are that children in comprehensive schools do significantly better than their cohorts in grammar schools, and that in areas such as Kent, which is exclusively selective, we have a far higher proportion of failing schools than we should have. Is it not right that if we are to drive up standards, we must drive out selection?

Mr. Clarke: I agree with my hon. Friend that the issue is standards and an assessment of standards based on the facts. As my hon. Friend suggests, I have had an opportunity to examine the research commissioned by him from Professor Jesson. I was interested that it stated that grammar schools in Kent and Medway do less well and are performing at lower levels than other grammar schools in the country, which is in itself an interesting point. I was interested, too, that the last comparison made by my Department between the results of grammar and comprehensive schools in 1999 showed that 100 per cent. of pupils in the top 25 per cent. of comprehensive schools ability range achieved five or more A* to C grades at GCSE, compared with 96.4 per cent. achieving that at grammar schools. The fundamental point that I want to make, and which I sought to make before the Select Committee, is that the judgment must be based on educational standards for everybody, and it must be based on the facts and the factual assessment of those standards.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle): Who was it who coined the phrase "sink schools" and in what context?

Mr. Clarke: I have no idea. I remember the phrase from the period in office of the Government of which the hon. Gentleman was a respected supporter. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman shouts "Alastair Campbell" across the Chamber. I am open to correction by the hon. Gentleman at all times, but I am pretty sure that Mr. Campbell never used the phrase "sink schools", and that the phrase was generated during the period of the Government of which the hon. Gentleman was a supporter.

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West): Is my right hon. Friend aware of one of the problems of the selective system that has been highlighted by the heads of the 21 secondary modern schools in Buckinghamshire—notably, the differential funding, which means that they are in deficit, while the grammar schools have a £2 million surplus? Is he concerned about the effect that that is having on the standard of

education provided for disadvantaged children, who are over-represented in those schools, particularly ethnic minority pupils?

Mr. Clarke: I am aware that there are issues of funding between schools. That is principally a matter for the local education authority concerned, but I return to the point that I made to my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman): in Buckinghamshire, as in Kent, the judgment must be made on the basis of educational standards for all pupils in the county, and on the basis of factual assessments of that, during which comparisons of the type that my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Dr. Starkey) makes are worthy of consideration.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): Does the Secretary of State accept that Labour Members frequently seem to be stuck in a time warp when they start to speak about academic selection? Whatever the failings of secondary moderns in the 1950s and 1960s, today's secondary modern high schools are achieving results only slightly below those of all-ability comprehensives. In English and maths, they are better than a third of comprehensive schools. At GCSE, they are better than a quarter of comprehensive schools. His own Department has designated 11 secondary moderns as beacon schools and 36 as specialist schools. Is it not time that Ministers joined us in celebrating the achievements of secondary moderns and grammar schools instead of knocking them?

Mr. Clarke: I am very happy to join the hon. Gentleman in celebrating the genuine educational achievement of schools of all types. There are outstanding secondary modern schools, grammar schools, comprehensive schools and private schools. In each of those categories, however, there are also schools that are less than outstanding and which need serious work. That is why I focus, as will my Government throughout, on the issue of standards for everybody—*[Interruption.]* Lèse majesté is a failing of which I am, I hope, not often guilty, Mr. Speaker, but I am on this occasion and I apologise to you for it. The Government whom I am proud to serve—*[Laughter.]* I believe that it is important to restore the concept of service following the approach taken by the previous Government on these matters. The Government whom I serve will focus on educational standards in all schools, celebrate high-quality schools of all types and seek to raise the standards of lower-performing schools of all types. That will be our approach throughout. We will not take the sort of ideological, backward-looking approach that characterises the Conservative party.

Tuition Fees

2. **Mrs. Anne Campbell** (Cambridge): To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the effect of up-front tuition fees on access to higher education. [89207]

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Charles Clarke): Since means-tested contributions to tuition fees were introduced in 1998, numbers in higher education have increased and there has been no fall in the proportion of those entering it from the bottom three social classes. We will shortly publish our review of higher education, which I can assure my hon. Friend will reflect our continued commitment to widening access. I can confirm that, as the Prime Minister has already told the House, there will be no massive increase in up-front tuition fees.

Mrs. Campbell: I am very pleased with that reply, but will my right hon. Friend also assess in the review process the effect of differential tuition fees on access, even if they are paid back as deferred loans or a graduate tax, as that is a source of worry to me?

Mr. Clarke: I can give my hon. Friend the assurance that she seeks. We are considering the matter extremely carefully. I repeat what I said a moment ago: our commitment to access will be a central aspect of the review, which I hope to announce shortly.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): Is it not now high time for the Secretary of State to acknowledge the clear implications of a written answer given to me only on Tuesday this week by the Minister for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education? It showed a doubling in the percentage of participation by students from unskilled families in the six Conservative years from 1991 to 1997, but that that process came completely to a stop after the imposition of tuition fees by the Labour Government. Does he not understand that his arbitrary 50 per cent. target for total participation by young people in higher education is logically and practically a totally different matter from widening opportunity for all those who are qualified and suitable to attend our universities? He needs rigorously to keep those issues apart.

Mr. Clarke: It disappoints me, but I have to agree with much of what the hon. Gentleman said. Throughout the important discussion on these matters, I have distinguished between the very important issue of the proportion of the age group that goes into higher education, which is a very significant consideration and is now about 43 per cent. of the population, and the balance in that intake of people from different social classes. Those are different questions and both are very important. On the first, which he raised first, I believe that the 50 per cent. target is very important indeed. Looking at our competitor countries, we see that it is exceptionally important that people are educated to such a level. It is also important, however, carefully to consider the appropriate qualifications and degrees to be offered to the 50 per cent. who are coming through. That is what my review will do.

On the second question, the difference between the chances of access to higher education of the higher and lower social classes is a public disgrace. The previous Conservative Government, in which the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) was a Minister, must bear responsibility for that. However, I shall be frank and

admit that our Government must bear responsibility for our period in office. When I make my statement on those matters, I shall present measures to tackle them.

Paul Farrelly (Newcastle-under-Lyme): What disadvantages does my right hon. Friend personally perceive in allowing different universities to charge students different top-up or tuition fees?

Mr. Clarke: There are advantages and disadvantages to that policy, as with other policies. If my hon. Friend wants me to list the disadvantages, the first is the overall amount of money and the impact on access about which my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) asked. The second is the courses that would attract higher fees in the case of differential fees, and the implications for more expensive and cheaper courses.

However, there are also important advantages. They include universities' ability to raise more resources, of which they are desperately short, and to develop a better contractual relationship with people who are coming to them. Major questions about the quality of teaching for many university students need to be raised.

There are therefore great advantages and disadvantages. My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Paul Farrelly) has been an active participant in the debate, and I hope that he, like me, will examine both the pros and cons.

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): Given that the Secretary of State for Wales and the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning in the National Assembly have condemned top-up fees as socially divisive, will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that he will not introduce any changes to the system of financing higher education in Wales without the consent of the National Assembly?

Mr. Clarke: I will not confirm that because a discussion is taking place between all my colleagues, including the Secretary of State for Wales and colleagues in the National Assembly for Wales. I shall not say to any participant in the debate, whether a political party such as the hon. Gentleman's or an organisation, that there is a veto on change. I shall try to achieve consent and agreement about positive changes to the university and higher education system in both Wales and England.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Does my right hon. Friend agree that we have made substantial progress in moving towards the 50 per cent. target for participation of those under 30? There have been tremendous changes, and that is a great success. We must now switch to ensuring a much more socially diverse entry.

Does my right hon. Friend also agree that we should not lose sight of the fact that we want high quality higher education that delivers for all those who have the potential to benefit? We must not forget that that must be financed from somewhere.

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend has put his finger on the point. First, we must tackle standards. Secondly, the quality and nature of the degree qualifications are important to the student, employers and the future. Different issues arise if we envisage 50 per cent. as opposed to 15 per cent. or 20 per cent. of the population entering higher education. They must be properly tackled. Thirdly, those who claim that we should simply forget about expanding higher education are wrong. I believe that we must do that. Those who claim that we should expand higher education but ensure that it properly serves our society and economy are right. I hope that we will follow that approach.

Teacher Shortages (Essex)

3. **Bob Spink** (Castle Point): To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action he will take to help reduce teacher shortages in Essex. [89208]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Stephen Twigg): Essex has benefited from the full range of Government measures that were introduced since 1997 to improve teacher recruitment. They include training bursaries, golden hellos and extra pay flexibilities. That has helped full-time equivalent teacher numbers to increase throughout Essex from 12,580 in 1997 to 13,650 in 2002. From 2003, Essex schools' budgets will rise through the local government settlement, and there will be further increases in the following two years.

Bob Spink: Does not the Under-Secretary understand that the Government have increased bureaucracy and damaged discipline, thus demoralising teachers not only in Essex but throughout the country? Does he realise that several schools in my constituency have massive teacher vacancies? Will he consider extending London weighting to my constituency so that teachers there can be paid at least the same as those in adjacent constituencies?

Mr. Twigg: I think that the hon. Gentleman is making a plea for more money from the Government for education at a time when the local government settlement has given a 5.7 per cent. increase to the local authority in Essex, within which we are recommending a 6.9 per cent. increase, which is an excellent and healthy increase for schools in Essex. I do not underestimate the difficulties of recruitment and retention in Essex or elsewhere, but the matter is being addressed in a systematic way not only by the Government but by the local education authority. I would encourage the hon. Gentleman to give his support to these positive measures to recruit additional teachers in Essex and elsewhere.

Bob Russell (Colchester): May I invite the Minister to have a friendly word with his colleagues in the Home Office about the Criminal Records Bureau, because that is one area in which the Government could help to reduce teacher shortages in Essex. As recently as last Friday, the Colchester *Evening Gazette* reported that

"More than 1,500 teachers, lunch-time assistants, classroom helpers and . . . caretakers"

could not start work because the Criminal Records Bureau had not yet checked their assessments. Of those, nearly 400 were teachers. The Government could resolve much of the teacher shortage in Essex in one fell swoop by getting the Criminal Records Bureau to work.

Mr. Twigg: I have a lot of sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's point. I will certainly use what opportunities I have to talk to the Criminal Records Bureau and to Home Office colleagues about the situation. As regards the recruitment of teachers, all that is required is that the List 99 requirements are fulfilled, so I will check that that is happening in Essex. I am sympathetic to the hon. Gentleman's argument, because we want to ensure that schools are able to recruit all staff, not only teachers, and I will look into the matter for him.

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): The Minister has heard the reasons for staff shortages in Essex. Those teachers will have contributed to the survey of 70,000 teachers earlier this week which found that one third of our teachers planned to resign or retire within the next five years. How much responsibility does he think that Government policy bears for this crisis in our schools?

Mr. Twigg: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has actually read the survey concerned. Yes, it does show that one in three said that they expected that they would, or probably would, leave teaching, but half of them will be retiring. They are not going to leave teaching because they are disaffected because of Government policy; they are retiring because of their age. It is absurd to create this scaremongering about recruitment and retention in our schools. What is more interesting about the survey is that it demonstrates that teachers are concerned about issues of bureaucracy and work load, and that is why we are addressing those issues. That is also why we are making positive proposals for the remodelling of the school work force, and I hope that the Conservatives will give us their support when we publish them.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) rises again, I must tell him that he must restrict his question to the county of Essex.

Mr. Green: Sorry. The Minister's response was unbelievably complacent. Teachers in Essex cite three main reasons for being fed up with their job: unnecessary paperwork, initiative overload and a target-driven culture. Those are the three defining failures of Labour education policy. Will he acknowledge that, unless he admits to teachers in Essex that the gentleman in Whitehall does not always know best, he will continue to drive teachers out of our schools and, in doing so, betray pupils and parents.

Mr. Twigg: I have not seen the survey broken down by county; obviously the hon. Gentleman has. My understanding, however, is that it shows that less than 6 per cent. of the teachers surveyed intend to leave teaching altogether. That is simply the reality, and it is a low figure. My colleagues and I are not complacent; we recognise that there are issues around teacher work load and questions of bureaucracy. That is why we are addressing them, and I would encourage Members on both sides of the House to support our proposals for remodelling the work force, whether it be in Essex, Kent or any other part of the country.

Pupil Behaviour

4. **Mr Vernon Coaker** (Gedling): To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps he is taking to tackle poor pupil behaviour. [89209]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Ivan Lewis): We are investing nearly £470 million over the next three years in a national behaviour and attendance strategy to support schools. We are also introducing radical measures to reinforce parental responsibility.

Vernon Coaker: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply, and I recognise the work that the Government are doing to tackle behaviour and discipline problems in schools. Will he look at the proposal to reintroduce special allowances for teachers who work in the toughest schools—what used to be called educational priority area special allowances? Would that not be a good way of overcoming some of the problems of recruitment and retention of teachers in our toughest schools, and a way of tackling some of the most difficult behavioural problems that those schools experience?

Mr. Lewis: My hon. Friend makes an important point about rewarding the unsung heroes of the teaching profession who make a real difference, often in the most challenging circumstances. Of course, he speaks from personal experience. Indeed, I have often thought that his previous career—achieving positive results with difficult children—makes him a credible future candidate for Speaker of the House, although we do not expect a vacancy for many years to come.

More seriously, our package of investment and reform to reinforce respect and discipline in our schools is ground breaking. It will provide support for heads and teachers, and achieve an appropriate balance between rights and responsibilities among our young people and their parents. We are the first Government to tackle behaviour head on, because we believe that it is crucial to raising standards in our schools.

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): Will the Minister say what he feels has contributed more to the disillusionment of our young people—indiscipline in our schools, the rise of the drug and gun culture, rap music as suggested by the Home Secretary or the Government's obsession with targets, testing and league tables?

Can the Minister point to a single Government target that has improved the lot of our black ethnic minority students, who are more likely to be excluded from school; our special educational needs students, who are seven times more likely to be excluded from school; and those youngsters in our inner cities, who are failing in greater numbers under this Government than under the deplorable Government who preceded them?

Mr. Lewis: The hon. Gentleman does an injustice to an extremely complex issue by pointing to a particular element that causes ill-discipline, poor behaviour and difficulties that young people experience. We know that a combination of the need for better support for teachers, opportunities for teachers to withdraw difficult pupils from classes, ensuring that we have tough exclusion policies and ensuring that we have a curriculum that turns young people on rather than off is involved, but it is also true, as Members have said, that the influences that impact on young people outside the school environment, such as rap music, make a difference to their perception of their community and the society in which they live. We need a combination of measures to support teachers, enforce parental responsibility and ensure that we offer a curriculum that inspires and energises our young people.

Huw Irranca-Davies (Ogmore): Will the Minister look into the deplorable situation in which Pencoed comprehensive school successfully defended an appeal on a temporary exclusion but was lumbered with a £20,000 bill? If it had gone for a permanent exclusion, the local education authority would have picked up the tab. Surely it is not acceptable that £20,000 will go into legal fees rather than books and teachers.

Mr. Lewis: Of course, we are willing to have a look at that specific issue. We recently introduced new guidance on reforming exclusion processes in our schools, but we must support head teachers, ensure that there is an appropriate balance between the interests of individual pupils and the school community as a whole and ensure that the exclusion process makes sense for teachers, pupils and parents.

Sir Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I am sure the Minister agrees that bad pupil behaviour in schools is not the fault of the Government or of any political party, but it is a growing and serious problem. Having talked to many teachers in recent times, both in this country and in Austria, where I have been for a short time, I may say that part of the problem is that there are few sanctions available to teachers in order to deal with indiscipline. Without structure and discipline in our schools, the teacher cannot provide the best education for the majority of pupils. Will the Government attend to providing sanctions so that those who behave badly do not impede the education of the majority of pupils?

Mr. Lewis: A range of initiatives that the Government have introduced is beginning to tackle behaviour directly. Let me list those initiatives briefly: learning support units, learning mentors, behaviour in education support teams, curriculum reform for 14-year-olds, parenting contracts and orders, police in schools, the reform of exclusion panels, pupil referral units, full-time education for permanently excluded pupils, truancy sweeps and the fast-track prosecution of parents who do not co-operate. Not one of those interventions was available under the Government supported by the hon. Gentleman.

Education Funding

5. **Linda Gilroy** (Plymouth, Sutton): To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proposals he has to increase funding available for the further and higher education sectors. [89210]

The Minister for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education (Margaret Hodge): We have announced the largest ever investment in further education over the next three years. Funding will rise by £1.2 billion, an increase of 19 per cent. in real terms, as part of a radical and ambitious reform and investment strategy which links funding to college performance. The higher education strategy document to be published later this month will set out our vision for the rest of the decade, including funding.

Linda Gilroy: My hon. Friend will know of the importance attached by Plymouth college of further education and Plymouth university to increasing access for young people from families whose members have not traditionally attended universities and colleges of further education. Will she ensure that funding increases, and the vision in the Green Paper, focus on increasing the amount spent on achieving higher rates of access and recognising the relationship between further and higher education?

Margaret Hodge: I applaud the colleges in my hon. Friend's constituency for the work they are doing to ensure that more young people from low-income and non-traditional backgrounds have access to higher education. I confirm what was said by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State: we will put access, and the ability of people with talent to attend university, at the top of the agenda in our strategy paper.

Dr. John Pugh (Southport): Given that many colleges throughout the country are uncertain about their finances because of glitches in the Learning and Skills Council's software, and given that even the helplines do not know how to help, who does the Minister think is responsible for this software silliness?

Margaret Hodge: I am aware of the problems experienced by further education colleges because of glitches in the information technology system, and I think the situation is unacceptable. I am having discussions with the Learning and Skills Council to ensure that it sorts out the problems as quickly as possible. I share the hon. Gentleman's concern.

Mrs. Lorna Fitzsimons (Rochdale): It is crucial for many of our constituents that the balance between further and higher education in terms of funding, remains an issue in the forthcoming review. The much-needed expansion in access for the non-traditional entrants by whom many of our communities are over-represented must be based on access, via further education, to higher education. Will my hon. Friend assure me that the mistakes resulting from the last Government's falsely competitive funding system,

which forced higher education institutions to compete for a top-up 10 per cent., will not be repeated in the review?

Margaret Hodge: I welcome my hon. Friend's comments, welcome her back to the Chamber, and wish her well as a mother. I assure her that by the time her child enters further and higher education—indeed, by the time her child is at secondary school—we shall have ensured that that child benefits from the highest standards and the best opportunities.

Let me deal with my hon. Friend's serious point about the links between further and higher education, and the way in which those links can support progress. I entirely agree with her views, which will be reflected in the strategy document.

6. **Norman Lamb** (North Norfolk): To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the financing of universities. [89211]

11. **Mr. Andrew Turner** (Isle of Wight): To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the funding of higher education institutions. [89217]

The Minister for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education (Margaret Hodge): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State acknowledged in the issue papers published in November that current public funding for higher education institutions in England was not enough to enable them to compete with the rest of the world. The higher education strategy document to be published later this month will set out our vision for the rest of the decade, including funding.

Norman Lamb: Does the Minister agree with the view expressed by the Secretary of State and reported in *The Guardian* on 19 December that

"the up-front fee . . . is the most serious disincentive to people from poor backgrounds coming into universities"

—although four studies commissioned by the Department, and published on its website, make clear that fear of debt seriously deters students in general, and students from disadvantaged backgrounds in particular, from thinking of going to university? Will the Government's proposals take account of the clear findings of those studies?

Margaret Hodge: We accept that both large up-front payments and fear of debt are factors that inhibit some young people from lower-income backgrounds from attending university. We also know that there are other important factors that we need to tackle, the first of which is to get young people to stay on at school to achieve more, and to get them to aim higher, raise their aspirations and see university as an option for them, rather than as an option simply for the middle classes.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): Reverting to the answer that the Minister gave to the substantive question, what is the size of the institutional funding gap that she is seeking to plug?

Margaret Hodge: There have been various assessments of the funding gap, but it would not be helpful to give a specific figure at this time.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): Is it £9 billion?

Margaret Hodge: Well, the figure given by Universities UK is about £9.9 billion. That is one figure, but the answer depends on the options chosen. We think that there is a substantial funding gap and we are looking at ways of filling it over time. However, as I said, giving a specific figure at this time is not helpful.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): In the context of student finance, is it not true that, in addition to the graduate premium that distinguishes between the earnings of graduates and of non-graduates, there is a differential graduate premium that distinguishes between the earnings of graduates of Britain's leading research universities and of graduates of the smaller universities? If it is logical to make graduates contribute to the cost of their tuition, is it not equally logical to make graduates of the leading research universities contribute an additional amount to their tuition costs?

Margaret Hodge: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the fact that graduate premiums do differ, both according to the institution attended and to the subject studied. That is one of the factors that we are bearing in mind as we think about future funding of higher education and support for students.

Mr. Andy Reed (Loughborough): I am sure that my hon. Friend is aware that one of the many difficulties faced by universities is the payment and retention of university staff. In making sure that universities offer a future for students, it is necessary to ensure that teaching, as well as research, is of the highest quality. In making certain that that happens, is she taking into consideration the pay gap experienced by those working in higher education institutions such as Loughborough university?

Margaret Hodge: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend: if we are to maintain and enhance the quality of teaching in our institutions, we must attract good quality teachers, and if we are to enhance our research capacity, we must attract into the sector, and keep, the best academics. Out of interest, since 1993 the real earnings of male academics in higher education have fallen by 0.4 per cent. That compares with a growth of about 5.8 per cent. in male professional earnings in general. That is one of the issues that we are looking at in our higher education reform.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): The hon. Lady is on record as repeatedly saying that this

graduate premium—the average earnings of a graduate, compared with a non-graduate—is justification for expecting a graduate to contribute to the unspecified funding gap that she referred to earlier. However, if 50 per cent. of that age group are to become graduates, it is surely logical to expect that, in time, 50 per cent. of the work force will be graduates. Will not the graduate premium be substantially diminished, therefore, thereby completely countering the point that she repeatedly tries to make?

Margaret Hodge: Interestingly enough, evidence emerging from the massive expansion in higher education that took place when the hon. Gentleman's party was in government demonstrates that the graduate premium not only sustained itself during that period, but, if anything, gradually went up. Our analysis tends to suggest that, given the demands that will be required of the labour market, there is no evidence that the graduate premium will be diminished as we expand the number of people who attend higher education institutions to fulfil the needs of the labour market.

Teachers' Pay

7. **Mr. Gordon Prentice** (Pendle): To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the impact of pay rates on the scale of migration of teachers between further education and schools. [89213]

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. David Miliband): The Department does not collect data on the number of further education teachers leaving to work in schools. However, one local government survey suggests that 1 per cent. of full-time recruits to secondary schools—about 210 staff from an FE complement of 46,000—are from the FE or higher education sectors. The additional £1.2 billion of investment in FE by 2005–06 will allow colleges to address recruitment, retention and reward issues.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: I would have expected many more teachers to leave further education and move into schools, as the starting salary for a schoolteacher is £3,000 higher than for a teacher in FE. The Association of Colleges says that teacher vacancies in FE are running at twice the level as in schools. When will we move towards parity between teachers in schools and in FE colleges?

Mr. Miliband: My hon. Friend raises an important point. He will know that the top of the FE scale is about £27,000 a year, whereas the top of the schoolteachers' main scale is £25,000 and the top of the schoolteachers' upper scale is £32,000. The pay systems for schools and FE are negotiated differently. In the end, pay comparability will depend, for schools, on the review body for schools and, for FE, on the negotiations between employers and teacher representatives. Those negotiations will restart on 13 January. The pay gap can be bridged by means of the money being put into FE as a result of decisions by my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Mr. John Horam (Orpington): On the subject of the pay and conditions of FE lecturers, will the Minister clear up the confusion caused by remarks made by the Minister for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education in a debate on FE in Westminster Hall in respect of the starter home initiative for key workers? The Minister gave the impression that Government policy had changed and that FE lecturers were now on a par with schoolteachers with regard to that scheme, whereas, hitherto they had to wait in the queue behind nurses, schoolteachers and policemen to benefit from it.

Mr. Miliband: I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education would not have wanted to cause any confusion. I promise to write to the hon. Gentleman at the earliest possible juncture to set out the position very clearly.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): Migration from sixth-form colleges to schools is encouraged by the fact that pupils in such colleges are about £1,000 worse off than their counterparts in sixth forms attached to schools. My 16 to 19-year-olds cannot choose to go to sixth-form colleges attached to schools, as their only option is a sixth-form college. Is it fair that my already deprived young people should be further deprived in that way? When will the Government level up the funding?

Mr. Miliband: The different arrangements that apply in different parts of the country reflect institutional history. However, every pupil in the country will benefit from the increased investment that is being put into the whole sector catering for 14 to 19-year-olds. The increased funding and higher quality will benefit all pupils, whether they are studying in school or college or following a work-based study course.

Literacy Strategy

8. **Mr. Nick Gibb** (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the role of phonics in the teaching of reading in the Government's English key stage 2 literacy strategy. [89214]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Stephen Twigg): The literacy strategy has put phonics at the heart of literacy teaching and has brought about what Ofsted described in its recent report as a "marked shift" in teachers' attitudes to, and understanding of, phonics.

Mr. Gibb: That answer is very welcome, but Ofsted also reports that 41 per cent. of seven-year-olds fail to reach the expected standard in writing, and that 31 per cent. fail in reading. Does the Minister agree with Ryan Conor, the special adviser to the previous Secretary of State, that synthetic phonics is a more effective method for teaching reading than the approach adopted by the national literacy strategy? Although it is to be welcomed that 25,000 year 3 teachers are to be taught phonics, what further measures is he taking to ensure that the synthetic phonics method is more widely used throughout years 1 to 4 of primary education, as also recommended by Ofsted?

Mr. Stephen Twigg: I think that the hon. Gentleman means Conor Ryan, not Ryan Conor. The issue of

phonics is central to the national literacy strategy and we take very seriously the remarks made by Ofsted. We believe that the model that we are using—the combination of synthetic and analytic phonics—is the correct one. Known as the Searchlights model, it is based on experience in this country and in other parts of the world, including the US. This week, I have written to all primary school head teachers and chairs of governors to reaffirm the importance of the national literacy strategy and the central importance of phonics in that strategy's success.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): Does my hon. Friend share my anxiety that the early huge achievements delivered by the national literacy strategy in improving literacy standards in the number of children leaving primary schools in Slough—the figure has risen from 50 per cent. to nearly three quarters—has slowed down, and that there is a lack of refreshment and re-energising in improvements in literacy in our primary schools? What does he intend to do to re-energise the national literacy strategy in primary education?

Mr. Twigg: My hon. Friend is absolutely right—we must praise the progress that has been made. In 1997, only 63 per cent. of our 11-year-olds were achieving what we would expect in terms of literacy, and now the figure is 75 per cent. That is a major advance. However, for one in four of our 11-year-olds not to achieve what we would expect in their literacy standards is not acceptable. That is why I announced this week that there will be extra training and additional booster classes for young people. This year, for the first time, 1,000 Easter schools across the country will be aimed at giving year 6 pupils that final additional support in preparation for their year 6 tests.

I do not rest on my laurels and neither does the team. We believe that the advances that have been made are very important. We have an ambitious target of reaching 85 per cent. next year. We will work to achieve that and this strategy is central to our ability to do so.

Higher Education

12. **Dr. Alan Whitehead** (Southampton, Test): To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the procedures for satisfying criteria for the grant of university titles to higher education institutions. [89218]

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Charles Clarke): The criteria for degree-awarding powers and university title were last reviewed in 1998. Our plans on this matter will be set out in our strategy document to be published later this month; I can confirm to my hon. Friend that the document will address the issue. Indeed, I discussed it with a delegation from the Standing Conference of Principals yesterday, which included the chief executive of the Southampton institute.

Dr. Whitehead: I thank my right hon. Friend for that interesting and encouraging reply. Does he accept that the present system appears to hold out the prospect of an exponential number of new universities and that while any institute of higher education can claim that it is on the road to university status, the reality is that very few, if any, new universities will be created in the foreseeable future? Is he prepared to say that a new system may well reflect reality more closely?

Mr. Clarke: I am certainly prepared to say that I agree with the thrust of my hon. Friend's remarks. One of the sadnesses of the current degree-awarding status and status discussion is that the quality of teaching undergraduates is not sufficiently recognised. There are many higher education institutions, including ones in his constituency and serving Southampton, which, although first-class teaching institutions, find it difficult to compete in the marketplace for undergraduates because they cannot call themselves universities. This has been a serious issue for a long time. That is why I confirmed that we are looking at this extremely carefully and we expect to say something about it in the document that will be published later this month.

Top-up Fees

13. **Mr. Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland): To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the Government's policy regarding university top-up fees. [89219]

14. **Mr. Simon Burns** (West Chelmsford): To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on university top-up fees. [89220]

The Minister for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education (Margaret Hodge): We will shortly publish a strategy document setting out our 10-year vision for the development and reform of higher education, including the outcome of the student finance review. After that there will be further opportunity for interested parties to comment.

Mr. Carmichael: The Minister is aware that her Labour colleagues in Scotland have been persuaded to take a rather more enlightened approach to tuition fees and student finance. Obviously, her consultation could have a spin-off impact on the position north of the border. What assurances can she give me that her consultation will involve the closest possible conduct with Scottish Ministers?

Margaret Hodge: A different approach is being taken by our colleagues in Scotland. That is a strength of devolution which I hope the hon. Gentleman applauds. Of course, we have regular conversations with our colleagues in Scotland and we will consult with them. If there are different systems in place, that is a good thing, not a bad thing.

Mr. Burns: Does the Minister accept that many parents in my constituency are extremely concerned about the mixed messages put out by the Government on top-up fees and the apparent breach of Labour's election manifesto? Will she seek to remedy some of the confusion? Media reports suggest that the Secretary of State has said that he will rule out all top-up fees, yet the

spokesman for the Department for Education and Skills has said that the Secretary of State will rule out only large top-up fees?

Margaret Hodge: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman's constituents will be pleased to share with us the findings of our strategy review, which we shall publish in a couple of weeks. I ask him and his constituents to wait until that time. I should like to say to his constituents and to their children that the purpose of the review is to ensure not only that we put university funding on a proper, secure footing, which is very important after the 36 per cent. cut in funding experienced under the hon. Gentleman's Government, but that student funding is put on a sustainable long-term footing.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

The Solicitor-General was asked—

Official Secrets Acts

20. **Andrew Mackinlay** (Thurrock): To ask the Solicitor-General if she will make a statement on her policy relating to prosecution of offences under the Official Secrets Acts. [89226]

The Solicitor-General (Ms Harriet Harman): The Attorney-General's consent is required to bring a prosecution for most offences contrary to the Official Secrets Acts 1911 or 1989. The Attorney-General considers first whether there is enough evidence to provide a realistic prospect of conviction. If there is sufficient evidence, the Attorney-General considers whether a prosecution is needed in the public interest. The more serious the offence the more likely it is that a prosecution will be needed.

Andrew Mackinlay: Ah, so the Attorney-General is to blame then. Next time, I wonder whether the right hon. and learned Lady will counsel her clients in the security and intelligence services that the Official Secrets Act is a deficient and blunt instrument, as well as one that does not meet European norms. Cases such as Shayler, Ponting or Sarah Tisdall, where the judge says, "You wicked, wicked man—six weeks in the slammer", really do not advance national security. We need new, modern legislation that will protect our critical interest as well as allowing justice to prevail and allowing people to give the truth when there has been bad mismanagement or irregularity in the security and intelligence services.

The Solicitor-General: My hon. Friend makes three points. The first was on whether we are compliant with our European obligations. The House of Lords has considered the Official Secrets Act and has decided that it is in compliance with the Human Rights Act 1998.

I think that my hon. Friend's second point related to the sentence in the Shayler case. In fact, the judge said that his starting point would have been 18 months in the circumstances of that offence, but he reduced it because the offender had spent time in prison in France.

On new legislation, obviously the Home Office will keep that issue under review and I am sure that my hon. Friend's comments will have been heard.

Finally, on the accountability and lawfulness of the security services, it is obviously right that the security services are not above the law and that they should be accountable. We take that point very seriously.

Mr. Richard Bacon (South Norfolk): On the point that the Solicitor-General has just raised, does she accept that the 1989 Act currently assumes that the internal procedures of the Security Service are incapable of failure? However, given that any procedure is capable of failure, should someone have to be put in the position of committing a crime in order to reveal a crime, without the possibility in law of entering a defence?

The Solicitor-General: I think that it used to be the case that it was assumed that the procedure was incapable of failure and that has, rightly, been looked at. The absolute prohibition on a member or former member of the security services giving out intelligence information is mitigated in relation to the public interest in a number of ways. First, as the hon. Gentleman understands, the person can tell their superiors. If that is not acceptable and the person does not want to do that, he can, if he is alleging unlawfulness, go to the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Attorney-General or the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis. If someone applies to give out information and is refused by his management, he can judicially review that decision as unreasonable. Of course, we also have the Select Committee which scrutinises the security services. I agree with where the hon. Gentleman is coming from: we must have the right opportunities for unlawful actions to be disclosed if they are taking place, but I hope that the procedures that I have described are actually working in that way.

Victims of Crime

23. **Mr. Andrew Turner** (Isle of Wight): To ask the Solicitor-General what steps she is taking to publicise the right of (a) victims of crime and (b) members of the public to seek the review of unduly lenient sentences. [89229]

26. **Mr. Gordon Marsden** (Blackpool, South): To ask the Solicitor-General what measures her Department plans to take to ensure that victims of crime and their relatives are informed of their right to ask the Attorney-General to consider the referral of a sentence to the Court of Appeal on the grounds of undue leniency. [89232]

The Solicitor-General: Where a victim complains that a sentence is too lenient, either they or the Crown Prosecution Service can ask the Law Officers to review the sentence. We can then, if we consider it unduly lenient, refer it to the Court of Appeal. We keep the issue of unduly lenient sentences, including publicity of them to victims and the wider public, under review.

Mr. Turner: I thank the right hon. and learned Lady for that answer, but I would draw her attention to the words,

"what steps she is taking to publicise the right".

On 4 July 2002, she told me:

"We need to ensure that Members and victims know that the right is there, but that it has to be exercised within 28 days."—[*Official Report*, 4 July 2002; Vol. 388, c. 392.]

On 24 October, I asked her an identical question to the one I am asking today, and she did not give me an answer at all. So what steps is she taking to publicise to victims the right that they have to draw the matter to the Attorney-General's attention within 28 days if they believe that an unduly lenient sentence has been given?

The Solicitor-General: The actual steps that the hon. Gentleman asks about are that, where there has been a conviction and sentence, the case will have been prosecuted by the Crown Prosecution Service, and it is the responsibility of the CPS to liase with the victim. If the victim complains about the sentence being too lenient, there is an obligation on the CPS to consider it. The CPS can then refer it to us or, if it is not prepared to do so, the procedure is that it should tell the victim, "We, the CPS, are not going to refer it to the Law Officers, but you can."

I anticipate the hon. Gentleman's thoughts, as he will not be able to make the next point, which is that the problem is the time limit: the complaint has to be made within 28 days of sentence. There is an absolute cut-off point, so that the sentence increase should not hang over a defendant when he has been convicted. I know that that causes difficulties, but we want to be sure that the CPS tells victims if it is not going to refer a sentence to us.

Mr. Marsden: My right hon. and learned Friend is well aware of the concerns that I have raised about this issue involving cases in Blackpool, where manslaughter verdicts relating to domestic violence were followed by sentences that the relatives and I consider to be excessively lenient. I am very well aware of her concerns about the issue, but given the problems that arise from time to time not least with the CPS and the information process in this respect, if we are not to be proactive in taking further publicity steps about this right, will she at least undertake to consider whether there should be a wider review, in which the whole question of the 28-day period is properly reviewed, because it is clear from a number of examples that the right is not always automatically adequate to assist victims or their relatives in the present circumstances?

The Solicitor-General: The first point that I would make in response to my hon. Friend's question is that, when the House discussed the Criminal Justice Act 1988, it was specifically decided that this would not be a general prosecution right of appeal against sentence, nor would it be a victim's right of appeal against sentence; it was a kind of special, exceptional jurisdiction. I know that that feels very uncomfortable for some victims who would like to appeal.

As for the process, there are difficulties with the tight time limit. Again, it was decided by the House—it is in statute, in primary legislation—that the application has to be referred within 28 days or it falls. That is designed to protect the defendant from the sense that he has an increase in sentence hanging over him.

As for domestic violence sentencing, my hon. Friend knows that sentencing is obviously a matter for the judges, but the Attorney-General and I have referred a number of domestic violence sentences, involving both homicide and assault, during the past 12 months, and we will refer domestic sentences where they appear to us to be unduly lenient.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): The Solicitor-General should be aware that the public's main concern about unduly lenient sentences relates to unduly lenient sentences for burglary. Will she take this opportunity comprehensively to reject the ludicrous statements by the Lord Chancellor, supporting Lord Woolf's guidelines, and say today that she agrees instead with Prime Minister's spokesman that those who commit burglary should face lengthy custodial sentences? There has been enormous Government confusion on that. The Lord Chancellor is entirely wrong, and ordinary people want burglars to be sent to prison.

The Solicitor-General: I entirely agree with the Lord Chancellor, and I stand strongly behind what he said. As far as unduly lenient sentences for burglary are concerned, they are not referable by the Law Officers to the Court of Appeal because they are triable each way. Only cases that are only triable on indictment are referable to the Court of Appeal.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): Will the Solicitor-General confirm that in cases of unduly lenient sentences, and in all prosecutions, a claim for public interest immunity will only be made by the prosecution on the grounds that public disclosure of the material would constitute a serious threat to national security or to protect police informants?

The Solicitor-General: The hon. Gentleman is right. The provision is wide-ranging in relation to public interest immunity, which allows material to be kept from the defendant. He is absolutely right that national security and the protection of informants are grounds for claiming public interest immunity, but they are not the only grounds. The courts have said that other categories of public interest might qualify, but, clearly, it is an exceptionally serious matter.

Business of the House

12.31 pm

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire): Will the Leader of the House please give us the business for next week?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): The business for next week is as follows:

MONDAY 13 JANUARY—Opposition Day [2nd allotted day]. Until 7 o'clock there will be a debate entitled "Failure of the Home Secretary to Provide a Credible Criminal Justice System", followed by a debate entitled "Failure of the Government's Drugs Policy". Both debates arise on an Opposition motion.

TUESDAY 14 JANUARY—Until about 4 o'clock there will be an Opposition half day [unallotted] on a motion in the name of the Ulster Unionist party entitled "The Future of Education in Northern Ireland", followed by a debate on the London bid for the 2012 Olympic games on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

WEDNESDAY 15 JANUARY—Remaining stages of the Community Care (Delayed Discharges etc.) Bill.

THURSDAY 16 JANUARY—Motions on General Synod Measures, followed by a motion to take note of various European documents relating to fisheries policy.

FRIDAY 17 JANUARY—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week after will be:

MONDAY 20 JANUARY—Opposition Day [3rd allotted day], there will be a debate on an Opposition motion subject to be announced.

TUESDAY 21 JANUARY—Debate on House of Lords reform on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

The House will wish to know that there will be a further debate during the week commencing 3 February in which Members will have an opportunity to vote on the seven options recommended by the Joint Committee.

WEDNESDAY 22 JANUARY—Debate on defence in the world on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

THURSDAY 23 JANUARY—Remaining stages of the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill.

FRIDAY 24 JANUARY—The House will not be sitting.

I should also like to inform the House that the business in Westminster Hall for Thursday 30 January will be:

THURSDAY 30 JANUARY—A debate on the report from the European Scrutiny Committee on democracy and accountability in the EU and the role of national parliaments.

Mr. Knight: I thank the Leader of the House for his reply. We are rather surprised that he has announced a debate on defence in the world for 22 January. Does not he recall that we had a debate on that very subject on 17 October last year, less than three months ago? The next defence debate that the House was expecting was one on defence procurement. With so many decisions awaited on new defence equipment, should not Members on both sides of the House be given an opportunity to raise those issues in debate? Why is he allowing Defence Ministers to dodge scrutiny on such issues, when many Members, including a large number of Labour Members, wish to express their views, particularly on the aircraft carrier project in which BAE Systems is a key contender? As he has said that this business is still only provisional, will he consider changing it to allow the House to debate defence procurement on that date?

Flooding remains a serious issue that has returned to devastate parts of the UK over the past few days, with many people suffering severe losses and the trauma of being forced to flee their homes. In view of changing weather patterns, it is clear that much more needs to be done. May we have an early debate on the Government's strategy on this now near annual emergency? It is important that the House is able to examine what is being done following the warning given by the Institution of Civil Engineers as long ago as 2001. It said that the Government's plans were "piecemeal and inadequate" and it concluded that spending on flood defences ought to be doubled. If the recommendations in the report have not been fully implemented, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the Government must take most of the blame for the scale of the latest devastation?

On the subject of modernisation, has the Leader of the House any plans to improve and update the way in which members of the Cabinet communicate—not with the public, but with each other? May we have an early debate on that? Is he aware of the widespread concern that there has been a complete breakdown in Government collective responsibility this week? That is not just our view—the newspapers have been full of it. *The Independent* of 8 January said:

"Reform of the House of Lords was in disarray yesterday after the Lord Chancellor warned that many MPs and Peers had rejected the 'nonsense' of a partly-elected second Chamber."

It went on to say:

"But he was immediately contradicted by Robin Cook, the Leader of the Commons, who insisted he favoured a 'mixed' House of Lords."

Meanwhile, on the same day, the *Daily Mail* reported on the Government's foreign policy under the headline

"Cabinet is rocked as Hoon rebukes Straw on strategy".

The article by its political editor stated:

"Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon delivered a stinging rebuke to Foreign Secretary Jack Straw for playing down prospects of an Iraqi conflict."

The paper added:

"The row also left Government policy on the approaching conflict looking confused and unfocused."

That was not all. On the very same day, there was more evidence that the Cabinet is coming apart at the seams. Other reports said:

"Downing Street slapped down Lord Irvine yesterday after he insisted it was right to keep burglars out of jail."

One article by Paul Eastham rightly concluded:

"By intervening so heavily, the Government has effectively humiliated its most senior law officer."

In the midst of all this, where was the Prime Minister? He was telling a conference of ambassadors in London—and apparently he was serious—that under his leadership

"Britain's role was to unite the world and act as a unifier."

[Mr. Knight]

He should start talking to members of his own party. In view of the widespread appeal of this ongoing free-for-all among Ministers, is there not a case for modernising the Government's procedures and perhaps allowing the next meeting of the Cabinet to be televised?

Mr. Cook: Happy new year to the right hon. Gentleman, too.

I am rather surprised that the right hon. Gentleman should be surprised that we are holding a debate on defence in the world. Quite a lot has happened to defence in the world since 17 October, and I remind him of a technical but important point. The previous debate took place in another parliamentary Session; we are committed to holding a debate on defence in the world in each parliamentary Session. That is why we have again tabled the subject for debate. I will, of course, consult my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on whether he wishes to hold that debate or the other debate on defence procurement on that day. However, I have often observed the House of Commons in action and noted the ingenuity of Members, and I do not think that it is beyond their skill to find a way to bring within order comments on an aircraft carrier in a debate on defence in the world, to which they are plainly relevant.

I am pleased to report that there have been substantial increases in spending on flood prevention since the last floods and since the observation was made in 2001. That may partly explain why fewer houses were inundated during these floods than there were two years ago.

The right hon. Gentleman asked us to double spending on flood prevention, but that would be very difficult to achieve in the context of a 20 per cent. reduction in spending, which is the formal policy of the Opposition. I remain to be convinced about whether they can flesh it out, but we have an hour of questions before us, so I shall welcome, and take careful note of, observations from any Conservative Member who wishes to propose a 20 per cent. cut in public spending in his or her constituency. I will make sure that the Government act on that request.

The right hon. Gentleman is perhaps guilty of wish fulfilment by claiming that the Cabinet is falling apart at the seams. The Lord Chancellor and I have repeatedly said, including in statements to the House last summer, that there will be a free vote on House of Lords reform. It is a bit inconsistent for the right hon. Gentleman's party to welcome our commitment to a free vote in Parliament so that it can settle the matter but then complain that there is not a collective decision in the Government on what Parliament should vote for.

I am glad to take this opportunity to say that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has played an excellent role in ensuring that the Iraqi crisis is dealt with in the United Nations and that it is kept firmly anchored there. Through those efforts, we achieved a resolution that was unanimously agreed by the Security Council and got the inspectors back into Iraq, which I thought would be welcomed by all hon. Members. I am sure that the House will wish to join me in congratulating my right hon. Friend on that.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): We have just heard the Leader of the House speak warmly of the Foreign Secretary. Can he explain why the Foreign Secretary decided to make an extremely important statement on Iraq by way of a written statement on Tuesday given that there are two most extraordinary reasons why it should have been an oral statement on which we could have cross-questioned him? For the first time yesterday, time was allocated for statements to the House to allow Secretaries of State to explain what they are up to and to allow us to question them. Why was that opportunity not taken? To add insult to injury, my copy of *Hansard* yesterday did not contain the statement from the Foreign Secretary. I understand that that was subsequently corrected, but *Hansard* did not have that statement as a written submission. I hope the Leader of the House accepts that that is outrageous.

What plans does the Leader of the House have for further discussions with Opposition parties about pre-legislative scrutiny? What progress has been made on that, and what are the candidates this Session? In particular, will he consider the case made by both main Opposition parties for a civil service draft Bill? He will be aware that the report of the Wicks committee is imminent. Surely that must be a strong candidate for pre-legislative scrutiny.

What discussions does the Leader of the House intend to have with Opposition parties about appropriate Bills for carry-over in this Session? I notice that this morning's papers report that yesterday he canvassed the views of the parliamentary Labour party on candidates for carry-over. Perhaps he will also talk to other Members of the House, since he is Leader of the House, not leader of the PLP.

Finally, will the Leader of the House find an opportunity for a statement on appropriate penalties for excessive speeding on the roads? Unfortunately, there was no chance earlier for the Solicitor-General to make a statement, but no doubt she would like to do so.

Mr. Cook: I am happy to deal with the last point first. My right hon. and learned Friend has just completed answering oral questions. I was with her throughout that period and she handled herself with great competence and authority. She is doing an excellent job and will continue to do so. On the matter to which the hon. Gentleman alludes, she has said that she is sorry for what happened and will of course plead guilty at the first opportunity. I hope that the House will now let the matter close.

We heard an oral statement on Iraq on Tuesday from the Defence Secretary. The Foreign Secretary has addressed the House many times on Iraq and will continue to do so. I do not think that anyone can fairly accuse the Government of not keeping the House fully informed of developments in Iraq or of not giving it opportunities to cross-examine Ministers and to express its views. We will continue to maintain that record.

On *Hansard*, I cannot explain why the written statement did not appear; we will make inquiries about that. Since we introduced the new system, it has, on the whole, been to the benefit of Members and the public because it provides a clearly identifiable and transparent system for Ministers to make statements, as opposed to the surreptitious device of planted questions. I am glad we have put that behind us.

It is early in the Session to decide which Bills might be appropriate for carry-over. As I repeatedly said when we discussed that in the autumn, the issue of carry-over

will arise only for Bills introduced after Easter. I fully accept, however, that when we reach that point we will want to carry the House with us and that we will have to consult other parties on appropriate Bills.

Similarly, with pre-legislative scrutiny I am very keen that the House should have the chance to scrutinise Bills in draft, because I believe that the earlier it can get in on the act, the better its opportunity to influence the shape of Bills will be. That is why I have committed the Government to trying to produce more Bills in draft during this Session and the next.

As the hon. Gentleman will be aware from previous Sessions, draft Bills tend to appear towards the latter half of the Session because our efforts are necessarily focused in the first half on the official Bills for consideration. I fully understand the interest of Select Committees and others, particularly the Chairman of the Liaison Committee, in knowing in advance what Bills may come before the House for pre-legislative scrutiny, and I will endeavour to make sure that everybody is kept informed.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): May we have a debate on the declaration adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in its special session on children in May, entitled "A World Fit for Children"? It includes the statement:

"Children must be protected from the horrors of armed conflict."

As 42 per cent. of Iraq's population are children of 14 and under, it would be appropriate to have that debate before Britain enters into any armed conflict with Iraq, so that we can see how we will live up to the provisions in the declaration.

Mr. Cook: I fully understand my hon. Friend's interest in this matter. He will be pleased to know that, in UN discussions, the United Kingdom has consistently supported the rights of children and wanted to make sure that we provide strong international norms for the respect of children's rights and the treatment of children. I only share with the House my deep regret that it is doubtful whether any of those norms, standards or rights will be observed by Saddam Hussein.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): The Leader of the House may be aware that the Vale of York suffered substantial flooding over the Christmas holiday, although on this occasion no homes near Thirsk were flooded. Will he give the House the opportunity of an early debate to consider two matters?

First, the Minister with responsibility for flooding should come to the House to consider the archaic procedure whereby the Environment Agency is responsible only for the main watercourses, and not for minor watercourses such as Cod beck, which in this case burst its banks dramatically. Such incidents are the responsibility of internal drainage boards. Will the Leader of the House review the matter by providing a debate in which the Minister responsible can respond to our concerns?

Secondly, it seems perverse that insurance policies will no longer cover the flooding of homes built on functional flood plains. Developers of such homes will probably have made a substantial profit by building them, but it will be the homeowner's responsibility for making sure that they are flood-proof. Will the Leader of the House invite the responsible Minister from the Department of Trade and Industry to respond to our concerns at the earliest opportunity?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Lady's point about the lack of consistency in responsibility is a matter that should be addressed, and I shall certainly draw it to the attention of the relevant Minister.

Insurance policies are primarily a matter for the insurance industry, but I have a lot of sympathy with the point that lies behind the hon. Lady's question. It is now clear that many housing developers have put up developments, sold the houses and invited willing purchasers to move in without adequate forethought to the risk to which they were exposing those new homeowners. I hope that the lesson of the past two years means that developers will be much more careful about where they site homes and much more frank with those purchasing them about the risk.

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): My right hon. Friend will be aware of the recent presidential and parliamentary elections in Kenya. As former President Moi's corrupt and incompetent Government have finally been defeated, will my right hon. Friend assure the House that, as Kenya is a Commonwealth country, we will do all that we can to work with the new Administration as they develop their economic and social policies and that, at the appropriate time, a debate on those developments will take place in the House?

Mr. Cook: Like my hon. Friend, I very much welcome the fact that the population of Kenya have had an opportunity to carry through a democratic process and to choose the Government for whom they voted. As a friend of Kenya, Britain will make it a high priority of its foreign policy to make sure that we support that democratic process, so that it can deepen and develop and be entrenched in future constitutional activities in Kenya. Obviously, we stand ready to work with the new Government on developing ways to deal with the poverty that many Kenyan people face. We are proud of the fact that our overseas aid to Africa has increased by 50 per cent. over the Government's lifetime.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): In light of the welcome revelation and admission in *The Times* today by the General Secretary of the Labour party that the Labour party is guilty of no fewer than 120 breaches of funding law, amounting to a sum of approximately £300,000, would the Leader of the House consider the merits of an early debate on honesty in government so that the House can properly compare and contrast the welcome and refreshing candour of the Labour General Secretary on the one hand and the Government's continuing failure to admit to failures in health, education, transport and the fight against crime on the other?

Mr. Cook: I very much welcome the hon. Gentleman's tribute to the honesty of the Labour party, and we shall seek to build on the support that he has offered us. I shall find every possible opportunity for the Government to be honest and frank with the House

[Mr. Cook]

about the fact that in the health service we have more nurses and doctors than ever before, and that for the first time in 30 years we have more beds in the NHS rather than less beds—

Mr. Bercow: Fewer.

Mr. Cook: I am sorry, I do not know what point the hon. Gentleman is trying to make. The fact is that the number of acute and general beds in the NHS has increased in the past year after 30 years during which the numbers declined, including a dramatic decline in the period when the Conservative Government were in office. They will decline dramatically again under any Conservative Government committed to a 20 per cent. cut in public spending.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): Does my right hon. Friend share my concern about the deteriorating situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo? As a former distinguished Foreign Secretary, does he agree that the international community does indeed have a role to play in seeking to prevent further genocide in the great lakes region? Is there perhaps a possibility of a debate in the House?

Mr. Cook: The situation in Congo is tragic, and has been both violent and unstable for a long period. I agree with my right hon. Friend that the international community does have a responsibility. Britain has sought to work with our European partners, particularly France and Belgium, to find ways in which the support of the international community can be used to try to bring an end to the suffering of the people of Congo and to start to develop the country's substantial assets. One of the great tragedies is that the country is perpetually assailed on all sides by violence because it contains riches that are used to enrich not local people but local warlords. I assure my right hon. Friend that the Government will continue to do all that we can to work with the international community to help the people of Congo.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Will the Leader of the House arrange an early debate on proportional representation, of which he and I are long-standing supporters? Does he agree that one of the benefits of PR is that it allows Parliaments to control Executives, and that we should therefore welcome the defeat in the Scottish Parliament last night of the Labour-Liberal Executive's shabby and underhand attempt to close fire stations? Will the Leader of the House arrange for that early debate so that we supporters of PR can further celebrate that example of democracy in action?

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Do not expect to win.

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) for his expression of support, but I rather suspect, taking the advice of my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), that I may be unwise to call for a snap vote on that proposition.

Mr. Skinner: The man has brains.

Mr. Cook: I thank my hon. Friend for his support. We devolved power to Edinburgh precisely so that the Scottish Parliament can make decisions affecting Scotland. Sometimes those decisions may be ones with which we may not exactly agree, but it is right that the Scottish people and the Scottish Parliament should make them.

Ann McKechin (Glasgow, Maryhill): My right hon. Friend may be aware that the Department of Trade and Industry recently completed a public consultation on the World Trade Organisation negotiations on the general agreement on trade in services. Given the importance of those negotiations to the supply of services, particularly in the public sector in fields such as education, health and transport, will he agree to hold a debate in the Chamber at the earliest possible opportunity so that Members can express their views?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend makes a point of immense importance about the next trade round and developing a freer trade in services to make sure that developing countries can protect their own economic interests and public services. A balance has to be struck—I can assure her that the Government are well aware of that—and I am sure that over the protracted period of the next trade round there will be opportunities for the House to debate the issue.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): Will the Leader of the House turn his attention to the forthcoming cricket world cup fixtures in Zimbabwe? Why have the Government been so slow to focus on the issue and the inevitability of President Mugabe hijacking the tournament for political purposes? Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it was only when the Secretary of State for International Development, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Clare Short), spoke out on the issue that the Government belatedly started to focus on it? Surely the time has come to stop passing the buck and make some decisions?

Mr. Cook: I am very happy to put the record straight, and am glad that the hon. Gentleman has given me the opportunity to disabuse him of the idea that the Government have shown an interest in this matter only recently. As far back as early July, the England and Wales Cricket Board was advised that the Government would not wish the team to go to Zimbabwe. I also think that it is rather unreasonable of the ECB to pretend that it has noticed only in the past few weeks that there is a problem in Zimbabwe. We could not have been clearer about the Government's position—the cricket team should not go, and it would be wrong for it to do so. I agree that, if it does so, there is a risk that President Mugabe will seek to exploit that for a propaganda victory. However, the decision is for the ECB. I understand the difficulty of the decision, but I hope that it will recognise that there are compelling reasons why it should decide not to go.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I have a question for my right hon. Friend as a moderniser about next week's

business. Half of a core day in the Chamber will be spent on Church of England Measures, but I invite him to consider whether those matters should not be debated in Westminster Hall. Looking around the Chamber, I see Presbyterians, Free Presbyterians, Methodists, Episcopalians, Catholics, lapsed Catholics, people brought up as Catholics, agnostics, followers of Islam and members of Jewish congregations: hands up all those who are communicants of the Church of England—there you are.

Mr. Cook: I have to confess that I cannot raise my hand in response to my hon. Friend's challenge. The matter to be discussed next week relates to the consolidation of the Church of England's pension rules, which is undoubtedly important to people who have such a pension. I understand the point made by my hon. Friend, and accept that there is a wider issue to be addressed. However, there are procedures to deal with that, and it is entirely right to retain those procedures at present. As for what may obtain on a future occasion, that is as much a matter for the Church of England as it is for the House of Commons.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The reference by the hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) to Free Presbyterians reminds me that I am truly a Free Presbyterian of the Auld Kirk.

The Leader of the House will no doubt join me in welcoming the advertising campaign this week dealing with the menace of child abuse and the internet. May we have a statement shortly on the state of conversations between the authorities in the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom on transferring information on known paedophiles travelling to England, Wales and Northern Ireland without giving proper notification to the requisite authorities so that action can be taken?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman raises an important dimension of our fight against the abuse of children, which has become highly internationalised, so it is therefore very important that international authorities co-operate closely. National authorities should be part of that exercise to make sure that we prevent paedophiles from taking advantage of any national authority's ignorance of activity elsewhere. We are therefore seeking the closest possible co-operation with all our European partners, and I shall invite my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to write to the hon. Gentleman setting out what we are doing in that respect with Ireland.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): On religious matters, non-believers should not be excluded.

If there is to be a ministerial statement on the proposed cricket tour of Zimbabwe, as there should be, would not that be a good opportunity, first, to remind the House that although many of us opposed English cricketers playing in apartheid South Africa, the Tories were in favour of that, and secondly, to argue strongly that there is no justification for English cricketers to play in Mugabe's lawless tyranny, and that to do so would be a disgrace?

Mr. Cook: If I may say so, we have had several ministerial statements on the issue and they have all been consistent that the cricket team should not go to Zimbabwe. I hear what my hon. Friend says about the parallels with the boycott of South Africa, but as I understand the present situation—and I would not wish to disturb it—there is unity from all political perspectives that it would be a mistake for the cricket team to go to Zimbabwe, that that could hand a propaganda victory to Mugabe, that we should not do so at a time when he is oppressing his people, and that those who go to play or to watch the cricket will be entering a country and eating food in a country where 7 million people are near starvation.

Mr. Andrew Mackay (Bracknell): May I ask the Leader of the House to reconsider his last answer? In my recollection, there have been no statements from the Dispatch Box from Ministers responsible for Zimbabwe. That is why so many of us believe that the message from the Government has been blurred. It is not good enough for Ministers to make personal statements, as we had from the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien) in the Westminster Hall debate. We require an urgent statement as soon as possible from a senior Minister, making it abundantly clear how wrong it would be for the cricket team to go to Zimbabwe. Then, I believe, there would be action.

Mr. Cook: The Prime Minister said from the Dispatch Box only yesterday that it would be wrong for the cricket team to go. There is no more senior Minister than the Prime Minister. That is an authoritative statement. All statements from Ministers have been consistent. As I understand it—although I am beginning to doubt it—the position of Opposition Members is that the cricket team should not go to Zimbabwe. They do not help to get that message across by suggesting that there has been any weakness, doubt or confusion about where the Government stand on the matter.

John Cryer (Hornchurch): The Commission for Integrated Transport recently suggested that the transport subsidies to pensioners should be cut in various ways. One effect of that would be that the freedom pass in London, which covers my constituency, would disappear, and there would be a more uniform subsidy along the lines of the 50 per cent. subsidy in the rest of the country. May we have a statement from the Dispatch Box from a Transport Minister to make it clear that the Government will have nothing to do with such a barmy suggestion, which would curtail my constituents' ability to travel?

Mr. Cook: As I understand it, the suggestion to which my hon. Friend refers is not from any Minister, but from an advisory body. It is in the nature of appointing advisory bodies that we receive but do not initiate the advice that they offer to Government. The Government have a good record of making sure that pensioners have an appropriate concessionary fare and are encouraged to travel. It is important that the transport system is fully used, and it is important for pensioners that they are able to get about. I can assure my hon. Friend that

[Mr. Cook]

the Government will wish to continue to defend the ability of pensioners to travel and to have full opportunities for concessionary fares.

Mr. Andrew Rosindell (Romford): May I reiterate the comments of the hon. Member for Hornchurch (John Cryer) regarding concessionary travel for pensioners? Will the Leader of the House consider not only a statement, but a debate on concessionary travel throughout the United Kingdom? He will be aware that there are many inconsistencies, whereby old age pensioners can travel within certain regions but not across boundaries. Will he consider a nationwide scheme, so that all pensioners can have access to free travel throughout our country?

Mr. Cook: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says. We welcome support for the Government's position from whatever quarter. I remind him that it was the Government who introduced the concessionary fare scheme. There was a full debate in the House and his party opposed it at the time. Presumably, in the search for the 20 per cent. savings, to which we have heard little reference in the past 40 minutes, it would be extremely difficult for any future Conservative Government to retain that scheme.

Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): A number of my hon. Friends are concerned that the Ministry of Defence is continuing to usurp the power of Parliament by continuing with the sale of part of the defence evaluation quango to QinetiQ. Details of the deal were quietly placed in the Library during the recess, so Parliament has effectively been asked to agree on the nod liabilities of about £100 million. May we have a debate on the matter, and on the lack of and the need for public accountability for the use or misuse of massive sums of public money?

Mr. Cook: I listened to what my hon. Friend said. I should not have thought that there was any member of the Government left who could imagine that putting a document in the Library was tantamount to doing so in private or without notice. The Ministry of Defence has been open about the matter. My hon. Friend will be aware that a number of items of Government business are done by statutory instrument. That is why statutory instruments are available to us. We have a prodigious programme of primary legislation in the present Session. If we successfully carry it through, we will have passed more pages of primary legislation this Session than in any previous Session. Not everything can be dealt with on the Floor of the House. I regret to have to say that as Leader of the House, but it is a matter of record that we must decide what are the priorities for the Floor of the House, and what other matters can be dealt with by statutory instrument.

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): The right hon. Gentleman will know that in just over two months, a European regulation on animal by-products that prevents the burial of fallen stock on farms will come into effect. Britain is one of the few EU countries that has not published a statement or a policy on how farmers should deal with the matter. It will not be possible to stack up animal carcases as fridges have been stacked up in the past, owing to the incompetence of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in these matters. Will the right hon. Gentleman ask the Secretary of State to publish as soon as possible a statement on how farmers should proceed to dispose of their fallen stock?

Mr. Cook: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the Government are well aware of the great importance of the matter in rural communities and the severity of the difficulties that may arise. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs will wish to clarify our proposals as soon as possible, and I will draw her attention to the hon. Gentleman's remarks.

Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): May we have a statement on the London underground, as the contract with the private consortium TubeLines took effect on 1 January without any parliamentary announcement? It is important that we know what arrangements there are for public sector management of those contracts. My understanding is that there is no expertise in place to provide such public sector management. Without that, private consortiums have a blank cheque. Moreover, that represents a step on the road towards privatisation of the underground.

Mr. Cook: I was not aware that that was an issue that we had failed to ventilate in the House over the past year. I remember many exchanges on the public-private partnership for the London underground. I can assure my hon. Friend that expertise will be made available to make sure that we maintain competent management. Let us not lose sight of the fact that the objective of the whole exercise is to make sure that we modernise the underground, provide the investment that it plainly needs, and offer a modern, effective service to the underground consumer. That must surely be the right way forward. I hope that we can start to make progress in providing the improvement that passengers and London Underground want.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Surely the point about Zimbabwe is that no Minister has made a formal statement to the House and thereby subjected himself to questioning.

May we have a statement from the Foreign Secretary on a subject first raised by my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin), the shadow Defence Secretary, with the Secretary of State for Defence on Tuesday, namely, the attitude of the Government to the UN inspectors and their role in Iraq? It is clear that Saddam Hussein had four years in which to produce chemical and biological weapons stocks, then to destroy the plant that produced them and conceal the stocks in any hole in the ground anywhere in Iraq. The House needs to know what the Government's attitude will be if, as expected, the inspectors fail to find any of those stocks and the Americans decide nevertheless that the danger is so great that they must proceed with military action. This is an important matter. It was raised by the

Conservative Opposition and has been taken up by Labour Back Benchers and the Liberal Democrat leader. The House deserves to have its say on the matter.

Mr. Cook: It would be impertinent for the House or any member of the Government to try to anticipate what the UN inspectors might say to the United Nations. It will, after all, be only another three weeks before we hear about progress from the head of the inspection team. I expect that he will necessarily say that he will require further time to carry out the task. Surely, the appropriate and responsible attitude for any Government—especially when they are a permanent member of the Security Council—is to say that we want to ensure that the inspectors can carry out that task, that they have adequate time and resources to do so and that the authority that they have been given by the Security Council is fully respected by the Government of Iraq. This should not be a business of the inspectors trying to discover that Iraq is concealing anything. The resolution is explicit in saying that the duty is also on the Government of Iraq to declare what they have.

Jim Sheridan (West Renfrewshire): May I ask my right hon. Friend to consider initiating an inquiry into the abuse of the democratic process of this House by political parties submitting spurious and repetitive questions only to try to portray themselves falsely as working harder than other political parties? Does he further agree that, if other parties were to follow that sharp practice, the administrative processes of this House would grind to a halt and that that would be extremely expensive for the taxpayer?

Mr. Cook: I have a lot of sympathy with the point that my hon. Friend makes. I can only commend to him and other Members of the House the excellent report from the Procedure Committee, which rightly pointed out that information requested by means of a written question can often readily be found in the Library or other published sources.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I do not accept that.

Mr. Cook: I am very sorry to hear that my hon. Friend takes that view, as I was quoting my submission to the Procedure Committee, which it reprinted in full. In making that commitment, I said that, as a Back Bencher, I found it useful to get information in the Library, where it is often readily available. I commend the excellent, competent and authoritative services of the Library to the House.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): Can we find time for a debate on the position of pensioners, who are perplexed by the Government's inability and weakness in grasping the nettle on the Zimbabwean cricket issue and making a specific decision about it? During that debate, we could focus on the £5 billion-a-year pension tax that the Government are imposing on pensioners, which is causing so much hardship to many of them.

Mr. Cook: For a moment during that question, time stood still for me. I shall try to disentangle the two separate issues that the hon. Gentleman raises. First, as I said, there is no ground for any confusion whatever about the Government's position in relation to the cricket tour—it is wrong and the team should not go. As I understand it, hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber agree about that. I lament the fact that it is proving so difficult to establish the consensus that I understand exists on both sides of the Chamber.

On pensioners, I would be delighted to arrange a debate so that we can demonstrate the extent to which the Government have increased the state pension at a much faster rate than that of earnings or inflation, the way in which we have raised 2 million pensioners out of poverty and the fact that, as a result of the introduction of the pension tax credit, there will be a further increase in real income for the less well-off pensioner, who will be about £20 to £30 better off than in 1997. That very substantial achievement would be put entirely at risk by a 20 per cent. cut in public spending—a proposal that I understand the hon. Gentleman supports.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): In view of the well-publicised views of the head of the Church of England, does my right hon. Friend find it unusual that our procedures allow for a debate on the pension fund of the Church of England, but not on its views about war in Iraq? Notwithstanding his reply to the question asked by the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis), does he not feel that at the very least, there is a need for a statement about the processes that are to be followed after the publication of the UN weapons inspectors' report, especially given the imminence of the completion of the interim report and its presentation to the Security Council?

Mr. Cook: I hear what my hon. Friend says about the Church of England. As my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) identified earlier, I have no personal authority to speak for or on behalf of the Church of England. I am happy, if I may, to leave that for it to absorb.

On the question of the United Nations inspectors and the statement to the Security Council, the Secretary of State for Defence and the Foreign Secretary have been punctilious in making statements to the House on these matters. I am sure that they will want to ensure that the House is kept fully informed about whatever develops in the Security Council on 27 January. I am confident that they will want to ensure that the House is kept fully up to speed, but at the same time, I counsel us against imagining that 27 January will necessarily be some sort of dramatic watershed. It is a staging post towards a programme of work that will probably have to continue.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): Is the Leader of the House aware that, because of the delays in securing parliamentary approval of the financial settlement for local government, many councils, including Oxfordshire, are having difficulties in setting their precepts on time and some councils will not have time to debate the full budgets before they have to do so? Can we have a debate in the House to chivy the Government on that issue? Does the Leader of the House not think it is important that we should look at the size of that stealth tax, which is going to be paid by our constituents,

[Mr. David Cameron]

especially as council tax has increased since the Government came to power not by 20 per cent., but by 40 per cent.?

Mr. Cook: I remind the hon. Gentleman that we have only just had a debate on the Local Government Bill and that I responded to the demands of the House that we debate the local government settlement in advance. As I am sure he is aware—he is a fair-minded Member of the House—every local authority throughout the length and breadth of England has received a settlement that exceeds the rate of inflation. Over the past few years, we have provided a very substantial additional real-terms increase in local government funding. I am glad that he asked the question in the way that he did, as it gives me the opportunity to say that, if there had been a 20 per cent. cut in public spending, we would have seen cuts in his local authority budget and not an increase.

Mr. John Lyons (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): On the 27th of this month, we will mark Holocaust Memorial day. This year, the event is being held in Edinburgh. May I ask the Leader of House to do two things? First, will he ensure that the House is represented at the event, and, secondly, will he find a way of reflecting such an important day in the business of the House?

Mr. Cook: Of course, it was this Government who introduced the Holocaust Memorial day. We did so precisely because that appalling act of genocide should not be forgotten, as part of committing ourselves to ensuring that there is no discrimination in our modern world and because we should never again see such appalling discrimination visited on anybody for any racial, religious or ethnic reason. The Government will therefore want to ensure that we appropriately mark 27 January. I cannot immediately tell my hon. Friend who will be representing the Government at the event, but I shall ensure that he is fully informed. I can assure the House that we will treat the day with appropriate dignity.

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): Might I be probably the first hon. Member to wish you, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the House and all hon. Members a very happy old new year for when it comes this weekend? I invite the right hon. Gentleman to join me in sending greetings to my constituents in Foula, which still celebrates the old new year, or Yule, with some vigour.

I welcome the addition of a fishing debate to next week's business, but what we really need is a statement from the Chancellor of the Exchequer. I suspect that, as it will be an exercise in reporting back, the fisheries Minister will simply tell us what we already know. What we do not yet know is whether the Government will put their money where their mouth is in supporting the industry, and that question can be answered only by the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Mr. Cook: I am happy to wish the hon. Gentleman's constituents a happy weekend, in whichever year it falls. I hope that we can achieve unanimity on that proposition.

On the fishing industry, the fisheries Minister will rightly be speaking in the House next week because he has been heavily engaged in the process. I hope that all hon. Members, from whatever perspective, will recognise that he has been fully committed on the issue, on which he has given very dedicated service. It is therefore right that he should speak for the Government in that debate. Of course, we understand that there will be difficult consequences for communities as a result of the changes and we will seek as best we can to assist those communities, but I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree that there is no future for the fishing communities if there is no future for the fish. That is why we must put conservation at the top of the agenda.

Point of Order

1.21 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I draw your attention and that of the Leader of the House to the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell), our Chief Whip, briefed me a few minutes ago that he has been advised by the Clerks that motion 4 on today's Order Paper is defective? Will you use your good offices to make appropriate representations to ensure that the motion is not moved until the mystery is resolved?

Mr. Speaker: The Clerk of the House informs me that he is not aware of that. I therefore have it on good authority that everything is in good order.

BILL PRESENTED

ELECTRICITY (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS)

Ms Secretary Hewitt presented a Bill to make provision in connection with the provision of financial assistance to, or the acquisition of any securities of or any part of the undertaking or assets of, British Energy plc or any of its subsidiaries; to provide for the repeal of Part 2 of the Electricity Act 1989; to amend Schedule 12 to that Act and to make provision for undertakings to make grants under that Schedule to be disregarded for tax purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Monday 13 January, and to be printed [Bill 39].

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I want to draw your attention to my concern and that of several of my hon. Friends about the possible abuse of the new written ministerial statements procedure. A few moments ago, the Leader of the House invoked as a rationale for it a desire to get rid of the planted written question. Are you conscious that we are worried that, when we have tabled genuine questions—rather than questions planted by Government Back Benchers—instead of receiving substantive replies, Ministers have fobbed us off and patted us on the head with references to the ministerial written statements that they have issued? We are worried that that happens on the same day that our questions should be answered substantively. I ask you, as the guarantor of our rights, to guard against that possible abuse.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is well aware that, as I have stated previously, I am not responsible for the quality of replies, except mine.

Orders of the Day

Health (Wales) Bill

Not amended in the Standing Committee, considered.

New Clause 1

RECIPROCITY FOR PATIENTS' FORUMS

". The National Assembly for Wales shall make regulations providing that Patients' Forums in England shall have the power to investigate health issues in Wales that affect patients resident in England who are treated by the National Health Service in Wales."—*[Mr. Evans.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

1.22 pm

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: With this we may discuss amendment No. 4, Title, line 1, after "Wales;" insert

"to make provision for reciprocity for Patients' Forums in England;".

Mr. Evans: The new clause is straightforward, and I am sure that the Minister appreciates that there is a problem that needs to be tackled. If it is not done through the new clause, I hope that it will be properly addressed in another place so that patients forums can cover anyone living in England who wants to receive treatment in Wales. The new clause stems from the purpose of community health councils, the patients' champion. If CHCs in Wales cannot investigate any complaints on behalf of patients who come from England or elsewhere, a problem will arise. Perhaps the issue also relates to people from England or Wales who receive treatment in France or Spain because of the spare capacity there and the extended waiting lists in Wales and England. There is therefore a wider problem. However, I assume that CHCs in Wales could champion Welsh patients in, for example, French hospitals, and deal with any problems that arose.

Patients are increasingly aware of their rights and know that any complaints should be heard. For example, complaints against doctors have increased by 1,450 per cent. in the past 11 years. That is staggering, and reflects the fact that people know that a procedure exists if problems arise and they are unhappy with their treatment.

We are not simply considering people who live in border areas and decide to be treated in the NHS in Wales. International and domestic tourism has expanded greatly. Wales, especially north, west and mid-Wales, receives many tourists from England who make regular weekend, mid-week and lengthier summer visits to some of its most beautiful parts. Sadly, some of them will become ill or suffer accidents, especially on beaches. For example, people who visit the Gower peninsula could cut their feet on glass that has been left on the beaches. I know of cases of people being taken to Singleton hospital or Morriston hospital. The increase in tourism means that people from England will be treated in Welsh hospitals.

The growth of business travel means that people on business who become ill or have accidents will use the NHS in Wales, as will people who drive through Wales

[Mr. Evans]

and have car accidents. It is therefore right to establish a structure to ensure that people are properly looked after and complaints investigated. That has not been thought through in the Bill. I believe that it is an oversight and I hope that the Minister will be able to reassure me about that.

People whose families live in Wales may wish to be near them if they need an operation or treatment. People are increasingly mobile and we want reciprocity whereby patients forums in England or CHCs in Wales can champion the rights of patients from England or elsewhere who are treated by the NHS in Wales. That matter needs consideration.

It is depressing that waiting lists in Wales have increased. Community health councils will be interested in that and may want to investigate instances of patients from elsewhere who are treated in Welsh hospitals. We know that there are huge cost implications.

Let us consider the position of someone who has diabetes and travels to Wales. Today, the Government produced a new strategy for diabetes in England, but it will take a further 12 months to introduce it in Wales. I am unhappy about that, and I hope that the Welsh Assembly can introduce a strategy for Wales more quickly. I do not understand why people in Wales are treated as second-class citizens and I hope that the Minister can reassure me.

In the context of increasing waiting lists, I hope that the Minister can comment on the story in *The Western Mail* about calling up reservists for Iraq. Some of the 1,500 will be Welsh doctors and nurses. If that leads to increasing waiting lists, the CHCs will want to investigate the matter. I hope that the Minister will reassure us that there are contingency plans to ensure that patients in Wales are properly treated.

The new clause is straightforward and covers a matter that the Bill does not tackle. The mobility of people throughout the United Kingdom and the world means that we need to ensure that the rights of those who receive medical treatment in the NHS in Wales are properly championed, whether by CHCs or the patients forums in England.

1.30 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): I am happy to assure the hon. Gentleman that the Government share his wish that patients forums in England should have the same rights that the Bill will allow the Assembly to confer on community health councils in Wales. I am also happy to be able to tell him that it is unnecessary to amend the Bill to achieve that. The functions of a patients forum are set out in section 15 of the National Health Service and Health Care Professions Act 2002. The main functions are monitoring and reporting, and include the duty to

"monitor and review the range and operation of services provided by . . . the trust for which it is established; . . . obtain the views of patients and carers . . . and report to the trust; . . . provide advice, and make reports and recommendations"

on service-related matters and make information available to patients and carers.

Patients forums have no powers to investigate health issues in England. Those powers are exercised in England and Wales by the Commission for Health Improvement, which was set up in April 2000. New clause 1 and amendment No. 4 would duplicate the commission's powers in Wales by conferring them additionally on patients forums, which operate only in England. The Assembly would not be in a position to make regulations affecting the operation of the patients forums in England because it has no responsibility for them.

The inspection of premises providing NHS-funded services, including the inspection of premises across borders, is a different matter. Section 17 of the 2002 Act, and paragraph 3 of schedule 7A of this Bill give the Secretary of State and the National Assembly respectively identical powers to make regulations conferring on patients forums and community health councils the right of entry and inspection to back up their functions. That is not intended to make them investigatory bodies because that is a role for the Commission for Health Improvement. CHCs will have the same right of entry as patients forums in England.

Mr. Evans: If someone from Bristol were holidaying in Swansea and became ill there, who would they complain to in the first instance, and how would that complaint be followed through?

Mr. Touhig: In the first instance, if the person lived in England and had a problem with the way in which they had been treated by the health service in Wales, they would complain to their patients forum, which would then have the opportunity under the provisions of the NHS Reform and Health Care Professions Act to investigate the complaint, even though the treatment had taken place in Wales. That is what we are putting right in this Bill: we are providing a reciprocal arrangement for community health councils in Wales to have the opportunity to do the same thing for England.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): The hon. Gentleman refers to the power to make regulations contained in paragraph 3 of schedule 7A. I shall pose to him the question that is invariably of interest to me in such contexts. Are the regulations that are to be made under that schedule to be subject to the negative procedure of the House or to its affirmative counterpart?

Mr. Touhig: Where there are regulations relating to aspects of this Bill, they will be made by the Assembly under its proper procedures as a result of the Government of Wales Act 1998. They will not be made by this House. I hope that that helps the hon. Gentleman.

As I was saying, it is not intended that patients forums or CHCs should be investigatory bodies. CHCs will have the same right of entry as patients forums in England, and if a situation arises in which a Welsh CHC wished to inspect facilities in England used by Welsh patients, it will be able to do so—and vice versa. Patients forums will have identical powers to do the same in respect of premises in Wales used by residents of England.

In practice, we would expect that a CHC or a patients forum that wished to conduct an inspection across the border would liaise with its English or Welsh counterpart for it to conduct the inspection on its behalf.

That seems practical. The situation is not, however, prescribed in any more detail, as it will be for local CHCs and patients forums to work up the arrangement that is best suited to them. I hope that that explanation will help the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) to understand why we would resist the new clause.

The hon. Gentleman made a number of other important points in his speech. He asked about someone from this country being treated abroad and perhaps being dissatisfied with that treatment. The first line of defence for that patient's interests would be his or her CHC in Wales, or patients forum in England. The hon. Gentleman also mentioned the diabetes strategy, and asked about related proposals for Wales. My colleagues in the Assembly are considering such proposals in Wales, and I am sure that they will take note of his point about the need to do it as speedily as possible.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to waiting times. The Assembly has made substantial progress in reducing waiting times in the priority areas of cardiac surgery and orthopaedics over the last year. There has also been an indisputable increase in the number of people being treated. A lot of work is under way to address the continuing problem of long waiting lists, which we are all concerned about, and the piloting of a new booking system for out-patients has shown reductions in cancellations and non-attendance from more than 15 per cent. to less than 5 per cent. The improved system will be rolled out right across Wales from March this year. I hope that that helps the hon. Gentleman so far as the action on waiting lists is concerned and that he will feel able to withdraw the new clause.

Mr. Evans: I am reassured by the explanation given by the Minister. I also welcome his comments about diabetes. I hope that—perhaps with some pushing from him—the Assembly will concentrate on introducing a strategy for those who suffer from diabetes in Wales. He made no reference to the issue of reservists, or to whether contingency plans would be put in place to ensure that patients in Wales would be properly looked after should there be a war with Iraq. Even with the reservists being called up, there could well be a problem.

Mr. Touhig: I take note of what the hon. Gentleman is saying. I am sure that his view is shared on both sides of the House, and I shall make sure that it is brought to the attention of my colleague, the Assembly Minister for Health and Social Services, Jane Hutt.

Mr. Evans: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 2

WALES CENTRE FOR HEALTH

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): I beg to move amendment No. 2, in page 2, line 13 at end insert—

'( ) The Special Health Authority for England and Wales responsible for the functions of the Health Protection Agency shall have a place on the Board of the Wales Centre for Health.'.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): With this it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 3, in page 2, line 24 [Clause 3], at end insert—

'( ) That the Wales Centre for Health shall have a duty to coordinate its activities with the recommendations of the Special Health Authority for England and Wales responsible for the functions of the Health Protection Agency in matters related to communicable disease control in England as well as with similar functions controlled by the NHS in Wales.'.

Chris Grayling: We have tabled the amendments to highlight an issue that should be a matter of concern for everyone in the House at what is undoubtedly a difficult time in security terms, and also because security matters are not the sole issues involved in the relationship between the health protection agency and the Wales centre for health. There is also the issue of how matters relating to communicable disease are addressed and communicated, and how public information on these matters is provided.

These are probing amendments designed to establish the relationship envisaged by the Minister between the Wales centre for health and the health protection agency. The latter organisation covers England and Wales but does not have the full remit in Wales that it does in England. The former will, if we understand its role correctly, have prime responsibility for the communication of public health information to the people of Wales. The Minister may be able to clarify the degree to which he envisages the Wales centre for health having responsibility for communication in those areas. The Bill states that the centre will be responsible for developing and maintaining

"arrangements for making information about matters related to the protection and improvement of health in Wales available to the public in Wales".

It will also have responsibility for research and training, both of which could be equally important in the current climate.

This is happening at a time of change for the infrastructure for the establishment of information—and, in part, for the provision of information—about communicable diseases and also, in these difficult times, about biological and chemical threats to this country. These functions were previously carried out by the Public Health Laboratory Service for England and Wales, and are in the process of being radically changed. Over the next few months, we shall see the creation of an entirely new organisation, the health protection agency, which will take over the responsibilities of the PHLS and a number of other bodies. It will be created as a special health authority and, from April, take on responsibility for providing or commissioning most of the NHS functions set out in the Government's consultation paper last year.

The organisation will be responsible in England for PHLS roles, but not, in general, clinical diagnostic microbiology services. However, it will be responsible for microbiological research and take over the national focus for chemical incidents, regional services and the National Poisons Information Service. It will also take over the health protection functions provided by consultants in communicable disease control and other health protection staff. Furthermore, it will have a role in providing advice on emergency functions.

[Chris Grayling]

In Wales, the organisation will also have many of those responsibilities, but not all of them. It will not be responsible for certain consultancy work, but it will, none the less, be the body that generates first-base information on major communicable disease risks and major biological and chemical risks.

This week, we have seen the first example of a chemical threat being discovered in this country. The PHLS has been predominantly responsible for providing information to the public indirectly and to the NHS directly on the nature of that threat, on what treatments are available, if any, and on how medical practitioners should try to identify the possible appearance of symptoms that ultimately might represent a chemical or biological attack on or threat to this country.

After 1 April, the HPA will be responsible for such tasks. It will be at the heart of our security apparatus in defending this country and providing information to practitioners and the public on the risks that we might face. Therefore, as we consider the Bill and set in place new structures in Wales for public health information, it is fundamentally important that we understand the relationship between the HPA and the new bodies, especially the Wales centre for health.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): I support the argument that my hon. Friend is making. Will he accept from me the assurance that terrorist groups always try to think one jump ahead? Given that so much has been said in anticipation of a terrorist attack on London as the capital of the United Kingdom, terrorists thinking one jump ahead may be considering the capitals of Scotland and of the Principality precisely to take us by surprise. Is not that a particular reason for bodies in Scotland and in Wales having the extra representation for which he is arguing?

Chris Grayling: I thank my hon. Friend for those comments, because he is driving at the nub of the reason for our laying the amendments on the Table for, I hope, the Minister's acceptance. I certainly hope that he addresses the issue and responds with his own thoughts on the different ways in which those organisations will interact. Ultimately, in the eyes of the terrorists who are threatening us, we are one United Kingdom and one nation. Terrorists will not respect administrative or national boundaries within the UK, so we must work effectively together.

We have a concern: in creating those structures through the Bill and in creating the Wales centre for health, we want to ensure that the centre has proper links with the organisations that will provide the rest of the NHS in England with the information, training, support and guidance that it requires to do its job properly.

That is the purpose of the amendments that we have introduced. We want to formalise the relationship between the Wales centre for health and the new body to ensure that there is absolute co-ordination between all those people who are responsible for establishing and communicating information on those important issues. In our view, it is particularly important that those arrangements be dealt with because of the uncertainties surrounding the restructuring of the PHLS, the creation of the HPA and the changes in this area as to the organisations being transferred from the PHLS to the NHS.

1.45 pm

The debate takes place as those organisations are going through a huge process of change that is enormously disruptive to them. We must be mindful of the warning given by the PHLS internal risk assessment team on the implications of the changes:

> "It seems inevitable that if the timetable of 1st April 2003 for the HPA is to be delivered, some level of risk will have to be tolerated. Were there to be a severe external challenge over the next few months, such as deliberate release, the situation and expected forward timetable would need rapid reappraisal."

I hope that the Minister's colleagues in the Department of Health are taking on board that warning, which has implications for Wales and for those who are taking over responsibility for some areas that the PHLS covers in the Welsh NHS. Those responsible for the Wales centre for health also need to be mindful of it, given the responsibility that they will undoubtedly have for making information available to the public on health issues that we all could face in the months and years ahead.

That information, which will originate from the HPA and our central scientific teams, must be disseminated effectively and quickly right across the NHS in England and in Wales. Our first amendment is one suggestion as to how we could strengthen and formalise those ties, ensuring that they are clearly in place during the period of transition for all those organisations and that they solidify as they go forward.

The PHLS drives the dissemination of information on communicable diseases and chemical weapons, and the HPA will take that over. Do we not need to ensure that those organisations are interlocked? What better way to achieve that than to offer the HPA a non-executive role on the board of the Wales centre for health, so that there is a genuine voice for our scientists and technical experts in the arena where communication and training will be formulated and delivered?

That is the objective of our first amendment. I hope that the Minister gives it due consideration, but, if he feels unable to adopt such an approach, will he none the less consider the direction in which we are attempting to steer him? Will he also consider how to ensure strong linkage between the two, and ensure that the scientists have a strong voice in the work of the Wales centre for health in shaping communication and training?

Our second amendment is designed to formalise a duty of partnership, especially as organisations will be going through difficult changes. It is all too easy for them to miss out working together and to focus on internal issues rather than ensuring that they work in the partnerships that we all need for the future. Our proposal is designed to ensure that there would be a duty on them to do so. It would provide direction for them and act as a reminder from Parliament that the nation needs them to operate in tandem.

The issue does not simply involve security, although at this time security must be a paramount consideration. If there is a chemical or a biological risk, we must ensure

that information and training flows right the way through our health services, quickly and effectively, and on to the public as and when they need it. However, the PHLS has played an active and important role in other areas, which, in future, will be played by the HPA. Examples are disseminating information on the spread of methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus in our hospitals—hospital-related infections and how they can be tackled—and providing information on winter vomiting disease, which is at the forefront of consideration in the health world, as well as other diseases that may be isolated, such as Legionnaire's disease. They may, like a flu epidemic, spread much more widely.

The information that the HPA produces will be of paramount importance to medical practitioners and patients alike. We are asking the Minister to create a duty of care on the Wales centre for health that says, "You're not simply there to serve the people of Wales. You're also there to be part of a partnership within the United Kingdom to ensure that we provide proper and effective information across our borders, throughout our nation and to all our people." We are one United Kingdom. The Bill is creating institutions that will serve the people of Wales. They must do that not in isolation, but in partnership with their counterparts elsewhere in the UK and organisations with a remit for the whole UK. The amendments are designed to suggest simple structures and duties that would enable them to do that—indeed, would ensure that they did it. They are designed to convey a sense of direction to the organisations. I hope that the Minister will give due consideration to our ambitions, and that, if he is not willing to accept the amendments in their present form, he will ensure that the partnership we need—in the context of communicable diseases, but particularly in the context of security issues—between our scientists and our information providers is strong, effective and structured.

Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North): I know that amendment No. 2 is a probing amendment, and it raises important issues, but I think both amendments should be resisted, because I feel that requiring a place on the board to be given to the Wales centre for health is too prescriptive at this stage. I feel that the Assembly should have maximum flexibility to decide which organisations should have places.

Dr. Julian Lewis: I thank the hon. Lady for giving way, with typical courtesy. Surely she recognises, however, that a terrorist chemical or biological weapons threat would require a national lead from central Government? Does she not agree that if any subject under the sun requires such a lead, it is that subject?

Julie Morgan: The hon. Gentleman is making important points sincerely, but I do not think that the Welsh body we are creating should be compelled to liaise with another body. Moreover, as was pointed out by the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling), the arrangements in Wales differ from those in England. The Assembly will retain some responsibility for emergency planning.

Mr. Bercow: The hon. Lady does not think that the special health authority for England and Wales should have a representative on the board of the Wales centre for health. Does she think that the board of the Wales centre for health should have a specific and designated representative on the special health authority for England and Wales?

Julie Morgan: I do not think that that should be decided here. I think it should be decided by the Wales centre for health.

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): I welcome the tone of these Conservative amendments more than that of those tabled in Committee, because they show enthusiasm for working together rather than pulling apart. In my view and that of my party, devolution is not about separation and isolation but about maximising the contribution that each nation—such as Wales or Scotland—and each English region can make to the whole. But the arguments of the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) in Committee often depended on a worst-case scenario, and I feel that the case he has advanced today for an English appointee does the same.

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman knows, surely, that the health protection agency will cover England and Wales. There is no reason to assume that the HPA representative on the board must be English, as Welsh people will of course be involved in the organisation. This is much more about solidifying the links between the organisations than about trying to involve England in Wales.

Mr. Williams: I take the hon. Gentleman's point, but I do not think any of us thought, on first seeing the Bill, that the primary purpose of the Wales centre for health would be to deal with terrorist threats—although of course I accept that terrorism is now a key issue, which we should all address. I feel that using a worst-case scenario as a basis for legislation will so constrain the nature of that legislation that it will be unsympathetic to devolution, and the right of the Welsh people and the Welsh Assembly to look after their own affairs.

Although I welcome the tone of the amendments and accept the points made by the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell, I do not think the hon. Gentleman's aims will necessarily be achieved by changes in the legislation. They could, I think, be achieved by good practice and the building up of partnerships that would work in actuality rather than on the pages of a Bill.

Mr. Touhig: The hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) said that these were probing amendments. Amendment No. 2 would insert the words

"The Special Health Authority for England and Wales responsible for the functions of the Health Protection Agency shall have a place on the Board of the Wales Centre for Health".

The special health authority, of course, does not yet exist. We intend to set it up in April 2003, using secondary legislation under section 11 of the National Health Service Act 1977, as an interim step pending the establishment of the health protection agency. We intend it to be a non-departmental public body, although that will depend on the availability of legislative time.

[Mr. Touhig]

It would be inappropriate to give a body that does not exist, and will in any case cease to exist as soon as the HPA is established, a place on the board of the Wales centre for health, or to require the centre to co-ordinate its activities with those of such a body. Surely giving the centre a duty to co-ordinate its activities with the recommendations of the interim body, or those of the HPA when it is established, would be incompatible with a requirement to ensure its independence.

The outcome of the pre-legislative scrutiny supported our intention that the centre should act independently, as Conservative Members pointed out in Committee. It could not act independently if required to co-ordinate its activities with the recommendations of the HPA. There would be no equivalent requirement for the HPA to co-ordinate its activities with those of the centre. It would also be inconsistent to require the centre to co-ordinate its activities with those of a body outside Wales, in the absence of a similar duty for it to co-ordinate its activities with those of relevant public sector bodies in Wales. And why should the HPA have a right to representation on the board of the Wales centre when bodies in Wales will have no such right?

The Assembly intends members of the centre to be appointed on the basis of their expertise and experience, and to be drawn from the statutory, voluntary and academic sectors in Wales. Amendment No. 2 runs counter to that intention. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Julie Morgan) that it would introduce a prescriptive and inflexible approach to a detailed issue. We intend the Assembly to determine the matter, under schedule 2(10)(a). I can reassure Members, however, that the Wales centre for health will not duplicate the expertise that the HPA will provide in Wales.

Dr. Julian Lewis: I do not think that people are worried about the Welsh body duplicating the work of the national body. What worries them, I think, is the possibility that the Welsh body will not consider the role of the national body sufficiently. It is, surely, a crucial defence role, albeit a civil and domestic defence role. It makes no more sense for the Welsh Assembly to consider the work of a body with a national defence role of that sort than for it to consider other important aspects of defence policy and say, "These should be a matter for us". Surely the Minister can see that we are discussing an overall national danger, and that national defence measures are therefore required.

2 pm

Mr. Touhig: I hope that the remarks that I am about to make will reassure the hon. Gentleman so far as that point is concerned. We need to distinguish between the roles of the Wales centre for health and of the health protection agency. The HPA will bring together specialist expertise at a UK level against microbiologicial, chemical and radiological hazards, and terrorist threats. The WCH is in support of public health in Wales, so the two bodies have two distinct roles.

The time to discuss the relationship of the HPA with other bodies, including those in Wales, will come when the proposals for establishing it appear before this House. The functions of the HPA in Wales will be fully explained at that time, but if it helps hon. Members I can say now that we do not intend the functions of the HPA in Wales to include all those that it will have in England. As I said, it is intended that, once established, the HPA will provide services and expertise in areas of microbiological, radiological and chemical hazards. I hope that reassures the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell in respect of the point that he made in his opening remarks.

Chris Grayling: If there were evidence of a biological attack in this country and of the possible spread of a communicable disease, would the WCH have any role in providing the public with information about that disease?

Mr. Touhig: I do not think that we want the legislation to prevent the WCH from providing any information to any national body such as the HPA, if that were thought appropriate. I see no reason why the WCH should not do that if it has something to contribute, but we need to understand the two separate roles of the HPA and the WCH.

Dr. Julian Lewis: We are getting to the heart of the matter. The Minister is saying that the WCH would not be prohibited from contributing, but the amendment would ensure that the WCH could contribute, make useful statements and enable important measures to be taken in the event of a terrible attack of this sort. He is not really reassuring us that, without the representation for which the amendment argues, the new body in Wales will be able to take effective action in the event of a terrorist attack.

Mr. Touhig: Perhaps I should again make it clear that the bodies have two separate roles. The HPA will bring together specialist expertise at a UK level against microbiological, chemical and radiological hazards and terrorist threats. The WCH is in support of public health in Wales. I cannot see for the life of me how putting a representative on the board of the WCH would in any way guarantee that any information that WCH wanted to contribute would automatically be contributed. I have no doubt that, if the WCH wanted to make a contribution, it would be able to do so through proper collaboration—which will come—between the two bodies.

As I said, the functions of the HPA in Wales will be fully explained when we present that information to the House. When it is established, it is intended that the HPA will provide services and expertise across the range of hazards that I have described: microbiological, radiological, chemical and so on. This information is currently—

Mr. Bercow: There seems little doubt that my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) and I are inadvertently proving to be pestilential nuisances to the Minister, but I am bound to tell him that that is part of our parliamentary responsibility. In answering my hon. Friend a moment ago, the Minister said that the presence of a representative of the special health authority for England and Wales on the board of the WCH would not change the balance of powers, and

that is accepted. However, I put it to him in all fairness that the presence of such a representative might usefully serve the purpose of sensitising the WCH to the importance of its communications responsibilities in circumstances of the kind that my hon. Friend has helpfully outlined.

Mr. Touhig: Perhaps we will discuss communications when we debate the next group of amendments. In fact, the hon. Gentleman's party is trying to prevent such communications in tabling those amendments, so perhaps we should leave that issue until we have that debate.

The work that the HPA will carry out in the areas I have mentioned is currently undertaken by the board of the Public Health Laboratory Service, the National Radiological Protection Board and the national focus for chemical incidents. However, field services that the HPA will provide in England—health protection functions that are provided by consultants in communicable disease control—will be provided by the national public health service in Wales. Emergency planning in Wales will remain the responsibility of the National Assembly. So because the functions of the HPA will be different in Wales, it is essential that arrangements for co-ordination with bodies that provide these services in Wales are sufficiently flexible. The HPA will need arrangements with a range of public health bodies, and as I have already said, it cannot achieve this simply by having a place on the board of the WCH.

The HPA will need to have relationships with the national public health service and the Assembly in order to carry out its functions. Those relationships will be most appropriately set out in agreements, which will come when we introduce proposals for the HPA. Settling these relationships by agreement, rather than introducing inflexible duties in the manner of the amendment, will provide the flexibility to meet changing circumstances and to make organisational arrangements, which will be put in place when necessary.

The hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell said that these are probing amendments, and I hope that I have managed to deal with the points that he and his hon. Friends raised.

Chris Grayling *rose—*

Mr. Touhig: I am not at all concerned by the hon. Gentleman's rising; each time, I swat away such contributions like flies.

Chris Grayling: I have to say that that was not the Minister at his best—I know that he can do better. He has not addressed what is a pretty important issue at the moment, and it is clear that he was reading the brief prepared for him earlier. His response concerned the technical issues, rather than the actual ambition of protecting the people of Wales. He said that the HPA will be formed from 1 April, but I should remind him that that is two and a half months away. If the Government are incapable of synchronising a sensible measure in this Bill with one that will be in place by 1 April, they are even less competent than I thought.

The Minister talked about legislation that will eventually be put in place to set up the HPA, but the reality is that there is no guarantee whatsoever about when that will happen. A loose and vague promise for the eventual introduction of a formal measure has been made, subject to the legislative timetable.

The Minister also talked about the independence of the WCH, but I do not believe that it can act in isolation on this issue. If I am not mistaken, we are still one United Kingdom, facing the threat of terrorism and disease. Wales is not becoming an independent country through devolution; we are working together and we need to work together. This issue needs to be about partnership, and to be frank I found the Minister's reference to not wanting Welsh bodies to have a duty to work with English bodies rather reprehensible.

The key issue behind the amendment—

Mr. Touhig: I did not in any way suggest that those bodies should not work together; I said that if the WCH had any contribution to make to the HPA, it would obviously want to do so and should be allowed to do so.

Chris Grayling: The Minister specifically said that, if the amendment were accepted, the WCH would be accountable to an English body in a way that it would not to bodies in Wales, but I would argue that that is simply not true. The HPA is an England and Wales body with a duty to protect our people, and to deliver the scientific expertise that will enable our health service better to protect our people, and that will enable people better to prepare for unforeseen eventualities. In that situation, surely the role of the organisation with prime responsibility for training and communication in Wales would not be affected adversely in any way by a concept that would put a scientific expert on to its board. That is all that the first amendment in this group seeks to achieve.

The hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Julie Morgan) wants to leave these matters to the Welsh Assembly, but they are not solely Welsh matters. Terrorists will strike, and that will affect us all. We cannot act in isolation. Diseases such as MRSA or tuberculosis will affect the whole country; they will not stop at borders.

Julie Morgan: There is general agreement that the hon. Gentleman is dealing with matters about which we are all concerned. However, we object to the amendment because of its implementation proposals, not because of the important matters with which it deals

Chris Grayling: I am grateful for that remark. It is all the more disappointing, therefore, that the amendment has not sparked a debate and caused the Minister to suggest different approaches. Instead, we have merely been told that the ideas are not relevant. If the Minister will say how he will structure the relationship covered by the amendment, we will be happy to treat it as a probing amendment, as originally intended. However, our public laboratory system and health protection infrastructure are in a state of flux and the new organisation is being set up at a time of threat and risk. We need to understand now what the Government are planning, not when an incident occurs in the future.

Mr. Touhig: I am trying to make it clear that the HPA will be a national body. It will tackle the threats—from microbiological attack, chemical and radiological weapons and other hazards, such as terrorism and so on—about which the hon. Gentleman is so worried. The WCH will not have that function; its role will be to support public health in Wales. The two bodies will collaborate closely. When the HPA is established, it will set up a series of structures through which it will collaborate with the WCH. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the overall responsibility for meeting the threats that he has described will rest with the HPA—the UK body that will take responsibility for such matters.

Chris Grayling: The Minister said a moment ago that the WCH could—and probably should—play an active role in telling the people of Wales about risks, and in dealing with those risks. We believe that it should play an active role in helping to train medical practitioners and health service personnel to deal with threats arising from terrorist sources or from outbreaks of communicable disease. The WCH and the HPA should be closely linked. It is logical for the House to ensure that the two groups—scientists, and communicators and trainers—should work together.

Mr. Touhig: The Government intend that the two bodies will work closely together and be complementary. The hon. Gentleman has argued that we all belong to one country, the UK, and that we need a single approach to the threats that we face, from terrorists and elsewhere. Now he suggests that the WCH should have a role in training people to deal with those threats. That role more properly belongs to the HPA, as he will understand when it is established.

Chris Grayling: I refer the Minister to clause 3((1)(c), which states that one of the functions of the WCH will be to

"contribute to the provision and development of training".

The WCH will therefore be the leader in delivering public health information in Wales. It also will play an active role in providing the necessary support training in relation to that information. Surely it should therefore work hand in glove with the scientists who deliver information about communicable diseases and about security risks? I do not understand why the Minister resists establishing a duty for the WCH to work in partnership with the national HPA. That would be a signal from the House at a time when this country faces real risks.

We are not asking the WCH to do anything specific: we are saying that the national Parliament expects the WCH to work with the national organisation that provides the scientific expertise on which the WCH will base much of its information. That would be its duty. We accept that there will be difficulties as the WCH establishes itself, and as the HPA goes through significant changes, but why is it inappropriate for the House to expect the two bodies to work in partnership?

We want to ensure that the people of Wales are not disadvantaged by the creation of separate bodies outside the structures of the NHS. Wales is not becoming an independent country. In respect of both terrorism and diseases, its people must still receive the same quality of service and remain linked to the national expertise enjoyed by people in England.

I assure the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams) that we are as concerned about the threat from communicable diseases as we are about the threat from terrorists. The hon. Gentleman said that Conservative Members have been inclined to look at the worst case when considering this Bill. However, given that chemicals that can be used as weapons have been discovered in the hands of terrorists in this country, I will take no lectures about not focusing on the worst case. It would be irresponsible of the House not to look at and cater for the worst case. We must make minor improvements to the Bill to strengthen the links between our scientists and the people who have to communicate the scientists' work.

I have been monumentally unimpressed by the Minister's response to the amendment. I hoped that he would say that the amendments were not quite right, but that he would take them in the spirit in which they were tabled and come back with his own ideas to ensure that the WCH and HPA work together. His response was inadequate, and I therefore intend to press the amendment to a Division. We need to make the point that the matter is too important not to be taken seriously.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 78, Noes 305.

Division No. 44] **[2:17 pm**

AYES

Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, rh William
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, rh David
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Paice, James
Portillo, rh Michael
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Robathan, Andrew
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Simmonds, Mark
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David

Wilshire, David
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Laurence Robertson and Mr. Desmond Swayne

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, rh A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, hon. Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Heath, David
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Malleber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Martlew, Eric
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Southworth, Helen
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stunell, Andrew
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Timms, Stephen
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*

Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Watts, David
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Joan Ryan and
Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 3

FUNCTIONS OF THE CENTRE

Mr. Evans: I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 2, line 21, at end insert—

'provided that it shall not use media channels widely accessible in any area outside Wales for the communication of such information unless that information is communicated jointly with those public information bodies responsible for the communication of health information in that area;'.

Obviously, I am disappointed that we did not win the vote on amendment No. 2. I must wholly disagree with the comment of my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) that the Minister was not at his best during the wind-up to the debate: we have never seen the Minister at his best, so I do not understand how my hon. Friend could arrive at that judgment. However, we shall move on.

Amendment No. 1 is straightforward; it relates to the promotional activities with which the Wales centre for health will be involved. We are not dealing at this stage with its role in research or the development of training.

Clause 3 provides that:

"The Wales Centre for Health must...develop and maintain arrangements for making information about matters related to the protection and improvement of health in Wales available to the public in Wales."

Our amendment would add the words

"provided that it shall not use media channels widely accessible in any area outside Wales for the communication of such information unless that information is communicated jointly with those public information bodies responsible for the communication of health information in that area".

That is a common-sense amendment.

2.30 pm

In many ways, the amendment builds on the Minister's earlier suggestion that, in practice, the WCH will work with several other organisations, even though that is not specified in the Bill. The Minister will remember that, in Committee, we tried to include a provision that would force the centre to work with similar bodies elsewhere in some of its campaigns. The amendment would do that, in another guise, inasmuch as we recognise that once the WCH is properly and fully established, it may embark on television campaigns that impinge on people outside Wales.

As we know, a considerable number of people in Wales—north and south—turn their aerials away from Welsh television stations for all sorts of reasons. People living in north Wales who were born in England may be more interested in what Granada has to offer, or people in parts of south Wales may point their aerials in the direction of Westcountry television, which is owned by Carlton, rather than watching domestic Welsh services.

The Wales centre for health might embark on a campaign of precautions and warnings against smoking—something that we would all welcome. We know that obesity is a problem, so the centre might launch a campaign for better eating habits, perhaps coupled with the promotion of health exercise. Again, we would support that, especially if the campaign was targeted on people who were vulnerable to those problems.

I do not think that there would be a great problem if such advertisements were broadcast on HTV Wales and also seen by people in Bristol who can receive that channel. However, there might be other campaigns where we should want the centre to collaborate with other bodies and co-ordinate its work with them. That is only common sense.

In Swansea, for example, there is a problem in getting mums and dads to take up the MMR inoculation for their children. Several GPs are so worried about that lack of take-up that they fear that there will be an outbreak of disease. The centre could set up a campaign targeted on the Swansea area, or even nationally throughout Wales. There might be no problem in doing that, but it might run counter to messages coming from England.

One of the beauties or strengths of devolution—so we are told—is that there can be policy differentiation between Wales and England if that is what Wales wants. For example, England already has a diabetes strategy, but Wales is still waiting for one. I am bewildered by that decision and hope that the Government will get on with a proper diabetes strategy for the whole United Kingdom and that all organisations will work together to ensure that it is sensible.

However, the situation could be reversed: Wales might have a strategy on something while England did not. If there was an advertising campaign in Wales on the issue, some English residents might think that it was also English health policy. Such differentiation in policy might not be a strength—it could cause confusion.

Confusion can also arise when we hear references to the "Health Minister", because, as hon. Members know, the title "Secretary" in the National Assembly for Wales has been replaced by that of "Minister". When that job title is mentioned people do not know whether it means the UK Minister or the Welsh or Scottish one.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): Surely, the diabetes strategy is an example of devolution working well. It was not an English initiative but a Scottish one. England took it up and Wales will do so later on.

Mr. Evans: I do not dispute the fact that the strategy started in Scotland and that it followed in England. The question that I want to stress is why Wales is last. People in Wales who suffer from diabetes have been pushing hard for such a strategy; indeed, even in England we waited too long for its implementation.

There is huge confusion even about simple things, such as the roles of county councillors, MPs and MEPS. We do not know who does what. We are trying to bring back some sanity and coherence. That is what the amendment is about.

There is a problem with flu jabs, for example. Due to the recent cold snap, one hospital in Wales stopped all non-emergency operations until February to tackle the problem. Although we would endorse a campaign to encourage more people to take up flu jabs, we also know that in some areas doctors have run out of vaccine in the past. A campaign might be initiated in one part of the country but seen on television in another area where no vaccine was available. That would be a gross waste of time and extremely inefficient.

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): Does my hon. Friend agree that it would cause huge frustration if people saw on television that they are supposed to get themselves inoculated against flu but when they turned up at their local GP surgery they found that there was no vaccine? There are already far too many attacks on people who work in the health service. Such campaigns could increase frustration with NHS staff, even though they were incapable of carrying out inoculations due to the lack of vaccine. The amendment would prevent such dilemmas.

Mr. Evans: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that point. The frustration would be worse if people were told in a television campaign to go to their surgery, only to find when they did so that there was no vaccine. That has happened in the past, so we are not even talking about a worst-case scenario.

If we can get everyone to work together on such matters it would be not only efficient, but would also save money. As we have said in the past, the duplication of television campaigns can be hugely expensive. Of course, I can almost read the Minister's mind as he sits on the Treasury Bench. He thinks that everything will be wonderful and that everyone will work together in their best interests. We have heard it all before, but we want such things to be stated in the Bill to ensure good practice, for goodness' sake. Much of the Bill is common sense in many ways—for example, some of the requirements that the Wales centre for health will be asked to meet—but we still think that it should be stated in the Bill none the less. That is what we are trying to do with the amendment.

Mr. Wayne David (Caerphilly): The amendment says that the Wales centre for health

"shall not use media channels widely accessible in the any area outside Wales",

but how wide is wide? Are we talking about 2 or 202 square miles? The amendment must be precise; otherwise it is meaningless.

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman quotes only part of the amendment, which goes on to say that the proposal should apply unless the centre is in dialogue with its sister bodies in England. We are trying to make that dialogue the norm, so that such problems would not arise.

There are various ways in which the centre should try to get its message across. For example, it could use regional newspapers. There are several very good daily morning and evening newspapers and even weekly newspapers in Wales, and they get their message across. Using the *South Wales Evening Post* would be a perfect way to get the message on MMR across, especially in areas that face the problem, such as Swansea. There would be no problem in doing that, and I suspect that it would be far more cost-efficient.

The use of television is the main problem because it does not respect boundaries, as has been rightly said. Many people could receive pictures from elsewhere. Of course, with digital television, people living in England can receive Welsh television, and vice versa. Satellite television, the internet and e-mails could be used, and I am sure that there is even a role for texting on telephones. All those things have to be considered.

We feel very strong about this issue. Although we failed in Committee when we tried to get those bodies to work together to achieve coherence and joined-up thinking, the campaigning aspect for the Wales centre for health will be vital. I can imagine that Members of Parliament will get in touch with the centre, saying "This is a particular health problem in my area. Please will you look into it, and do some research and campaigning on it?" That would be a perfect and appropriate role for Members of Parliament, but, surely, given the limited amount of money that the Wales centre for health will have at its disposal, we want to ensure that it at least talks properly to similar organisations elsewhere.

We want to ensure that the campaigns are properly costed, work together and are rolled out where appropriate, so that we can save money and be far more efficient than if we leave things as they are and simply pray that the bodies will talk to one another and work together. Why do we leave that to chance? Let us include such things in the Bill and ensure coherence.

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): I would not want to disappoint the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), but I also believe in co-operation between health promotion bodies in Wales and those in England. After all, disease does not respect national boundaries, or any other boundary for that matter. However, I wish to point out some of the problems to which he has already alluded, as well as those that arise from the fact that the amendment uses the words,

"shall not use media channels widely available accessible...unless that information is communicated jointly".

Let us consider the media channels available. The hon. Gentleman has already referred to television. However, I contend that the amendment would constrain the Wales centre for health unreasonably because all the media channels that may be used would have to be agreed with bodies over the border. Any message that the centre wanted to broadcast in Wales would probably have to be communicated jointly with those bodies.

I shall list the media that might be used and comment very briefly on them. First, Sianel Pedwar Cymru—S4C, the Welsh television channel—is widely available as the hon. Gentleman has already said. I occasionally watch it when in London, and I understand that it is also available on the internet and can be watched all over the place. Radio Cymru and Radio Wales—the two national radio channels—are widely available in the west and north-west of England and in the midlands,

[Hywel Williams]

as is witnessed by the phone-ins that they broadcast. People in many places listen to programmes on Radio Wales, so anything broadcast on those two media would then have to be communicated jointly with bodies in England.

Of course the internet is available universally. It is available to people in Caernarfon in my constituency and to those in Caernarfon in New South Wales; to Bangor in the constituency of the hon. Member for Conwy and to Bangor, Maine. We are talking about only England and Wales, of course, but information that the Wales centre for health might produce would be widely accessible in many areas outside Wales, and any such decision would be a matter of practicality.

2.45 pm

Mr. Wiggin: Can the hon. Gentleman suggest any reason why people in England would not agree to co-operate with the Wales centre for health?

Hywel Williams: Certainly not; people would be very interested in co-operating, but the question is whether such things should be stated in the Bill and whether the centre should be constrained not to use media unless it agrees to communicate jointly. That question applies not only to broadcast media and the internet, but to newspapers because, as many hon. Members will know, the vast majority of people in Wales read morning and some evening newspapers that are produced in Fleet street in England, and 80 per cent. readership for the *Daily Post* and the *Western Mail* is fairly modest.

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman will also recognise that, for example, the *Daily Mirror* produces an edition for Wales called the *Welsh Mirror*, which predominantly carries Welsh articles on certain pages, where advertisements could be placed that would not infringe the provision.

Hywel Williams: Yes, indeed. I agree with the hon. Gentleman; that is a matter of fact. I am sure that hon. Members would be very pleased if the print media in Wales were developed so that we could have dedicated Welsh newspapers. However, that it not the case at present, so the amendment would constrain the Wales centre for health if it wanted to use, for example, *The Sun*, which has a wide circulation in Wales, or, at the other end of the scale, the *Shropshire Star*, which is now sold in Barmouth, Harlech and various other places on the west coast.

Those are the practical points that I want to make. I am entirely in favour of co-operation in health promotion; it is a vital function of the centre. I cannot see how the amendment would add anything to its operation. In fact, it would constrain it considerably.

Mr. Roger Williams: I am concerned about the amendment's practicality. During a short holiday in France, I had the great joy of watching S4C by some technical wizardry that enabled the owner of the property to watch club rugby while enjoying the finest wines available in the area. I do not know whether we would need the co-operation of various organisations in France to carry out the amendment's requirements.

The Wales centre for health will have lots of organisations with which it can carry out its information campaigns, including the *Brecon and Radnor Express*—an excellent newspaper that is widely read throughout my constituency. However, the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) took things a little far when he said that the amendment would produce a reduction in surgery rage and hospital rage. I am not sure about the cost effectiveness of all the work that would have to be done.

Mr. Wiggin: Is the hon. Gentleman seriously suggesting that he does not want to see a reduction in hospital rage and surgery rage?

Mr. Williams: I would obviously want to see a reduction in any rage in surgeries and hospitals, but I am suggesting that the amendment would have a minimal effect in achieving such a reduction.

A number of my constituents face another problem. They do not turn their receivers towards England. The problem is that they cannot receive Welsh television, so the Wales centre for health would have a problem in communicating to those in that sector of Wales, which runs up and down the English border, who are unable to have access to television—the strongest and most important media in the country.

In addition, I thought that the driving force of the amendment may have been to inform people in England of a special circumstance in Wales. For instance, were there an outbreak in Wales of a communicable disease such as mumps, rubella or chickenpox, it would be unwise for children from England who were not vaccinated to visit the area affected. That information might be required to be put out to people living in England. In those circumstances, it would be in the interests of everyone if the health authorities in England were informed of that. Once again, that is something that can be achieved in practice rather than in legislation, and I look forward to the Minister's comments.

Mr. Touhig: The hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) felt that I was not at my best in the last debate. He was not persuaded by my argument or my oratory. I am sure that he will forgive me, however, if I point out that 300 people were, and they followed me into the Lobby, while barely 70 followed him.

Mr. Wiggin: They were not watching.

Mr. Touhig: They were all listening or watching on the monitor.

I also note the point of the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams) about communications and how he was watching club rugby and drinking good French wine. I did exactly the same in the Dordogne last year. Long may those methods of communication, and French wine, continue.

The previous debate centred on the links between the health protection agency and the Wales centre for health. What is extraordinary about the amendment is that it will put a complete block on a key area of collaboration and communication between the health protection agency and the Wales centre for health.

The amendment would impose unjustified restrictions on the Wales centre for health's ability to make information available to the public in Wales. It will prevent the centre from publishing information in any way that might lead to it reaching people anywhere outside Wales, without first getting the specific agreement of those public health information bodies responsible for the communication of health information in that area, as the amendment states.

The amendment raises two issues: the role of the Wales centre for health in communicating with the public; and the need for the centre to collaborate with other bodies. On the first issue of the role of the Wales centre for health, there may be some misunderstanding. Let me clarify the matter. The role of the centre is to assess evidence and provide information and advice on public health issues to the public, to the Assembly and to other public sector organisations in Wales, including the new national public health service. It will also monitor trends and undertake surveillance, identify gaps in information and data and encourage action to fill those gaps, build partnerships with other bodies in the public, voluntary and academic sectors, and develop the skills and knowledge base that underpin public health practice.

What the centre will not do, however, is conduct health promotion programmes, as it appeared that the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) was suggesting when he spoke a moment or two ago. That will remain the responsibility of the Assembly together with the national public health service in Wales, which will take over the health promotion work done by the health authorities when they are abolished later this year. There are already several campaigns in Wales addressing such issues as smoking, HIV and sexually transmitted infections in accordance with the Assembly's national health promotion strategy, "Promoting health and well-being". There has been no need to impose restrictions on those campaigns in terms of the media used, nor do they cause cross-border problems. There can be no justification for imposing such severe restrictions on the freedom of the Wales centre for health to provide information to the public, if it wished to use such media.

The amendment refers to

"media channels widely accessible in any area outside Wales".

That would include publications such as newspapers and magazines, including medical and professional journals, radio and television channels and the Wales centre for health's website. Many of those can be readily received in areas outside Wales. The amendment would therefore prevent publication through numerous media popular within Wales simply because they are, or could be, accessible in England, as the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Hywel Williams) pointed out.

I made it clear at column 58 in the second sitting of the Committee that the centre will have its own website, which will provide an important means by which it provides information across the planet. The amendment would prevent the centre from being able to post valuable information on its website simply because it would be accessible to people outside Wales. It could only overcome that embargo if it could secure joint publication with public health providers in the rest of the world. It is hard to see what form of communication would be accessible to the centre. Even locally distributed leaflets could stray across national boundaries: a wind might blow them across the border into England, and the centre would be in trouble. That shows the quality of the amendments being tabled by the Conservative party.

At a time when communications have never been more fluid, nor information more accessible, the amendment would impose unacceptable and unreasonable restrictions on the Wales centre for health. It would restrict the free flow of information across Wales' borders—information that could benefit the rest of the United Kingdom.

On the second issue of collaboration with other bodies, on which part of the debate on the previous group of amendments focused, I can confirm that the centre, in its shadow form, is already taking steps to co-ordinate its work with other bodies. For instance, it is to seek partner status with the public health observatories in England, and it is in contact with the Public Health Institute of Scotland and the Institute of Public Health in Ireland. It will work closely with the Health Development Agency in its development of a public health evidence base.

Paragraph 20 of schedule 2 gives the centre the power to co-operate with other public authorities. The Assembly intends that it should do so with other bodies in Wales and in other parts of the United Kingdom and with other countries in the world. The centre will co-operate with other bodies in providing evidence and information. The amendment, however, would place severe restrictions on the means available for the centre to do so. It would also restrict the means by which public bodies outside Wales could learn of the information provided by the centre.

The amendment is too prescriptive and is unworkable. The Bill requires the centre to make information about matters related to the protection and improvement of health in Wales available to the public in Wales. It must be up to the centre to decide how it intends to make that information available within Wales. I can only suggest that the author of the amendment must have been somebody related to comrade Ceaucescu.

Mr. Evans: I did not realise that S4C was so widely viewed in France. I am sure that it will be delighted to learn that its viewing figures, at certain peak times, may be larger in France than they are in Wales. Perhaps the French are tuning in to look at the quality of club rugby in Wales so that they can improve their game.

The amendment is clearly designed to get everyone working together. The Minister tells us to accept with blind faith that organisations are doing what the amendment suggests and that they will do that in the future. However, when we try to make the position clear in the Bill, we are told that we are handcuffing organisations and that it would be dreadful to force them to do what we are told they are doing anyway. That argument does not wash with me.

I have heard more red herrings than are in Billingsgate about what might happen if the amendment

[Mr. Evans]

were accepted. The Minister talked about leaflets straying in the wind. Leafleting is possibly one of the most effective tools for communicating a message if the leaflets are targeted and delivered and are not thrown up on the borders in the hope that the wind is blowing in the right direction. That would be ridiculous.

The vast majority of local newspapers would not fall foul of the provisions in the amendment. They are most widely read in the area in which they are distributed. I am sure that people from England and other parts of the world subscribe to the newspaper circulated in the constituency of the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams). However, it is most widely read in its own patch, as is the case with most local newspapers.

I am not convinced by the Minister's argument. He was not at his best in the previous debate and he certainly has not been at his best in this one. He has not convinced me, so we shall press the amendment to a Division.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 78, Noes 326.

Division No. 45] **[3 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Lansley, Andrew
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
Maples, John
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Portillo, rh Michael
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Selous, Andrew
Simmonds, Mark
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Laurence Robertson and Mr. Desmond Swayne

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, rh A. J.
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Byers, rh Stephen
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, hon. Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Heath, David
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Holmes, Paul
Hopkins, Kelvin

Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Martlew, Eric
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Prosser, Gwyn
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stunell, Andrew
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Timms, Stephen
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Watts, David
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ivor Caplin and
Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe

Question accordingly negatived.

Order for Third Reading read.

3.13 pm

Mr. Touhig: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

The Bill has been considered in Standing Committee and on Report. It exemplifies the partnership that exists between the Labour Government and the Labour-led National Assembly for Wales and is a practical example of the benefits of devolution. Although Westminster and Cardiff have already achieved a great deal by working together, the Bill proves that that partnership has the potential to deliver much more for the people of Wales. The Bill helps to fill in the detail of the strategic framework established in the last Session by the NHS Reform and Health Care Professions Act 2002. It will deliver some of the key elements of the Assembly's 10-year plan to improve the health and well-being of the people of Wales. By bringing patients closer to the centre of the stage, the Bill will give them a stronger voice in the improvement, development and running of the health service in Wales. The newly reformed community health councils will be the main vehicle for giving patients a greater say.

The Bill retains and reforms CHCs in Wales and provides an independent NHS complaints and advocacy service, which will strengthen public and patient involvement in health service planning and delivery. It establishes the Wales centre for health to provide independent training, advice and research in health care, which will make an important contribution to arrangements for protecting and improving health. It also establishes Health Professions Wales to provide education and training of health care professionals. That will increase the equality, effectiveness and efficiency of the health care system.

The Bill is important not just for its content, but for the process by which it has come before us. It is the first all-Wales Bill to have been subject to the rigours of pre-legislative scrutiny. It is no exaggeration to say that it is regarded as the model for the way in which that should be carried out. As such, it comes to us not only improved in its contents by pre-legislative scrutiny, but as an

[Mr. Touhig]

ambassador for the process. It underlines how the House can change and reform its processes to improve legislation making. The Government are rightly proud of that innovation and gratified by the reaction to it. We consequently intend to make more use of that form of scrutiny. However, it is right to pay tribute to the four Opposition parties and their leaders in Wales and the House who welcomed and embraced the pre-legislative process. They helped to underpin its legitimacy. Rather than merely having a political party express its will, hopes and aspirations in Parliament, they expressed the will of the House in Parliament.

The Bill was first published in draft as the NHS (Wales) Bill in May last year. Some 87 organisations and individuals representing the profession and other bodies that would be affected by it were sent copies and explanatory notes on which they were invited to comment. Some 27 did so. To facilitate the widest possible public involvement, the draft Bill was also published on the Wales Office website. Some 15 people responded to that including, as I said on Second Reading, a Mr. Lei Leiu in China, who sent an e-mail offering to sell us an excellent forging hammer. It is clear that something was lost in translation. That aspect of scrutiny produced 25 recommendations for changes to the draft Bill.

The Welsh Affairs Committee considered the draft Bill in this House. I want to pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, South (Mr. Jones), who chairs that Committee, and Committee members for their work in scrutinising the Bill. The Committee also consulted stakeholders widely. Both the Assembly Health and Social Services Minister, Jane Hutt, and I gave evidence before the Committee, which produced a carefully considered report with 17 recommendations for change. The Welsh Grand Committee had a full day's debate on the report. The National Assembly for Wales also debated it in Cardiff in committee and in its plenary session. The Health and Social Services Minister and I also accepted an invitation to appear before an all-party group in the other place. The Assembly asked for a number of changes to the Bill to which we were able to accede in most cases.

Publication in draft has allowed for a lengthy, thorough and open consideration of the Bill and the policies that it contains. It says much for the effort put into the original draft, including discussion with stakeholders by the Assembly, that the draft Bill received warm and widespread welcome across Wales. Indeed, none of the pre-legislative scrutiny revealed any concerns with the principle of what was proposed. The pre-legislative scrutiny produced 45 recommendations for changes to the draft Bill. Some of those duplicated recommendations and some suggested extending the Bill to include, for example, a ban on smoking in public places, which, as I explained on Second Reading and in Committee would be outside the Bill's scope.

The Bill adopts the principles behind 16 of the recommended amendments. The revised Bill was considered by the Standing Committee and agreed without amendment. It remains unchanged. All amendments to the draft Bill could be categorised as minor or technical—even the change to the long and short title. It is worth reflecting on some of the more significant changes because they provide a context for the issues raised in Standing Committee. The Bill is essentially enabling by nature. It quite properly devolves responsibility for determining the detail of the function of the bodies established by the Bill—the reformed community health councils, the Wales centre for health and Health Professions Wales—to the Assembly. It would fly in the face of devolution to do otherwise.

Questions were raised during consultation about the extent to which this approach might be seen to constrain the freedom or independence of the bodies. The policy intention was that they should enjoy considerable autonomy. On reflection, we concluded that the Bill would be improved if we made that clearer, so we amended the draft Bill to give more powers to CHCs to require information, and to impose on them a clearer duty to report on their activities. We also restricted the Assembly's powers to direct the activities of the Wales centre for health and removed the Assembly's power to issue directions about the functions of Health Professions Wales.

When we came to Second Reading, several hon. Members dwelt on those issues. The hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) asserted that the Assembly's powers over CHCs were too wide. My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones) called for greater independence for CHCs, and the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) extended that to call for more independence for CHCs, the Wales centre for health and Health Professions Wales.

In the Standing Committee, we were privileged to work under the guidance of my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths). I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House want me to pay tribute to his wise and skilful chairmanship and to say that we will miss him when he stands down at the next election. We wish him well for the future. He made a major contribution to the Bill's passage through the Committee. Opposition Members tabled several amendments, and some, where the Bill's intentions may not have been clear enough, were of a probing nature. I hope that we satisfied all hon. Members on those matters. Other amendments continued the theme of the Second Reading debate and sought to strengthen the position of the CHCs, the Wales centre for health and Health Professions Wales.

The intention behind those amendments was summarised by the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell at the Committee's third sitting, when he said:

"Broadly speaking, the Committee is agreed that the Bill is a decent set of steps, sensible, based on consultation and welcomed by health care professionals in Wales."

In fairness to him, I point out that he went on to say:

"Its main weakness is that in several different ways it hands excessive power to the politicians of the Assembly".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 12 December 2002; c. 89.]

I wholeheartedly concur with his first point, but I disagree with him totally on the second. Giving power to the Assembly within a carefully constructed legislative framework, and making those powers subject to the Assembly's arrangements for democratic determination, so that there can be detailed, open and transparent consultation, can hardly be deemed excessive when considered in the context of the devolution settlement.

The independence that Opposition Members seek to enshrine in the Bill is already assured. We took careful note of the views expressed by stakeholders during pre-legislative scrutiny. We amended the draft Bill in 16 areas to address the concerns expressed and, as I was able to remind the Standing Committee, amendments were made to provide greater autonomy and to clarify the independence of CHCs, the Wales centre for health and Health Professions Wales.

I was also able to assure the Standing Committee that the Assembly's freedom to impinge on the autonomy of those bodies was itself constrained by its own consultation arrangements, which I further explained in a subsequent letter sent to all members of the Committee.

This is a short Bill—short in content and short on controversy—but it is important. It breaks new ground in pre-legislative scrutiny and it is important for the future of health care in Wales. It is a key part of the reform agenda of the Government and the Assembly. It had a thorough airing before introduction. It reflected the views of stakeholders when introduced, and its intentions have been further clarified in Standing Committee and in the House today. I therefore have no hesitation in commending the Bill to the House and asking hon. Members to give it a Third Reading.

3.24 pm

Mr. Evans: We have heard a lot about the strengths of devolution, and in all honesty I cannot say that the NHS in Wales is a prime example of it. However, I heard the Secretary of State for Wales on the Frost programme on Sunday trying to entice Sir David Frost with the news that, thanks to devolution, he can look forward soon to receiving a concessionary bus pass. There was a look of bemusement on Sir David's face at the prospect of catching the No. 13 bus from Swansea to Townhill. I am not sure what he thought the Secretary of State was saying.

The Minister has just spoken about the procedure that the Bill followed, which we certainly welcome. Pre-legislative scrutiny is important, particularly as, time and again, we find our opportunities for detailed consideration of Bills further constrained. Perhaps the Minister should have bought the forge hammer from Mr. Lei Leiu of China so that he could have knocked the Bill into better shape. However, we know that the Bill has a further journey to make. Judging by its consideration in Committee and in the House today, the Government should not be so obsessed with timetabling. There is a great deal of good will on this side of the House towards Bills that genuinely deserve support.

I echo the Minister's comments about the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths), who chaired the Standing Committee well. Of course, he takes a great interest in this area of the NHS in Wales, and has much experience of it. We wish him well for his retirement at the end of this Parliament.

We know that the Government intended the Bill to be much bigger, but parts of it were hived off to the NHS Reform and Health Care Professions Bill. Problems will arise from that Bill, not this one. I have huge reservations about that new bureaucratic system, with five health authorities being replaced by 22 local health boards and other bodies.

We know that the former Secretary of State for Education and Skills said yesterday in an interview that politicians should be more credible and admit when they have made mistakes. This is one area in which Welsh politicians and UK politicians could achieve more credibility with the public by admitting that they have made a big mistake with those reforms. A report out this week says that £8.5 million of savings must be made in the NHS in Wales if the reforms are to be cost-neutral, and that is without the £15 million of transitional cost in setting up the new bodies, so there will be problems with that bureaucracy.

Returning to the Bill before the House, we support the retention of CHCs in Wales. We supported their retention in England as well, and we would have welcomed that measure if Labour Members had voted for it. We tried in our amendments to give CHCs more independence. The issue is not whether we should trust the Welsh Assembly to retain power over CHCs but whether we should ensure that CHCs, which are the whistleblowers, watchdogs and champions of patients, will be given independence. They would not then need to worry that the Welsh Assembly could change their name, savage them or even abolish them, which the Bill gives the Assembly the power to do.

We know that CHCs will be hugely busy. Headlines randomly selected from newspapers make that clear. One says "Hutt again fails to meet targets" and another, from the *South Wales Evening Post*, says "Woman, 82, stranded in hospital". Another headline is, "Health wait deadline passes"—a reference to people who had to wait more than 18 months for orthopaedic surgery. I know that the Minister said that the Welsh Assembly had made advances in that key area, but I am afraid that in some parts of Wales the waits are still huge. Other headlines are, "Health board shake-up costs 'rise'"—a reference to the fact that an imperceptible improvement in the service will cost a lot—and, "Nursing vacancies plague Welsh NHS".

Those are important headlines. One can hardly open a newspaper in Wales without reading a story about the dire problems faced by the NHS. In Wales, more money is spent per head of population than in England—£822 in Wales compared with £740 in England, although waiting lists in England are lower than in Wales. Since 1997, the number of beds in Wales has been reduced, and both in-patient and out-patient waiting lists have gone up. Total activity has gone down, as has elective activity. I referred earlier to University hospital of Wales, which has stopped non-emergency operations until February because of winter problems. I have talked about orthopaedic surgery. In Gwent, 1,200 patients have waited more than three years to see a consultant for the first time, which is not acceptable or humane. Waiting lists are also rising in several other key areas.

At the same time, bed blocking is a problem in Wales, and we have not heard any solution to the issue. Local authority care homes are closing, which will add even further to the problems of the NHS in Wales. We know that the health service is scouring the world for nurses and that more patients are being sent abroad or to England for their operations, which is causing a huge problem for trusts' budgets in England. As I said, trusts are spending more in Wales than in England. It is terrible that the NHS in Wales faces all those dire

[Mr. Evans]

problems, and I feel sorry for the dedicated staff who are dogged by politicians, whether from Westminster or Wales. They are being prevented from getting on with the job that they sincerely want to do and which was their reason for going into the NHS in the first place.

I do not believe that the Government woke up one day and said, "Let's see how we can wreck the NHS," but that is exactly what has happened since they came to power in 1997. As for the Bill, we wish it well. We hope that when it goes to the other place, peers will look at some of our suggestions and table their own amendments. Indeed, I hope that the Government in a quieter moment will reflect on our suggestions and amend the Bill in the other place themselves. However, we wish the Bill well, and I do not wish to delay its progress any further.

3.31 pm

Mr. Roger Williams: We welcome the Bill as well. During an earlier discussion of the Bill, my hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) spoke about the stress he suffered as a result of the Conservatives' delay in announcing whether they would support the Bill. I am pleased to say that he has recovered and is now doing his bit in Committee.

I congratulate everyone who has contributed to the progress of the Bill, particularly the hon. Member for Clwyd, South (Mr. Jones) on his work with the Select Committee. The good relationship that has developed between the Assembly and Welsh Members will stand the legislative system in Wales in good stead, and will give us a huge advantage when we come to consider other Bills. We all recognise the problems that Wales faces, and the Bill represents a step forward in improving the NHS there. To a large extent, the poor state of the health of the Welsh nation is an historic problem. Any audit would point out that many people suffer health problems such as pneumoconiosis and silicosis as a result of their employment in the mining and slate industries. In the farming industry, people suffer from farmer's lung, an illness that attacks the lungs.

Those chronic illnesses are not cured easily, if at all, but we should ensure that people's quality of life is improved so that they can have a longer and more enjoyable life. People whose jobs involve heavy lifting can suffer from orthopaedic conditions. As I walk around farmers' markets in my area, I see many farmers hobbling away, waiting for their hip replacement, an operation that can provide many with comfort and relief.

Mr. Evans: Is the hon. Gentleman disturbed by the increasing number of people who have to use their life savings and, indeed, borrow money to go private because of the wait, often in great pain, that they have to endure before getting a hip replacement on the NHS?

Mr. Williams: I agree. Many of us have dealt in our surgeries with people waiting for hip replacements who are forced to use the private sector. To some extent, that is an historic problem that cannot be solved at the stroke of a pen; it will take time.

Ill health in Wales is due not only to employment, but to high unemployment. The closure of the steel industry and the coal mines has brought relative poverty to many areas. There is a close relationship between poverty and ill health. Through a cycle of ill health and deprivation, families that have suffered from ill health for many years go on to produce another generation whose lifestyle and quality of life make it more prone to long periods of ill health. Youth unemployment has decreased over recent years, but many people have difficulty in finding gainful employment, and drug abuse has dragged them into ill health and exclusion from the health service.

The Bill is, as the Minister said, an enabling Bill. I welcome that. It gives powers to the Assembly to organise the structure and workings of the three organisations in a way that is suitable for Wales. In Committee, I was critical of some of the Tory amendments—

Chris Grayling: Tell us about yours.

Mr. Williams: I shall in a moment. I was glad to see Tory amendments, as we would have had a very short Committee stage without them. I was critical of them because they showed a misunderstanding of the devolution principle and settlement. It is not in the interests of devolution for the primary legislation to contain such fixed requirements that they give the Assembly no discretion to use its powers to make the organisations responsive to the needs of the people of Wales. I was happier with the tone of today's Tory amendments, which reflected a sense of partnership and working together. I am sure that that can be achieved, not necessarily by being written into the Bill, but through the working partnerships that will grow up between people working in different areas of Britain who are concerned to improve the health of the nation.

We are pleased that community health councils are to be retained in Wales and their role enhanced and extended. If that is to be achieved, we must ensure that the their membership is of suitable calibre and sufficiently representative of the people who live in Wales. I have mentioned on several occasions the amount of training that CHC members will have to undertake to carry out their responsibilities. I am pleased that the Assembly will be able to arrange appointments to the CHCs.

Although local authority members have for a long time made a huge contribution to the work of the CHCs, too many of them on such a council will not enhance its work. Many local authority members give much time and effort to that work, while some see it as an extension of their local authority work. They put more emphasis on the local authority work, and less time and effort into their CHC work. I have spoken to local authority members about the provision. They are happy about it. If they want to obtain or retain membership of a CHC, they can put their name forward and go through the process. The Nolan principles for the system of appointment are well established in Wales and widely respected. Gone are the times when all three members for the Brecon Beacons national park went to the same church, which was the church that the Secretary of State attended.

Since the Standing Committee proceedings finished, I have received representations about the name of CHCs. We discussed whether they had a good brand name and

whether it should be retained on the basis that everybody knows where to go. However, certain members of CHCs believe that they could be renamed with a term that makes them more accessible and is more descriptive of their job and their advocacy work on patients' behalf.

The Wales centre for health will undoubtedly do much good work that will be valuable in addressing the endemic problems that affect the Welsh nation in relation to health. A huge amount of work certainly needs to be done on research and to roll out some specific results on Welsh conditions and medical problems.

I do not think that Health Professions Wales will act as a bar to prevent people from coming to Wales to work in nursing or any of the other health professions. It will be an enabling body that will encourage people to come to Wales to work. It will also produce an environment in which people can enter their chosen profession and look to it to give them a good quality of life and experiences. The body could also be influential in improving the qualifications to which health professionals can aspire and perhaps increasing their number. Qualifications might be introduced in relation to skills or duties that would be useful in a specifically Welsh context.

I am sure that everybody will want the Bill successfully to complete its passage.

3.41 pm

Mr. Wiggin: The Bill will, sensibly, retain CHCs for Wales. It is a disgrace that English CHCs have not been preserved in the same way. While I am happy to work in the House for what is best for the Welsh people, it is fair to point out that Labour Members have a responsibility to look after the whole of the UK and that the Bill will therefore stand in the statute book as a monument to new Labour's double standards.

What is good for the goose is good for the gander—and my entry in the Register of Members' Interests shows that I have some expertise on geese. We know that CHCs are a good thing, as does the National Assembly for Wales. What a shame that nobody told the Executive of this Government, as was shown when my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) asked the Prime Minister this question:

"Following the Government's humiliating defeat in another place last night, will the Prime Minister finally agree with the views of medical charities, the British Medical Association and the Opposition and withdraw his mad plans to abolish community health councils?"

The Prime Minister replied:

"No, we will not, because the replacement of community health councils by patient forums and patient councils is, we believe, and as the College of Health made clear earlier, a better way to make sure that patients' interests are represented. There has been a debate about community health councils for many years, but patient forums"—[*Official Report*, 25 April 2002; Vol. 376, c. 305.]—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. We are debating on Third Reading the contents of the Bill that is before the House. The hon. Gentleman cannot remain in order while making such comparisons with matters outside the Bill. He must speak about the contents of the Bill that is before the House.

Mr. Wiggin: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I ask you for some guidance? I was quoting those remarks because the retention of CHCs is the sole purpose of the first part of the Bill. That is why I was making such comparisons. Am I out of order in that respect?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I can allow the hon. Gentleman to allude to the fact that a different policy is being pursued in England, but that is outwith the scope of the Bill. On Third Reading, a much more restrictive approach is taken than on Second Reading, when hon. Members can speak about what they would like a Bill to deal with and make complaints in that regard. On Third Reading, it is not in order to talk about matters that lie outside the Bill.

Mr. Wiggin: I am grateful for your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I remain a little muddled about the matter. However, I shall cease quoting the Prime Minister, although it is fair that hon. Members have a good idea of the double standards.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I could clear up the muddle more drastically for the hon. Member.

Mr. Wiggin: I hope that you will not feel that that is necessary, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Let me deal with the aspects of the Bill that cover the National Assembly. Until your recent intervention, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I had not witnessed such pathological delight by Labour Members as that shown in their eagerness to hand over opportunities to the National Assembly to exercise powers such as those in the Bill. I am worried about the autonomy of Health Professions Wales and the Wales centre for health as well as Welsh CHCs when the National Assembly can exercise almost unlimited power over them.

I am also worried about the Bill's ambiguity on the co-ordination of the activities of the Wales centre for health and Health Professions Wales with those in rest of the United Kingdom. For example, there is the bureaucracy involving Welsh patients who seek medical treatment in England or vice versa. I support the Conservative view that a strong, independent body separate from the Welsh Assembly needs to be created to support CHCs. We were dismayed that none of the amendments that we tabled in Committee in favour of the independence of Welsh CHCs was accepted.

Let me give an example of imbalance. The Bill gives highly centralised powers to the National Assembly for Wales to abolish or alter the CHCs, to abolish or assume the functions of the Wales centre for health as well as to appoint its members and chairman, and to abolish Health Professions Wales. Although I am sure that it is possible for the Government to know and agree with the intentions of the current Welsh Assembly Administration, it is impossible to know the type of Administration that will exist in future.

I have always believed that, when making law, we should take the longer-term view and attempt to prevent as many unknown eventualities as possible, thus ensuring that the powers in the Bill will not have to be redistributed yet again. I am not against its concepts, but I am increasingly saddened by the short-term approach that it exemplifies.

[Mr. Wiggin]

Foundation hospitals constitute another missed opportunity. We have all expressed anxiety that there are no plans to create foundation hospitals in Wales. An article in the *Daily Post* on 12 December confirmed that there are no plans for such hospitals. The Secretary of State for Wales endorsed the views of the First Minister, Rhodri Morgan, that foundation hospitals are not an option for Wales. He effectively endorsed Mr. Morgan's criticisms of the Prime Minister's national health and social policies on the development of foundation hospitals.

Although I appreciate that some may describe Rhodri Morgan as a dinosaur with extreme socialist views who is stuck in a prehistoric shell and refuses to accept that we have moved on from the 1940s, the First Minister is more than entitled to his views. However, the Secretary of State deserves criticism for endorsing those seriously outdated views. Despite criticising the two-tier health service, the Government are trying to construct a similar division.

Mr. Touhig: The Secretary of State made it clear in his comments that we are a partnership. The Government here and the Government in the Assembly have the same objectives, which we shall follow by different routes. However, the objectives are the same, and the Secretary of State emphasised that.

Mr. Wiggin: I am grateful for the Minister's intervention.

I am also worried about the excessive bureaucracy that the Bill will add to the already horrific amount in the NHS in Wales. Health spending in Wales is significantly higher than in England, yet Wales has worse health outcomes. The Labour-Liberal Democrat Welsh Assembly Government have failed to meet their targets for waiting lists, which continue to increase. Welsh consultants rejected the Government's offer of a new contract because they were worried that the waiting list targets distorted clinical priorities.

The shortage of funding for Welsh patients who seek treatment in England has threatened the principle of treating patients according to clinical priority. Shortages of care home places and delayed discharge are also significant problems in Wales. There are also many GP vacancies. A truly Welsh health Bill would deal with those matters and strengthen the excellent work of the staff, doctors, nurses and managers who work in Wales. A Welsh health Bill of which we could all be proud would put patients first.

3.49 pm

Hywel Williams: I am sure that hon. Members will be gratified to learn that I intend to be brief. [HON. MEMBERS: "Sit down, then!"] I shall in a moment, if hon. Members contain themselves.

I welcome this, the first all-Wales Bill since devolution. It is the product of extensive preparation and discussion. The proposals that have been fashioned are extremely appropriate for Wales and do not preclude co-operation between the health service in Wales and that in England, Scotland or any other country. The Bill contains valuable proposals for the Wales centre for health, which will have a vital job in promoting public health. I also welcome the establishment of Health Professions Wales, and the strengthening of the CHCs, including, I hope, their all-Wales body.

I would like to look at the process by which we have reached this point. It has involved an extensive process of consultation, consideration and discussion involving the National Assembly for Wales and its committees, the public, the Welsh Affairs Committee, the Welsh Grand Committee, followed by the Bill's Second Reading, the Standing Committee, Report and Third Reading—nine steps, so far. The interpretation of this process will, no doubt, be varied and could form the subject of much discussion in Wales in political and academic circles. I look forward to that discussion, as I think that we need to develop our understanding of Welsh political processes through as wide a discussion as possible. Bearing in mind those nine steps, however, I conclude by commending to hon. Members—and, incidentally, to Lord Richard—the good business principle of cutting out the middle man.

3.51 pm

Mr. Touhig: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I should like to say that we have had another good debate on the Health (Wales) Bill this afternoon, and we have again explored in fine detail some of its provisions. The outcome has confirmed that the pre-legislative scrutiny that preceded the Bill's introduction was successful, and proceedings in the Standing Committee and here today have further assisted in providing a thorough understanding and appreciation of the Bill and the policies that it seeks to implement.

The hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) gave the Bill a welcome but then, as usual, dwelt on some of the problems that we have had with the health service in Wales. We recognise that there are problems, but I hope that he will also recognise that the legacy of his party's time in government was closed hospitals, fewer doctors and nurses, and fewer hospital beds. One wonders where the Conservatives' present proposal for a 20 per cent. cut in public expenditure would leave the health service in Wales, if ever they were in power and able to do anything so drastic and insane.

The hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams) welcomed the Bill. He referred to some of the problems that we face in Wales, in terms of the legacy of ill-health and inequality. He also touched on the worries about orthopaedics. I can tell him that, in Gwent, where there has been a problem with the delivery of orthopaedic services, the health expert Professor Brian Edwards will carry out a review of orthopaedics in the area of the Gwent NHS trust, and produce a report on ways in which waiting times can be reduced. We all look forward to that.

The hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) highlighted the different approaches in Wales and England, so far as giving patients a clear voice is concerned. That is devolution, and this Labour Government, working in partnership with the Labour-led Assembly, share the same objectives, although we may well follow different routes to achieve them. That is perfectly valid within the context of the devolution settlement in Britain. He also mentioned waiting lists.

As I said earlier, there have been significant improvements in reducing waiting lists in Wales. Money is being put in to tackle the problem, reforms are being put in place, and the taskforce headed by the Assembly's deputy Health Minister is now monitoring progress to see how quickly we can reduce waiting lists across a range of areas in Wales.

The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Hywel Williams) welcomed the Bill, but also spoke about the processes by which we brought it here. No doubt we shall continue to evaluate how successful they have been. I am sure that there will be Wales-only legislation further down the line and that we shall examine how we should consult, in a pre-legislative sense, before it comes before the House.

The Bill contains three key elements that have been extensively considered and welcomed. The first is the retention and reform of community health councils, which has been widely welcomed. The second is the welcome from stakeholders for the establishment of the Wales centre for health, which was conceived back in 1998 in the days of the old Welsh Office before devolution and taken on as a result of the commitment of the Cardiff Assembly. That means that we shall strengthen public health capability and capacity in Wales. The third is the creation of Health Professions Wales—a body to perform the functions of the former Welsh National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting and to support post-registration education and training of health care professionals.

Proceedings in Standing Committee improved Members' understanding and knowledge of the Bill, which have also been enhanced this afternoon. I am grateful for all contributions made by Members throughout the pre-legislative process and in Committee as well as on Report and Third Reading. We have done a good job of work between us and I am very pleased. I have every confidence in commending the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Thursday 16th January, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 16 (Proceedings under an Act or on European Union documents), the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion relating to Fisheries at Six o'clock, or three hours after their commencement, whichever is the later and the Orders of the House of 28th June 2001 and 29th October 2002 relating to deferred Divisions shall not apply.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

Lords Bills

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That—

(1) Standing Order No. 57 (Presentation and first reading) be amended, by leaving out paragraph (3);

(2) The following Standing Order (Bills brought from the Lords) be made:

'57A.—(1) If a Member informs the Clerks at the Table of his intention to take charge of a bill which has been brought from the Lords, the bill shall be deemed to have been read the first time on the day on which the Member so informs the Clerks, and to have been ordered to be read a second time on such day as he shall appoint, and shall be recorded in the Journal of the House as having been read the first time and ordered to be read a second time on the day so appointed, and shall be ordered to be printed.

(2) If a public bill is passed by the Lords and carried to the office of the Clerk of the House at a time when this House is not sitting, then, provided that a Member shall have notified the Clerks at the Table, in writing, of his intention to take charge of the bill—

(a) the Clerk of the House shall arrange for the printing and circulation of copies of the bill, and

(b) the bill shall be recorded in the Journal of the House as having been read the first time on the next sitting day and as having been ordered to be printed pursuant to this standing order and to be read a second time on such day as the Member shall have appointed.'; and

(3) Standing Order No. 78 (Lords amendments) be amended as follows:

Line 1, after 'bills', insert 'and Lords reasons';

Line 3, at end insert 'and the provisions of S.O. No. 57A (Bills brought from the Lords) shall apply to the appointment of consideration and the printing of Lords amendments and reasons as they apply to the appointment of second reading and the printing of bills brought from the House of Lords'; and

Line 5, after 'bills', insert 'or Lords reasons'.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

3.56 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I apologise for bringing back to the House a matter that I raised earlier on a point of order. In apologising to the Minister, I should perhaps explain that we were made fully aware of the potential defect in the motion only this afternoon.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell), our Chief Whip, has been seeking enlightenment from various parts of the House for the past 48 hours or so, and he has had considerable difficulty in finding the author of the motion. We understand that it has been at the bottom of a drawer for some time, but its original author has, at long last, been discovered today. He—I think the author is a he—has acknowledged that there is a potential lacuna, which my hon. Friend will refer to in more detail in a moment.

I have been a Member of the House long enough to be immediately suspicious whenever anybody from the Government Whips Office tells me that something is a mere technicality and that we need take no notice whatever of it. In such circumstances, we thought that we should look carefully at the issue. Initially, we thought that there was a potential relevance to the issue of ping-pong between the two Houses, but that does not seem to be the real problem. Nevertheless, there is a defect.

It seems to me that a point of principle is involved. If any Member, whether a Back Bencher or a Front Bencher, identifies a possible problem with any motion brought before the House, it is their responsibility to

[Mr. Paul Tyler]

raise it in the House before that motion goes through so that we can deal with it there and then, rather than wait for another occasion on which to try to correct it.

I hope that the Minister's response to this brief debate indicates that he is prepared to take the motion back for further consideration in the light of the issues that we have raised with the House this afternoon and the misgiving of the author in the Clerk's Department that it may not be as watertight as he originally intended. If he does so, there will be no need to divide the House. If not, we must deal with the point of principle. We shall listen carefully to his assurances to see whether a Division is necessary.

I must tell the Conservative spokesman, the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), who remains on the Front Bench, that the shadow deputy Leader of the House has indicated that he shares our misgivings, so no doubt he would join us in the Lobby if that became necessary. Following those few words, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove may catch your eye.

3.58 pm

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): The context for the debate is the change to the sitting hours of the House, as there will be more occasions on which a sitting of the House of Lords continues beyond a sitting of this House. It has therefore been thought fit to introduce a change to our Standing Orders such that when a Bill has completed its passage through the House of Lords and is returning to this House, it would not be necessary for this House to remain sitting to receive it at the close of business.

The motion, apart from continuing the existing procedure, albeit with a different numbering, would introduce a new procedure to, in effect, allow the House to be deemed to be sitting so that a Bill coming from the House of Lords could be carried straightforwardly and picked up by a Member of this House.

We have no problem with the principle or the theory of a change in our Standing Orders that we consider practical and sensible in the light of the change in our arrangements generally, but we see a difficulty in the proposed process. Normally, when a Bill has completed its progress in the House of Lords it is physically brought to this House and laid on the Table, at which point a Member can take it up. If this House is not sitting, however, there is no point at which a Member can take up a Bill.

Paragraph (2) of the proposed new Standing Order, in paragraph (2) of the motion, states:

"If a public bill is passed by the Lords and carried to the office of the Clerk of the House at a time when this House is not sitting, then, provided that a Member shall have notified the Clerks at the Table, in writing, of his intention to take charge of the bill",

and so forth. The key words are:

"provided that a Member shall have notified the Clerks at the Table, in writing, of his intention to take charge of the bill".

That seems perfectly sensible, until we ask when the Clerks can be notified of that intention. There is no start date, and no end date. In the case of our normal procedures, the start date is clear: it is the day on which the Bill has been laid on the Table when the House of Commons is in session.

Today I asked the motion's original author whether there would be anything to prevent me from submitting to the Clerk of the House some 36 letters covering each of the Bills that the Government are taking through the House of Lords and declaring my intention of taking them up when they reach this House. If I wrote the letters today or tomorrow, I would be the first person to submit such a request and, according to the motion, would therefore appear to have absolute priority. He quite properly told me that all Standing Orders are subject to interpretation by Mr. Speaker; he also told me that such matters must be interpreted with common sense.

I fully accept both those points. Clearly our business could not proceed solely on the basis of the literal interpretation of every Standing Order, and common sense must indeed be brought to bear. Let us suppose, however, that I did not write my 36 letters tonight. Later in the Session, also on a Thursday and perhaps at about this time of day, it might become clear that our business would end before 6 pm, and also that a Bill would emerge from the Lords later than 6 pm. Would it be in order for me to give a letter to the Clerk at this point, in anticipation of that Bill's arrival, or would I have to wait for the moment at which the Bill was passed in the Lords? Or is there some other start date?

I have told the draftsmen, and the Clerk of Legislation—with whom I had a discussion today—that we are faced with the possibility of a race without a starting line or a starting time.

It could be argued that we can leave all these matters to the rulings of Mr. Speaker, and the common sense and good judgment of the House. Although I have no objection to that in principle, I think it unfortunate that, in changing our Standing Orders positively and introducing a new procedure, we may also introduce a gap—a hole—in the evidence needed for an interpretation.

In the light of this debate, the Minister may want to agree to withdrawing the motion, and to taking a second look at the two lines in paragraph 2(2) stating

"that a Member shall have notified the Clerks at the Table, in writing".

We need a starting moment for such submissions.

This is not an entirely academic point. The House will undoubtedly be aware that there have been occasions when it has been a matter of contention as to who should pick up a Bill from the other place and who should proceed with it. Indeed, it has sometimes been a matter of competition as to who gets to the Table first to take the Bill up. Well, we understand the procedures of this place, and earlier this week there was an example of that kind of competitive approach to the Clerks at the Table which has yet to be fully resolved. I want to make it clear that that process is understood and is acceptable when the House is sitting, but when it is not, how does that competition find effect? How is priority given to one Member over another, where such competition exists?

In the light of advice that I received from the Clerk of Legislation, of discussions with the original drafter of this motion, and of points that have been made in the House, I hope that the Government will agree to withdrawing this motion, so that a second look can be taken and a simple and straightforward tweaking of the wording can be made, which would be for the good order and best conduct of this House.

4.6 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): I am very grateful to the hon. Members for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell) and for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) for raising this matter earlier in a point of order, because that gave me the chance to consult with my officials and the Clerks of the House. I think that the House agrees that this is a sensible motion in principle. It deals with the strange anomaly that, until now, the House has been unable to receive Lords messages when it is not sitting. That contrasts with the other place, which can do the reverse.

The hon. Member for Hazel Grove has identified a potential problem, which I shall briefly describe as the possibility of a hostile takeover of a private Member's Bill coming from the other place. Following conversations with my own officials and, through them, with the Clerks of this place, it has become clear that the author of the motion does not in fact consider it defective. It is true that he has identified a potential problem, but I hope that, in the light of what I am about to say, the hon. Gentleman will feel able to support the motion.

I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern, but there are a couple of caveats. First, the provision will apply only if a Lords message arrives when the House is not sitting—a point that is obvious to all of us. Secondly, it is already possible that two or more Members might vie to take up a Bill arriving from the Lords, so the theoretical problem already exists. The hon. Gentleman's prime concern appeared to be that the Standing Order applies no starting date for a notice in writing of a Member's taking up a Bill. The House authorities assure me that they would not accept notice way in advance in the manner that he suggested, nor would they accept any attempt to set down a Bill for Second Reading at a far off date—the other hypothetical example suggested by the hon. Gentleman.

I should say in all honesty that no Standing Order in this place is utterly safe from some kind of abuse, but I can assure the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members that, were problems to emerge in practice as a result of this motion, we would make changes. In the light of those assurances, I hope that he and other hon. Members will feel able to support the motion. I commend it to the House.

Mr. Stunell *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. If the Minister has sat down he cannot take an intervention, and the hon. Gentleman is not allowed to speak again.

Question put and agreed to.

COMMITTEES

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With the leave of the House, I shall put together motions Nos. 5 to 7.

Ordered,

That Mr. Mark Simmonds be discharged from the Environmental Audit Committee and Mr. Peter Ainsworth be added.

That Angela Watkinson be discharged from the European Scrutiny Committee and Mr. Richard Bacon be added.

That Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas be discharged from the Regulatory Reform Committee and Mr. John MacDougall be added.—*[Mr. Woolas.]*

PETITION

Food Supplements

4.9 pm

Mr. Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury): The petition from Consumers for Health Choice and its supporters declares:

Consumers in the United Kingdom have for many years maintained good health by choosing to take safe vitamin and mineral supplements and herbal remedies and fear that the European Food Supplements Directive and the proposed European Directive on Traditional Herbal Medicinal Herbal Products will severely restrict the number and range of such products on general retail sale in the future.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons requires that the Secretary of State for Health does all in his power to protect the rights of UK consumers by ensuring that such European legislation does not unnecessarily and unacceptably restrict the availability of natural herbal products.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Oil Industry

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Woolas.]*

4.10 pm

Mr. Eric Joyce (Falkirk, West): A great deal has been said and written in recent months about employment in the North sea and elsewhere off the UK coastline. As far as I am aware, virtually all of that debate has been about the fishing industry, which I understand accounts for about 5,000 jobs. It is certainly true that the fishing industry is going through a challenging time and I know that the Government and the Scottish Executive are working hard to ensure the best possible deal for workers in that sector, but it would be wrong to allow the imperative edge of recent debate in that field to obscure the fact that more than 30,000 people in this country are employed offshore in the oil and gas industries, and many more related jobs exist on the UK mainland, including around BP's Grangemouth refinery. That refinery is located in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty), but it employs more people from my constituency, in places such as Falkirk, Camelon, Denny, Banknock, Bonnybridge and Larbert, than from any other constituency.

We cannot take those jobs for granted, nor the immense contribution that the industries make to the UK Exchequer. A key role for the UK Government is to ensure that relationships with employers and trade unions are in good order, and that fiscal and other policies achieve the best returns for as long as possible to both the Exchequer and workers, while at the same time ensuring that the UK remains a profitable and attractive place for major oil and gas industries to invest in.

I want to take this opportunity to raise three important issues that relate to the near and medium future of the oil and gas industries. The first issue is that of the European working time directive, which was adopted by the European Council of Ministers on 23 November 1993. For entirely defendable reasons, this important directive has not yet been implemented in respect of UK offshore industries. However, following the endorsement of a horizontal amending directive by the European Parliament on 18 May 2000, the working time directive will apply to UK offshore workers from 1 August this year.

I know that the Government are engaged in discussions with employers and trades union representatives about exactly what form the application of the working time directive will take. Naturally, many of the issues are complex, especially in logistical terms, and all parties will no doubt accept an element of compromise.

I have been impressed by a number of arguments to do with matters such as travel to work time that were raised during a recent lobby of the House by members of trade unions such as Amicus-AEEU, the T&G, the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers and the GMB. I have been impressed, too, by the efforts over the past few years of the offshore industries liaison committee in respect of the working time directive. I should also say that both of my brothers have worked offshore for many years. They have given me considerable assistance in respect of my perspective on the matter. Of course, industrial employers have presented strong balancing arguments. I note that both sides have placed great emphasis on health and safety, which is very welcome.

In the time available today, however, I wish to single out the issue of paid leave. Crucially, I understand that the original exclusion of the working time directive for the offshore sector was granted on the basis of the entirely understandable difficulties that surrounded shift patterns. It was not accepted that the nature of offshore working had any implications per se for the right of workers to paid leave. Employers will understandably balk at any legislative measures that will raise their costs, so I expect them to fight a rearguard action in this respect. In a sense, that is their job. Kvaerner employs one of my brothers on a Talisman rig and, for the first time in 25 years offshore, he now receives paid leave. That, I believe, is a response by an employer to the increasing scarcity of skilled workers offshore, and it represents good employment practice.

The exploitation of our assets is not served best by unhelpful speculation about the long-term future of United Kingdom-based oil and gas industries. It sometimes serves to constrain entry to employment and makes it less attractive to jobseekers. That, in turn, drives up the average age and increases the scarcity of those workers in the field. I hope that all North sea employers will take the same line as those who have already recognised the right to paid leave in contractual if not legal terms.

In many ways it is preferable for changes to occur according to the natural equilibrium of the markets, but the working time directive has proven its worth elsewhere. It is now in order for it to be applied in this respect to the offshore sector. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will respond specifically to the issue of paid leave.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that there is an important health and safety element in respect of travel time to and from the rigs, and that workers offshore are concerned that that should be included in the current negotiations on the working time directive? Does he agree that travel time should be included in the total working time for those working offshore?

Mr. Joyce: The hon. Gentleman raises an interesting point. Travel time is a different concept in this context. Virtually everyone travels to work, but the travel-to-work arrangements for offshore workers are very specific and are governed by tight rules and regulations. I am sympathetic to that but, similarly, anyone who flies to and from work—the hon. Gentleman will have an understanding of that—has to comply with the rigid and strict implications that apply when travelling anywhere by air. To that extent, there are constraints on anyone who flies to work.

This is a difficult area in which to legislate, and the best thing may be for companies to recognise their obligations. However, it is important—I think that the hon. Gentleman is hinting at this—to recognise that workers can spend a great deal of time between the heliport and their place of work. There are tight constraints on their behaviour in the heliport and in the aircraft. I understand that this is the subject of continuing negotiations.

As the Minister knows, the international convention on civil liability for oil pollution damage, to which the UK is a signatory, was adopted in 1969. It has since been subject to a number of additional protocols and amendments, most recently in 2000. In essence, the present situation, following the 2000 amendments, is that while liability for any spill technically rests with the shipowner, in practice a strict limit is placed on that liability unless wilful negligence can be proved. That is difficult to prove, even in cases such as the Prestige recently.

The size of the limited liability relates to the size of the vessel, but it is presently set at between £2.6 million and £52 million, although the larger figure would apply mainly to oil companies, which tend to be the operators of such large vessels.

Independent operators insure themselves through an insurance arrangement that mutualises the risk among them. I understand that the typical cost of coverage for a £25 million liability is about £5 million. Where the amount covered by the insurer is insufficient, and that liability is insufficient, the international oil producing countries fund meets the balance of the costs up to a limit, at present, of £117 million.

That fund is, in turn, realised by signatory Governments through a levy on the oil industry. The calculation of the levy is complex and I do not intend to go into it, but it is proportionately broken up between the oil companies according to their activity in that sphere.

The figure will soon be raised to reflect the increasing costs of cleaning up spillage and the increased perception of risk in that area. After the Prestige spill, the EU is set to propose, in advance of the International Maritime Organisation conference in May, that the figure covered by the IOPCF should be raised to €1 billion, or about £660 million. Moreover, I understand that although the limited liability figure placed on operators may be increased, it will not reflect that new overall figure of €1 billion. There will thus be a substantial increase in the oil industry liability but no proportionate increase in the liability for the shippers.

The major oil and gas companies accept that a substantial increase to their liability via the IOPCF is on the cards, although the extent to which they agree as to the necessity for that increase or its size is a moot point. In some cases, as operators themselves, they have a foot in both camps. That is why it is important that their point of view is heard on whether the possible failure to raise shippers' limited liability to reflect the new €1 billion figure will have the effect of ensuring that best practice for safety, health and the environment is maintained.

Oil companies use independent shippers for most of their transport. It is important to note that each time an oil company hires such a shipper, the operator's credentials are checked carefully. However, while oil companies can share limited inspectorial information—an inspection is carried out in each case—that is limited to a broad letter of comfort. Anything exceeding that opens the risk of breaching anti-trust legislation in force elsewhere. As a result, some bad apples will, from time to time, sneak through. Although we must be careful not to make the risk to the shipping industry prohibitive, we should also be aware that not increasing the liability to the industry in line with the likely new IOPCF liability of €1 billion could send the wrong messages to the small minority of operators who may be tempted to "wing it".

I understand that, in February, the UK will take part in a summit of European Ministers with the aim of agreeing the new IOPCF figure at €1 billion. At that juncture, I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to raise the question of the limited liability figure placed on shipowners. Perhaps he can deal with that point in his response to the debate.

My third point relates to charges at St. Fergus, where gas is piped from the North sea through the Miller and Flags systems. The charges in fiscal terms and the future of wet gas in market and exploration terms are complex matters and I have neither the wish nor the expertise to reproduce that complexity in this debate. What I want to do is to flag up—if the pun is not lost on industry enthusiasts—the pivotal stage that we are approaching for jobs in places throughout the UK, such as Grangemouth, and the wider future of wet gas extraction from the North sea.

Wet gas reserves in UK waters will be exhausted relatively soon—within years. When that happens, the focus for extraction will be on the Norwegian sector. If present circumstances continue, and if the economics do not add up, there is a risk that the Norwegians will create their own infrastructure, thus bypassing St. Fergus and possibly dashing many related jobs in the UK wet-gas sector.

That alternative infrastructure—I draw on an excellent article by Alf Young in *The Herald* last Friday—could take the form of up to a £1 billion investment by the Norwegians to create a wet gas pipeline to a location that would compete aggressively with St. Fergus. It is reasonable to conclude that, if the pipeline investment were made and the pipeline were constructed, locations such as Bacton would almost certainly involve lower costs.

It is clear, of course, that the major players in the oil and gas industry have a crucial role to play, and I imagine that the relationship between those interests and the Government in this respect have been even more productive since the Chancellor abolished oil royalties in his excellent pre-Budget report. The energy White Paper will, no doubt, focus on wet gas, among many other issues, but I wonder whether the Minister can confirm whether that will be the case. Any comments on that would be most helpful.

I should like to conclude with what may to some seem like a statement of the obvious: we are all heavily dependent on the oil and gas industries, domestically, economically and even geopolitically. In the cut and thrust of public discourse, those facts are too often sidelined or regarded as unavoidable but undesirable necessities. Indeed, too often the wider public discourse about energy policy involves an unthinking excoriation of the oil and gas industry, and considerable adjustment is required.

Energy is a gripping part of public policy, and issues such as the growth of renewable sources and the future of the nuclear industry merit extensive treatment. Debate about the future of energy policy is not always helpful, however, when it is characterised by interventions that apparently seek to consider the oil

[Mr. Joyce]

and gas industry as lepers, and the wider geopolitical and economic basis on which our success as a modern society is based is sometimes viewed similarly.

Of course the reality is that, for at least another 30 or 40 years, our energy needs will be hugely reliant on our continued efficient exploration and exploitation of hydrocarbons the world over and, for as long as possible, in the United Kingdom. The Government enjoy strong relations with the oil and gas industry, with employers and trade unions. That acts very much in the interests of those whose jobs and future jobs depend on a buoyant offshore industry. In many ways, the interests of my constituents, people in Scotland and across the United Kingdom converge very closely much more often than people imagine with the interests of the oil and gas companies and wider oil and gas interests. I hope that the Minister can respond to the three points that I have made in the debate today.

4.27 pm

The Minister for Energy and Construction (Mr. Brian Wilson): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Joyce) on securing this debate and on raising some important issues, including some that are not often raised even when the House considers the oil and gas industry. I am also grateful to him for courteously giving me notice of the issues that he has covered in advance of the debate.

I want to say something general about the Government's strategy and objectives in relation to the United Kingdom continental shelf. We are committed to doing everything in our power to maximise the economic recovery of oil and gas in the United Kingdom, and we work towards that objective in very close partnership with the industry through Pilot. In particular, we are working to attract new entrants into the North sea, where a good range of companies are active and continue to break new technological ground. Our fallow fuels initiative and Promote UKCS project have been successful recently in attracting companies from the USA and Canada that are new to the United Kingdom to invest in projects in the North sea. We intend to hold a new, 21st offshore licensing round early this year to give all those companies and, of course, the established players in the United Kingdom sector, further opportunities to invest.

However, I agree with my hon. Friend that it is crucial to maintain the industry's status as an attractive place to work. The Government and the industry recognise that the work force in the oil and gas sector are ageing and that the industry must be attractive to younger people, and we have been addressing that at all levels. For instance, last month, I launched the "Opportunities" graduate attraction scheme to raise awareness of the sector and to introduce talented youngsters to the exciting career opportunities on offer. That takes the form of a road show, which is currently touring the UK and visiting universities, particularly in Scotland, where young people who have entered the oil and gas industry are communicating with their peers about the prospects on offer. The Government are therefore committed strongly to working with the industry, through Pilot, to maximise continuing activity on the UK continental shelf, and to ensure that this country has a healthy oil and gas industry for a long time to come.

I shall now turn to the specific issues raised by my hon. Friend about the working time directive. As he rightly says, it provides for weekly and night working-time limits, rest breaks and paid annual leave entitlements. As he mentioned, the offshore sector was excluded from the directive when it was adopted in 1993. Its provisions will be extended to cover the offshore sector and others that were previously excluded on 1 August this year through the horizontal amending directive.

We have already issued a consultation document to implement the horizontal amending directive through amendments to the working time regulations. That consultation began on 31 October, and is due to end on 31 January. As part of the consultation process, my officials are holding a series of meetings with employer and trade union representatives from the previously excluded sectors, including the offshore sector. My hon. Friend the Minister for Employment Relations, Industry and the Regions told me just before this debate that he has had meetings with both the employers and the trade unions in the offshore oil and gas sector. We are therefore acutely aware of the need to get this right and to ensure that the people who work in the industry benefit from the extension of the working time directive to offshore oil and gas.

As we are still within the consultation period, I am sure that my hon. Friend will recognise that I cannot comment on what might be in the final regulations. I can assure the House, however, that those workers covered by the amending regulations will receive all their entitlements, including annual leave. I should also like to pay tribute to the way in which employers and trades unions have engaged in discussion on this issue, and I assure him that his comments will be taken into account.

My hon. Friend then turned to the question of liability for offshore oil spillages and pollution from both shipping and the offshore industry. Two separate sets of arrangements exist. On pollution from shipping, for which the Department for Transport has policy responsibility, the 1992 protocol to the civil liability convention of 1969 determines the level of liability for oil pollution carried as cargo by oil tankers. The limit of liability is determined by the gross registered tonnage of the tanker. The minimum is equivalent to £2.6 million, with a maximum of £52 million. As my hon. Friend rightly said, when that limit proves insufficient, an international oil pollution compensation fund provides additional compensation up to an overall limit, which is currently equivalent to £117 million. That compensation fund receives its revenues through levies on major oil receivers in each of the contracting states to the convention and the fund.

I am pleased to let the House know that, following an initiative by the UK at the International Maritime Organisation in 2000, following the Erika oil spill off the French coast, the international oil pollution compensation fund regime limit will be increased with effect from 1 November this year to the equivalent of £176 million. That will also raise the shipowner's liability by 50 per cent. to a minimum of £3.9 million for a small tanker and a maximum of £78 million for a large tanker. We believe that that strikes a fair balance between the interests of potential claimants who suffer losses arising from oil pollution and the respective liabilities of shipowners, oil companies and other receivers.

My hon. Friend is absolutely right when he talks about the supplementary approach being taken through the European Commission. As a response to the Erika incident, the Commission made a proposal for an EU compensation fund to supplement the international regime. This envisaged a limit of €100 billion, and it is due to be adopted by the International Maritime Organisation in May this year. The fund will be open to all contracting states to the civil liability convention international oil compensation fund regime. The limit will be determined at the IMO's diplomatic conference in May but, following the recent Prestige oil spill in Spain, EU Ministers at the Transport Council recently agreed to seek a limit of up to €1 billion, which is approximately £660 million. The €1 billion compensation will be in addition to the £176 million that I mentioned earlier.

I assure my hon. Friend that the United Kingdom is playing a prominent role in the EU and internationally to promote implementation of the proposed supplementary fund, as well as other international conventions dealing with maritime liability that arise from polluting and hazardous cargoes and pollution from ships' bunker fuel oils.

To put the figures in perspective, it is worth reflecting that, at the time of the Braer and the Sea Empress oil spills in January 1993 and February 1996, the overall limit available from the regime that existed at the time was approximately £51 million. All eligible claims were eventually met under that regime. The limit was subsequently raised to the current limit—the equivalent to £117 million—in June 1996. It is clear that the sums that are being talked about now as a compensation fund in the event of oil spills are and will be substantially greater than they have been in the past.

As I have said, there are two sets of arrangements. The other is for offshore oil installations and that reflects the different situation for structures in a fixed location, often many miles from land. Under the terms of their licence, every operator of an installation on the UK continental shelf must be party to the offshore pollution liability scheme. As a member, companies must demonstrate adequate financial ability—insurance cover, for example—to meet claims for pollution damage and remedial measures.

Companies must agree to accept strict liability for claims up to $120 million per incident, although payments beyond that are not ruled out. A recent study, part funded by my Department, confirmed that, in the vast majority of scenarios, the potential costs of damage and remedial action for pollution from an offshore installation would be considerably less than $120 million. A further provision of the scheme is that, if an operator should fail to meet claims for pollution, the other members of the scheme are obliged to step in to cover the default.

I hope that I have satisfied my hon. Friend that an active approach is being taken by the Government and internationally to ensure that the money is in place to cover all eventualities when spills and incidents occur. Of course, the most effective way of dealing with them is prevention rather than paying compensation in circumstances that are always damaging to the environment.

My hon. Friend raised an important point about entry capacity charges at St. Fergus. He sees a reduction in those charges as critical in ensuring a future for St Fergus, so it is perhaps important to go over the history. The entry regime at St Fergus—that is, the arrangements governing the access by gas from offshore to Transco's national transmission system for gas—has been a live issue for a number of years. More than four years ago, in the autumn of 1998, entry capacity constraints arose as a result of a work overrun in de-bottlenecking entry capacity at St Fergus at the same time as a new oil-cum-gas field, the Britannia, was coming on stream. In the circumstances of the time, Transco addressed the problem of excess demand by "scaling back". That was a short-term administrative solution that could not last into the longer term.

Ofgas was already working on what became known as the new gas trading arrangements to introduce a computer-based on-the-day commodity market in gas together with entry capacity auctions. Those reforms were introduced a year later, in October 1999. The new entry capacity auctions went some way towards replacing the old administrative arrangements for allocating entry capacity with a market-related solution, but they were only designed to allocate existing capacity. Given the excess demand for entry capacity at St. Fergus, the options led to high prices at St. Fergus.

The next step was to develop an investment regime to incentivise the construction of additional entry capacity when that is an appropriate response to market conditions. That has been a focus of Ofgem's work over the past few years. An innovative investment incentive regime is part of Transco's price control covering the period 2002–07. In parallel with the new investment regime, Transco is in the process of introducing long-term entry capacity auctions. Until now, Transco's auctions for entry capacity into the national transmission system have looked no further than six months ahead, but from next week—Wednesday 15 January to be precise—Transco will, for the first time, hold long-term entry capacity auctions. Those will cover not six months, but 15 years, which is the whole period until 2017.

The auction arrangements are complex. There are, however, three key points to which I should like to draw my hon. Friend's attention. First, for the first time the auctions cover possible new, as well as existing, entry capacity. Secondly, the auctions have an important link with Transco's new investment incentive regime, because the prices bid in the auctions, and the prices paid in the secondary markets following the auctions, will be taken into account by Transco when deciding whether to invest in new physical infrastructure. Thirdly, the auctions should help to put downward pressure on future entry capacity prices at St. Fergus and elsewhere because new entry capacity will have reserve prices set by Transco on what is essentially a cost-related basis.

I am sure my hon. Friend will understand that I am not in a position to forecast prices for entry capacity at St. Fergus or, indeed, anywhere else. What I can say is that for the first time, Ofgem and Transco have put in place arrangements that are designed to make a link between the market demand for entry capacity, the price of that capacity and the cost of increasing entry capacity. That should help the market to work more

[Mr. Brian Wilson]

effectively so that it can signal where it needs additional entry capacity and for what it is willing to pay. It should also help it to respond to the opportunities to flow more gas where weak demand may be leading to low entry capacity prices.

Mr. Weir: I am interested in what the Minister says. Does he believe that the new arrangements will bring the cost of landing at St. Fergus nearer to that at other terminals? The worry is that landing at St. Fergus is much more costly than, say, at Bacton.

Mr. Wilson: The arrangements will certainly help to achieve that end. Whether they are part of the solution or the solution itself remains to be seen. They do represent a significant advance and innovation, however, and we need to see how they work out. I am aware of the importance of the issues to the future of not only St. Fergus, but the oil that flows from it. Discussions between my Department and its Norwegian counterpart are under way about the possibilities for a new framework treaty to facilitate continued supplies of hydrocarbons both as a primary fuel and as a source of feedstock for the UK chemical industry. I know that the issues are also important for Grangemouth, Mossmorran and other downstream activities within the chemicals industry. In the context of the treaty, it will be important to get the infrastructure right to facilitate the flow of hydrocarbons across the median line. Discussions have already taken place in Pilot on how, in doing that, we balance the need to maximize the use of existing infrastructure and the need to leave open the option for new pipelines to enhance capacity. That is a difficult equation and an important one to get right.

There are under consideration a number of potential projects to bring additional supplies of gas to the UK. There are different views on the necessity and desirability of those projects, but I welcome that interest in the UK market. It will be important for the UK to have as many import options as possible as we move towards becoming a net annual importer of gas later in the decade. It is for the market to determine which of the various projects under consideration will ultimately go ahead. The Government's role is to set the right political and regulatory framework to ensure that commercially driven projects are not impeded.

My hon. Friend has raised three diverse and significant issues, and I have had a little more time to respond to them than I would normally have had. The third issue in particular has immense implications for the future of not only the oil and gas industries, but the chemical industries in Scotland and the UK as a whole. I should be pleased to respond to any point that I have not covered in correspondence with my hon. Friend and other hon. Members.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fifteen minutes to Five o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 13 January 2003

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

WORK AND PENSIONS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Child Benefit

1. **Andrew Mackinlay** (Thurrock): If he will make a statement on planned improvements to child benefit and its delivery. [89700]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Andrew Smith): This Government have shown their commitment to universal child benefit as the foundation of their support for children, with record increases and child benefit for the first child up by £4.70 a week—a 25 per cent. real-terms increase. From April, the Child Benefit Agency will transfer to the Inland Revenue, so families will receive Government financial support for their children from a single Department.

Andrew Mackinlay: Bearing in mind that hundreds and thousands of mothers who are currently recipients of child benefit will also be beneficiaries of the new child tax credit, is it not possible that all the money could be paid in one lump sum through the payroll taxation system? Will not many people who currently receive child benefit be confused by the similar names of the benefits and not understand what they will soon be entitled to receive through the child tax credit?

Mr. Smith: I take my hon. Friend's point, but I would have thought that most parents, and mothers in particular, would like to know what they are getting in child benefit as well as what they are getting in child tax credit. The key issue is how much better off they will be as a consequence both of the increase in child benefits and the introduction of the new child tax credit.

Sir Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I acknowledge that the Government have done much to increase the volumes of money that are paid through child benefit, which is welcome. The Secretary of State mentioned that a major transformation is coming in April, when the child benefit centre goes to the Inland Revenue. Is he not concerned that the decision-making report that he made to the House last July indicated that some 57 per cent. of child benefit calculations for decisions against which appeals could be made were accurate? That means that 43 per cent. were inaccurate. Surely, that needs to be sorted out before the transfer is effected in April.

Mr. Smith: I share the hon. Gentleman's concerns about that issue and note his comments. Work is being undertaken by the Child Benefit Agency specifically to improve its performance. I am pleased to say that its performance has been improving in many respects and I am confident that it is well placed to make the transfer to the Inland Revenue satisfactorily.

Means-tested Benefits

2. **Mr. Peter Viggers** (Gosport): What proportion of pensioners are eligible for means-tested benefits. [89701]

The Minister for Pensions (Mr. Ian McCartney): Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker.

About one third of pensioner benefit units have been in receipt of income-related benefits over the past five years. We want all pensioners to have a decent and secure income in retirement. Our first priority was to help the poorest, which is why we introduced the minimum income guarantee. As a result, no pensioner has to live on less than £98.15 a week or £149.80 for a couple. From April this year, the level will be £102.10 for a single person or £155.80 a week for a couple.

Mr. Viggers: The Chancellor of the Exchequer once memorably told the Labour party conference that he wanted to end the scourge, as he called it, of means-testing pensioners. Of course, this Government have done exactly the opposite, and by April about 60 per cent. of pensioners will be means-tested. Has the situation developed to such an extent, undermining people's independence, as a result of a sequence of incompetences and serious blunders, or, as I suspect, because of a cynical and deliberate intention by this socialist Government to undermine people's independence and increase their dependency?

Mr. McCartney: Christmas has come early; that is a second present for me. The hon. Gentleman accused me of being a socialist. I plead guilty.

It is bit rich to hear Opposition Members talking about means-testing. This Government are not means-testing; we are targeting poverty, not pensioners—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] Hon. Gentlemen should listen for just a second. We are ending the weekly means test. Those aged 65-plus will need to report major life events. Instead of a weekly means test, financial circumstances over a period of five years will need to be reported. We are abolishing the upper capital limits of £12,000 and £16,000 for people in residential care and waits for hospital operations are down from 13 to six weeks. On calculations relating to personal injury awards, notional earnings for unpaid work, charitable donations, credit or insurance and disability allowances, this Government are getting rid of the means-testing created by the previous Tory Government.

Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): The Secretary of State is on record as describing the pension system as

an incomprehensible maze. Does my right hon. Friend accept that part of the incomprehensibility is due to the increase in means-testing in the system for helping pensioners, and that the Green Paper deals with the complexity of only the private pension scheme? As one socialist to another, I ask him whether the Government will examine more closely the relationship between private pensions and the basic and secondary systems that the state provides to simplify that incomprehensible maze.

Mr. McCartney: I thank my hon. Friend for her question. In the Green Paper and through modernising the public pension system, the Government are simplifying the system. The amount of money that we spend on pensioners' income, not bureaucracy, is growing. The pension credit alone means an additional £2 billion a year to tackle pensioner poverty. I make no apology for doing that.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): In order to evaluate the Government's strategy of mass means-testing for pensioners, we need information on the number of pensioners who are entitled to means-tested benefits but do not claim them. The last figures show that hundreds of thousands of the poorest pensioners were missing out, but they relate to the previous century. When will we get figures for this century? Is the delay due to incompetence or a more sinister reason?

Mr. McCartney: In this House, the hon. Gentleman has from time to time tried to put pensioners off claiming their entitlements, whether the minimum income guarantee, winter fuel payments or the pension credit. Instead of dancing on a pinhead about uptake, he should say whether Liberal Democrats support the introduction of the pension credit, which means an extra £2 billion a year for pensioners. He can either support that or continue his campaign of denigration and put pensioners off claiming their rights.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): There can be no doubt that pensioners are better off under the Labour Government than under the Conservative Government. Indeed, the Conservative Government broke the link between pensions and earnings. However, does my right hon. Friend agree that the next logical step forward to overcome the problems of means-testing and take-up is converting the minimum income guarantee into the state pension? That would automatically link pensions with earnings again and overcome the problems of means-testing.

Mr. McCartney: My hon. Friend's proposal would mean an additional £10 a week for all pensioners, but a reduction of £17 a week for the poorest pensioners. We want real distribution of resources, which means tackling poverty. If we want to do that, we must put our resources where they are required for pensioners who do not get a decent income.

Mr. James Arbuthnot (North-East Hampshire): Does the Minister accept that if he does not do what the hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) suggested, the minimum income guarantee and pension credit will act as a serious disincentive to save for those who are on average and lower incomes? Will not that ultimately mean more rather than less means-testing under the Government?

Mr. McCartney: This is the first time in history that a Government are rewarding savings through the pension credit. The Conservative party opposes the minimum income guarantee and winter fuel payments and wants to privatise the basic state pension. That lies behind the right hon. Gentleman's question. It is time that Conservative Members told the British public what they are up to with pensions. While the right hon. Gentleman tries to hide that, we shall get on with eradicating pensioner poverty.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Does my right hon. Friend remember that however cold the winter months became before 1997, pensioners did not receive a penny, and that since we have been in office, the £200 per pensioner household has been a good socialist move? Why did not the Tories do that? Why were they so mean that they deprived pensioners? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Minister does not need to answer that.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): When the Chancellor spoke of getting rid of means-testing, did he mean, as the Minister suggested, simply renaming it as "targeting"? Is not it time that the Government accepted that they have increased the number of people who do not claim the benefits to which they are entitled? Millions of people live on 30 per cent. less than what the Government consider appropriate. It is estimated that 1 million people will not claim the pension credit, even by 2006, according to the Government's figures. All those involved with pensions are devising proposals to restructure the basic pension system so that people receive a larger state pension, yet the Government complacently sit on their hands. They simply twiddle and produce a Green Paper that recycles old information, which we have heard time and again. Is not it time that the Government did something to help poor pensioners?

Mr. McCartney: The hon. Gentleman should calm down. I can answer the point about 1 million people not claiming the pension credit—that policy has not yet been implemented. The hon. Gentleman should ask a sensible question. The one organisation that brutalised pensioners is the Conservative party. The Government inherited a legacy of pensioner poverty and are eradicating it.

Economically Inactive

4. **Mr. Wayne David** (Caerphilly): What measures he has taken to encourage into work those in the most deprived communities who are counted as economically inactive. [89703]

The Minister for Work (Mr. Nicholas Brown) Our active labour market policies are helping people to move from welfare to work in all parts of the country, and tax credits are making sure that that work pays. The new deals have already helped three quarters of a million

people into jobs, and jobcentres are notified of more than 10,000 new vacancies every working day. Moreover, in the most employment-deprived areas of the country we have introduced specific initiatives such as action teams for jobs. The action team working in my hon. Friend's constituency has so far helped 275 people into jobs.

Mr. David: I know the Minister will agree that this is a huge issue. In some parts of the south Wales valleys, as many as one in four of the working-age population are categorised as economically inactive. Does my right hon. Friend also agree that it is necessary to improve the health and well-being of many in our poorest communities, and that healthy living programmes must be a vital part of our ongoing strategy?

Mr. Brown: I do agree; I represent a constituency with similar problems. We must consider people on "inactive" benefits who might be able to do some work if the opportunities and the encouragement were there, and work with the national health service to establish rehabilitation programmes. That, indeed, is the thrust of the Green Paper on which we are now consulting.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): The Minister will know that there are now 4 million income support claimants, more than there were when the Government came to power. He will also know that the number of incapacity benefit claimants is back to the 1997 level. Of the lone parents who were promised—if that is the right word—mandatory interviews enabling them to seek employment, only 14 per cent. have been given such interviews. What has gone wrong?

Mr. Brown: The problem arose, of course, under the Conservative Government, when the number of people receiving incapacity benefit and its predecessor trebled. It was, indeed, the unstated policy of the Conservative party to move people from unemployment benefit on to the inactive benefits, because unemployment was at its peak: some 3 million people a year were becoming unemployed.

We must see what we can do to return to work people receiving inactive benefits who would like to work and who could do something. That means working with the NHS and others to find pathways back into work. We are consulting on precisely those matters by way of the Green Paper.

Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton): My right hon. Friend will know from his several visits to Plymouth of the spectacularly successful work done by the employment action zone and the Employment Service in tackling unemployment there. How will the partnerships be helped through the operation of employment action zones after October this year to help the "hardest to help" back to work?

Mr. Brown: Those matters are under review. The Government's core policy is, of course, the roll-out of Jobcentre Plus. I have just written to Members describing the programme, and there is a copy of that letter in the Library. The future of the employment zone model is under consideration, but the Government will want to continue the partnership work that underpins it.

Incapacity Benefit

5. **Mr. James Gray** (North Wiltshire): What targets his Department has for getting people who claim incapacity benefit into work. [89704]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Andrew Smith): None in that form. Our target is to increase the employment rate of disabled people, and to reduce the gap between their rate of employment and the overall employment rate. The proposals in our Green Paper "Pathways to Work" aim to help more people in receipt of incapacity benefit move into jobs.

Mr. Gray: The Government may have no targets now, but when they launched the new deal for disabled people their target was to return 90,000 disabled people to jobs within three years. However, *Disability Now* magazine—which I am sure the Minister respects as much as I do—tells me that the current figure is not 90,000 but 1,400. Why is that?

Mr. Smith: If I recall correctly, 8,000 people have moved into jobs through the new deal for disabled people. We need to do more in terms of our overall policy, but we are making good progress on the employment rates of disabled people.

The employment rate for disabled people rose by 4.5 per cent. between 1998 and 2002, and the difference between the disabled and the overall employment rate has fallen by 3 per cent., so the gap is being narrowed. Of course we want to do more—for example, by acting against discrimination against disabled people through building on the experience of the new deal and through the new pilots that we are launching later this year.

Jonathan Shaw (Chatham and Aylesford): I recently visited the social security office that provides services for my constituency. The staff there embraced and welcomed the new Jobcentre Plus approach. They are on the third phase, but there was a concern that those on the final stages of the roll-out of the new programme will not necessarily get the benefits that those involved in the pilot programme will receive. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that those at the end of the programme will be as well furbished and established in our constituencies as those who are at the beginning?

Mr. Smith: Yes, indeed. The whole object, as we develop new programmes and pilot new initiatives, is to learn from experience so that we can ensure that the service improves—for example, through the programme support and personal advisory support that is available, and which, reports tell me, is greatly appreciated by clients of our services.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): I am sure that the Secretary of State and, in this respect at least, the whole House may wish to agree with the Prime Minister, who said in a speech last year that it was "a scandal" that 2.7 million people on incapacity or other disability benefits are

"written off, left to drift into long-term incapacity and unemployment".

After the Conservatives introduced changes in 1995, the incapacity benefit count fell inexorably for five years. Is it not, therefore, genuinely disturbing that, under Labour, it has now bounced back to above the level at which it started, and that the trend, despite the Prime Minister's remarks, is resolutely upwards? When can we have slightly less consultation from the Secretary of State—be it pathways to work, or whatever—and slightly more effective action to tackle this scandal?

Mr. Smith: We have already had action, which is why the annual inflow on to incapacity benefit fell by one quarter between 1997 and last year, from 840,000 a year to 640,000. That compares with an inflow rate of 940,000 a year when the Conservatives were in government. Of course we want and need to do more to help people on incapacity benefit who want to work, and are able to work, to get into jobs. Some 150,000 a year move into work at the moment, and I would have hoped that there would be support from the Conservative Front Bench and, indeed, from all hon. Members, for helping still more disabled people to fulfil their potential through work.

Antisocial Behaviour

6. **Mr. James Plaskitt** (Warwick and Leamington): What plans he has to link housing benefit penalties to antisocial behaviour. [89705]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Malcolm Wicks): The inclusion of an antisocial behaviour Bill in our legislative programme underlines the Government's determination to tackle this problem, which blights the lives of so many of our constituents. We shall include in that Bill whatever measures will act as a real deterrent. We are considering a range of options, including housing benefit sanctions.

Mr. Plaskitt :I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that nuisance neighbour problems can be some of the hardest that we have to deal with in our constituencies. Constituents can become really frustrated at the inability of housing authorities or the police to take the action necessary to fix the problem. Does my hon. Friend agree that their frustration can be further aggravated by the knowledge that, in some cases, the law-abiding innocent neighbour may be subsidising the rent of the nuisance neighbour through their taxes?

Malcolm Wicks: I certainly understand that frustration. There was widespread support in the House for the Bill introduced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), and it was our job in the Government to try to make that a workable and legal Bill. It would have been on the statute book now but for the successful filibuster by the Liberal Democrats, who will have to account to their electorates for their behaviour.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): Does the Minister consider it to be antisocial behaviour for a council not properly to deal with housing benefit claims from constituents who are vulnerable and need help? What action would he propose taking against a council that has been found by the Audit Commission to be failing in payment of housing benefit?

Malcolm Wicks: We are taking a wide range of measures and action to improve housing benefit administration. We have a performance framework and extra funding for local authorities, and housing benefit performance is increasing, but I recognise that there are problems in some local authorities. We are tackling them as fast as we can.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): As the Government kindly took over the Housing Benefit (Withholding of Payment) Bill—and rewrote every clause and every word in it, including the long title—what would be the Minister's response if, after the support that No. 10 has provided, its provisions do not appear in the antisocial behaviour legislation that the Government are to introduce later this year?

Malcolm Wicks: To use my right hon. Friend's phrase, we took over the Bill simply to make it legal and workable, and he must forgive us for that. The serious point is that there is a range of ways to tackle antisocial behaviour. The Police Reform Act 2002 introduced changes that will strengthen antisocial behaviour orders, because we know that too few have been enacted. Also, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's consultation paper, "Tackling Anti-Social Tenants", includes a range of ideas about tenancy agreements and the rest. Those and my right hon. Friend's ideas are ones that we are considering actively in terms of the antisocial behaviour Bill that will be brought before the House.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Concern about such disgusting behaviour extends to all parts of the House, and I am sure that all Members present have had brought to their surgeries, as I have, harrowing cases involving frightened or terrified people—pensioners, young families and others—some of whom have even been driven from their homes. The Minister has rightly drawn attention to the shameful role of the Liberal Democrats in talking out the measure. When will he be able to tell his hon. Friends whether the proposal is to be enacted this year?

Malcolm Wicks: We all recognised during the deliberations on the Bill introduced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead that, at best, it would be a minor weapon in the armoury and that antisocial behaviour orders—this we stated at the time—and tenancy agreements were the stronger. I can only repeat that we are considering all those ideas, and our proposals will come forward with the Bill in due course.

Benefits (Poverty Threshold)

7. **Mr. Brian Jenkins** (Tamworth): What his targets are for reducing the number of households that receive benefits and which are below the poverty threshold. [89706]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Malcolm Wicks): On 18 September 2002, we published a new edition of "Opportunity for All", which provides a detailed account of our strategy for tackling poverty and social exclusion as well as the range of indicators and targets against which we measure progress. The report shows that we have achieved a great deal and that our approach is working. We will continue to deliver on that challenge over the years to come.

Mr. Jenkins: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. We are all aware that work is the only way out of poverty for many and that we are encouraging people in areas where the number of vacancies is greater than the number of jobless to take a role, but what is he doing to protect the vulnerable innocent—the children—who all too often live in households where income falls below that which we deem necessary?

Malcolm Wicks: We all recognise that over, perhaps, the past 30 years, due to economic as well as social and family factors, poverty in this country began to wear a younger face—child poverty increased significantly. Back in 1996–97, one third of children lived in low-income households. I am pleased to say that, compared with 1997, there are about half a million fewer children in low-income households, based on a relative measure. Given the real increase in incomes, and therefore the moving target that we face, that is a real improvement in tackling relative poverty as it affects too many of our children.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): In the words of the question, what are the Minister's targets? Has he achieved them, or is he going to?

Malcolm Wicks: The Government have a strong ambition to eradicate child poverty—*[Interruption.]* If the House will listen, we also have a public service agreement to reduce child poverty by a third. So far, we have gone a third of a way in a third of the time towards achieving that target.

David Cairns (Greenock and Inverclyde): Thirty-nine per cent. of people of working age in my constituency are economically inactive, and we have the third poorest average wage rates in the whole of Scotland. Will my hon. Friend therefore consider urging his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to site one of the six new pilot schemes giving people on incapacity benefit extra help to get into work in my constituency, as that will go some way towards tackling one of the most serious causes of poverty households?

Malcolm Wicks: I am afraid that the decision on the pilots has not yet been made, but I am sure that my colleagues have heard my hon. Friend's genuine concern. We all recognise that incapacity issues are some of the most taxing facing our society, and our recent document shows our determination to tackle those issues effectively.

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): Work is the best way out of poverty. However, the rate of economic activity in Wales is much lower than in the south-east of England—61.3 per cent. in early 2000 for people over 50 compared with 76.8 per cent. in the south-east. Can the Minister assure us that that gap is being closed?

Malcolm Wicks: We are conscious of regional and local variations in unemployment. So far, the success is that some 75 per cent. of people of working age in Britain are in jobs, which puts us more or less at the top of the European league table—only two smaller countries have a slightly better record. We are not complacent, however, and now realise that our understanding of the causes of unemployment has to be more detailed and specific if we are successfully to tackle them and the issues raised by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): My hon. Friend is correct to draw attention to the action taken by his Department to eradicate child poverty. However, will he explain what he intends to do to ensure that the Child Support Agency, which is not collecting maintenance so some families are driven into greater poverty, becomes more efficient and provides maintenance for the 30 per cent. of children who are losing out at present?

Malcolm Wicks: Certainly, I alluded earlier to family changes that have affected Britain and the fact that many of our children are now growing up in one-parent, rather than two-parent families. That is a major contemporary cause of poverty, hence the introduction of the Child Support Agency, whose performance is improving year by year. We have, of course, introduced proposals for reform. When we are in a position to implement them after thoroughly testing the system and after my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is able come to the House with dates, they will further improve the situation. With a simpler formula, our colleagues in the CSA will be able to spend more time on enforcement, which is a major step in the right direction.

Pensions Funding

8. **Mr. John Bercow** (Buckingham): If he will make a statement on the Government's policy towards the minimum funding requirement for pensions. [89707]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Eagle): Our Green Paper on working and saving for retirement sets out proposals for replacing the minimum funding requirement with scheme-specific requirements that will allow schemes to chose investment strategies more appropriate for their own particular circumstances.

Mr. Bercow: I am grateful to the Minister for her helpful reply. Given the widespread and justified concern about companies which, in choosing to wind up their final salary schemes, universally renege on their pensions obligations to their staff, can the hon. Lady tell the House and me whether, under the new arrangements, companies will be better or worse placed than under preceding arrangements to keep their pension promises to their employees?

Maria Eagle: First, I welcome the hon. Gentleman to the Back Benches—the last time that we jousted in the House he was in a different place. Since he moved, I have

found that I agree with more and more of what he says. For example, I agreed with him the other morning when he said on television that the Tory party's chances of winning the next election are about as great as finding an Eskimo in the desert.

I have a lot of sympathy with what the hon. Gentleman has just said—he is referring more than anything else to the Maersk situation. Certainly, what that company has done is currently lawful, although we would probably both agree that it is pretty disreputable behaviour by any standards. The Green Paper includes proposals to share out scheme assets more fairly on wind-up and to strengthen protection for members of pension schemes caught in such situations. Pension provision will work into the future only if all parties can trust other parties to keep their pension promises. I look forward to hearing my hon. Friend's response, and perhaps that of some of his constituents, to the consultation on the Green Paper.

Mr. Bill Olner (Nuneaton): My hon. Friend will know that the trade union movement has made specific demands for the Government to protect workers' pensions. Far too many companies have got away with pension holidays and are now reneging on final salary payments. It really is time for the Government to get tough on employers who scandalously expose their workers to poverty when they retire.

Maria Eagle: I strongly agree. My hon. Friend will have noted that the Green Paper contains proposals for stiffening the obligations on companies to consult their employees and unions before making unilateral changes to their schemes. Unfortunately, the current minimum funding requirement did not provide the level of security that many thought it might, and that is why there is widespread agreement in the industry and across the field that we are right to be considering changes to the MFR. One of the difficulties is that it has led to short-term decision making and inflexibility. In a time of fluctuating stock markets, to say the least, short-term decisions are not necessarily the best thing for pensions, which are of course a long-term business.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Does the Minister agree that, when one considers the whole spectrum of investments, including pensions, split funds and life insurance, one can see, without wanting to appear too alarmist, that there is a real risk of people losing confidence in all financial instruments. Is it not therefore incumbent on the Government to apply their mind to the problem with rather more urgency than is suggested by a Green Paper process, which may mean that effective remedy is years and years away?

Maria Eagle: We have to strike a balance between responding urgently to daily headlines and situations that change very quickly and bearing in mind the fact that pensions are a long-term business. We will not get the best framework for private pensions saving over the long term if we react daily and make changes that deal only with issues that are in the headlines. We will not ensure that people save enough in private pensions for their retirement if we do not have the right framework in the long run, so the most important thing is, with as much consensus as possible in the House and across the industry, among employees and employers, to get the right system in place to provide the protection and balance that will enable people to save appropriately for their retirement.

Action Teams for Jobs

9. **Mr. John Lyons** (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): If he will make a statement about the effectiveness of action teams for jobs. [89708]

The Minister for Work (Mr. Nicholas Brown): Action teams are performing well, so far helping over 57,000 jobless people in the country's most deprived areas to move into work. An evaluation study of the first year of the initiative found that 80 per cent. of people who found work through action teams moved into sustained jobs.

Mr. Lyons: In parallel with the work of the action teams there are some outstanding local developments and initiatives that are trying to deal with some of the long-term unemployment problems in rural and semi-rural areas. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that we continue to encourage such initiatives so that we can really tackle the problems?

Mr. Brown: I strongly agree. We have to provide a whole range of modern, labour market-oriented services to sparsely populated communities. The Department takes its outreach work very seriously. We are considering initiatives such as mobile centres to give advice on jobs that are available, and indeed on benefits.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): But does the Minister believe that the 1 per cent. employment tax starting in April will improve job opportunities?

Mr. Brown: The public services have to be funded.

Dr. Stephen Ladyman (South Thanet): Action teams for jobs have been a great success in my constituency, and there are some wonderful examples of how that initiative has got people back into work. However, does my right hon. Friend accept that its effectiveness is limited in part because it is targeted on priority wards, rather than being provided for the whole district? Can he understand how frustrating it is for somebody to discover that they might be denied help from an action team simply because they live on the wrong side of a road?

Mr. Brown: My understanding is that the action teams are not too prescriptive about this, but I do appreciate the point that my hon. Friend makes. Nevertheless, I think it right that scarce public resources be targeted where the need is greatest, and I do not think that such projects would be helped by the £20 billion cut in public expenditure that we understand is on offer from the Opposition.

Minimum Income Guarantee

10. **Andrew Selous** (South-West Bedfordshire): What level of savings fund is necessary for a person not to qualify for the minimum income guarantee. [89709]

The Minister for Pensions (Mr. Ian McCartney): The level of pension savings needed for a person not to qualify for the minimum income guarantee will depend on the level of entitlement to state pension benefits that has been built up over individuals' working lives. The introduction of the pension credit ends the unfair, absolute penalty on savings, thus encouraging people to provide for their own retirement. The existing capital cliff edge will disappear, so those with savings of more than £12,000 will no longer be automatically excluded from help.

Andrew Selous: Is the Minister aware that a pensioner couple in receipt of both housing benefit and council tax benefit need a fund of £142,000 in order not to be subject to means-tested benefits? Does he not agree that letting pensioners keep 100 per cent. of their savings and giving them a higher basic state pension as of right would be the most effective ways to assist saving among the poorest of the population?

Mr. McCartney: I wonder how the hon. Gentleman squares that view with the intention, expressed by Opposition Front Benchers, of cutting public expenditure by 20 per cent., some of which would fall on the poorest pensioners. His party is against the minimum income guarantee, the pension credit and winter fuel payments. The fact is that this is the first Government in history, through the pension credit, to give people the incentive to save—unlike the previous Conservative Government, who imposed a 100 per cent. marginal tax rate on savings, thus forcing many pensioners into poverty.

Mr. George Mudie (Leeds, East): Can the Minister confirm that since 1997, the minimum income guarantee has led to a real-terms increase in the pensions of the poorest pensioners of 37 per cent., taken 1.1 million pensioners out of absolute poverty, and provided an average additional sum of £30 per week for the poorest pensioners? However, can he also confirm that this is the same MIG as the Leader of the Opposition described as having nothing to recommend it?

Mr. Speaker: Order. That was two questions: the Minister should answer the first one, not the second.

Mr. McCartney: That was always my intention, Mr. Speaker—although perhaps I should ask my hon. Friend to repeat it, as I cannot remember it. *[Laughter.]* He is absolutely right, and perhaps the most important point to make is that, hopefully, hon. Members on both sides of the House will come together from April of this year and adopt a bipartisan approach to securing the successful implementation of the pension credit. It will provide more than £2 billion in the way of additional income for the poorest pensioners and, for the first time, for those who suffered under the previous Conservative Government, when they saved a little and lost a lot.

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): Can the Minister confirm that under the pension credit, which will affect the majority of pensioners, any pensioner will keep only 60p of every extra pound of pension income that they save?

Mr. McCartney: When the right hon. Gentleman was Secretary of State, pensioners got nothing: for every pound saved, they lost a pound. He gave with one hand, and took with the other.

Mr. Lilley *indicated dissent.*

Mr. McCartney: Perhaps I should start again. The right hon. Gentleman owes this House and our country an apology for the way he managed this Department as Secretary of State. He introduced rules that meant that for every pound a pensioner saved, their entitlement was reduced by a further pound. The pension credit has at last put right the mistakes that he made.

Pension Yields

11. **Dr. Julian Lewis** (New Forest, East): What his estimate is of trends in average pension yields over the next decade. [89710]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Eagle): The Government do not make an official estimate of future investment returns. Over the past 10 years, overall pension investment returns have been 7.5 per cent., and private sector estimates suggest that they will be around 7 to 8 per cent. over the next 10 years.

What is clear is that people need to put sufficient aside for their retirement and regularly monitor their level of saving. Many of the proposals in our recent Green Paper "Simplicity, Security and Choice" will help them do this.

Dr. Julian Lewis: It is surprising—is it not?—that one can have an answer to a question like that without any mention of the £5 billion a year taken from pension funds by the Government since they abolished the tax credit on dividends in 1997. The Under-Secretary was waxing eloquent about the iniquity of firms in closing final salary schemes, but does she accept that the Government's pensions raid has little to do with those firms doing what they have done? They could have absorbed it, they should have absorbed it, but if the Government had not taken that action, the problem might not have arisen.

Maria Eagle: No, I do not accept that. The Conservative party is for ever talking about the £5 billion without mentioning the offsetting corporation tax cuts, for a start. As is well known in the House, throughout the industry and by anybody who considers these issues, many factors have led to some of

the problems in respect of defined benefit schemes and their closures, not least the stock market falls that have been taking place over the past couple of years.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): I know that my hon. Friend is aware that the pension yield for ex-Allied Steel and Wire workers from Cardiff over the next 10 years may be as low, according to some predictions, as 16 per cent. of the pension they expected on retirement. I know that she will want to join me in welcoming last week's announcement that Celsa is reopening the steel plant in Cardiff, which will save many hundreds of jobs. Will she also agree to look at the plight of those workers who lost their pension as a result of losing their jobs at a time when the pension fund was at a low ebb?

Maria Eagle: Yes, and I know that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Pensions has met some of the workers affected in this particular case. Much of the Green Paper deals with issues that have been raised by right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House in respect of those who work and save into occupational pensions and whose legitimate expectations are not met. We must get right the changes that will arise following the consultation on the Green Paper. If we do not, it is much less likely that people will be confident enough to save into occupational pensions the amount of money that they need to ensure a secure retirement.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): Does the Minister agree that the fall in pension yields has been particularly serious for annuitants? As the Government have held at bay the amounts for compulsion in other elements of pension policy, why do they cling to compulsion in this area rather than allowing pensioners to make their own investment decisions?

Maria Eagle: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that annuities are the only way of securing an income for the lifetime of a person who has saved, and of course we all celebrate the fact that people are living longer. That is what pensions are for, and that is why annuities are important. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman and his party will be responding in full to the Green Paper consultation, and I look forward to seeing what they have to say.

Retirement Savings

12. **Hugh Robertson** (Faversham and Mid-Kent): If he will make a statement about the rate of saving for retirement in the United Kingdom. [89711]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Andrew Smith): As set out in the pensions Green Paper, we believe that as people are living longer and want good standards of living in retirement, they need as a whole either to save more, to work longer, or a mix of both. That is why we are consulting on a range of measures to improve simplicity, security and choice in pension saving as well as making it easier for people to carry on working longer when they want to.

Hugh Robertson: In view of the problems of last year's Office for National Statistic figures, is the Secretary of State convinced that people are now saving enough for their retirement? If not, what is he doing to encourage people to save more?

Mr. Smith: I already said in my initial answer that we recognise that if people want good standards of living in retirement, and as people are living longer, they will clearly need to save more, work longer or a mix of both. The ONS conducted a review of the statistics, and I think it wise to treat all pensions statistics with caution until that review has been fully implemented.

Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): Is not the greatest sense of insecurity about people's pension contributions to be found in the 40 per cent. devaluation in the value of their pensions that is a result of frittering that away in a gamble on the stock exchange over the past year? If we are to encourage pension contributors to make larger contributions, should we not also consider allowing workers to have a greater choice about the direction in which their savings are going? I refer specifically the prospect of workers being able to choose to have their contributions paid into infrastructure investments, which would provide security of assets, certainty of return and a social dividend on top?

Mr. Smith: The Green Paper's proposals radically to simplify the framework for pensions saving, not least as far as tax treatment is concerned, will increase existing flexibility, which has already been enhanced, not least by the introduction of individual savings accounts.

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): The Secretary of State has just said that it is wise to treat pension statistics with caution. Why, then, having come to the House last month to claim that our pension contributions had increased by 40 per cent. since 1997, did he use that statistic as justification for the complacency of his Green Paper? I welcome the fact that he has not repeated that statistic today; has he seen sense and abandoned his claim that our pension savings are zooming upwards? If that figure really is so shaky, why did he rest his policy on it last month?

Mr. Smith: There is no complacency about pension savings or the way in which the statistics are assessed. That is why I announced the review on which the ONS has now embarked. That is also why, as I said, it is wise to treat all statistics with caution until the review has been fully implemented. The hon. Gentleman will have noticed that the pension commission that we are establishing as part of the Green Paper process will, as one of its first tasks, undertake a baseline audit of the adequacy of long-term savings for pensions, including the adequacy of the information available.

As for the figures cited by the hon. Gentleman, I and other Ministers are right, when asked, to report to the House the figures that we are given by the ONS. We should be criticised if we did not give those figures. The figure of 40 per cent. was cleared with the ONS, and I checked it again before Question Time today.

Mr. Willetts: It is always the fault of the Office for National Statistics. The fact is that Ministers used the statistics as the basis for their complacent policy. I do

not believe, and have set out my arguments for not doing so in *The Times* today, that we are saving £46 billion a year, another statistic that the Secretary of State has repeated. The correct figure is £32 billion a year. The Secretary of State is able to claim that we are apparently putting more and more money into our pensions only by counting the extra money that companies must put in to offset the effects of the tax increase. If he were to put another £5 billion a year tax on pensions, and if companies had to put more money into their pensions funds to counteract it, he would claim that we were saving more for our pensions. Does he realise what an absurd position he has got himself into?

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman has been very assiduous on this matter, and I have been happy to come to the House to acknowledge the service that he has provided in questioning the statistics. Indeed, that is the job of the Opposition.

That said, so far as the hon. Gentleman's claim to be specific about the level of pensions saving is concerned, I treat his statistics with at least as much scepticism as I regard those that come from the ONS.

Redundancies

13. **Tony Cunningham** (Workington): What plans he has to help people affected by large-scale redundancies to find new work. [89712]

The Minister for Work (Mr. Nicholas Brown): In April 2002, we launched the rapid response service to provide a coherent, tailored response to help people affected by large-scale redundancies. The service provides advice and support to enable people who are made redundant to make the transition into new jobs. By December, the rapid response service had provided support nationally to more than 200 companies and made its services available to more than 67,000 people facing redundancy.

Tony Cunningham: I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply and for his keen interest in my constituency. Does he agree that one problem in constituencies such as mine is that while jobs tend to be lost in the manufacturing sector, the jobs that are created tend to be in the service sector? What is being done to help people who find themselves in those circumstances?

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend is right. The labour market circumstances in west Cumbria are specific to that area. The response led by the local authority in my hon. Friend's constituency is the right one. The authority has brought together all elements in the community to consider areas in which new jobs can be created, to do what they can to assist and to work with the Employment Service, and to offer proactive advice to those who are displaced in the labour market, most of whom, as my hon. Friend said, have been displaced from manufacturing enterprises.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): The Minister will be aware that most large-scale redundancies in the Vale of York are in the farming community. Can he confirm that there will be training opportunities for those who have lost their jobs on farms, and that, for example, those who may have been well qualified to drive tractors will be eligible for training to drive light goods vehicles? To whom should such people apply, and could the training eventually be extended to heavy goods vehicles as well, as that is far too expensive for individuals to pay for out of their own pocket?

Mr. Brown: I am more than happy to help the hon. Lady's constituents where I can. Of course, I have sympathy for those in farming communities who are displaced. The fact is, however, that employment trends in agriculture are remorseless, long term and very clear. May I write to the hon. Lady on the specifics that she raised? As for where people should apply, it is of course to the nearest jobcentre.

Andy Burnham (Leigh): I very much echo the concerns raised by my hon. Friend the. Member for Workington (Tony Cunningham) and draw my right hon. Friend the Minister's attention to my constituency, where there were four large-scale manufacturing redundancies in the past year, resulting in 1,000 job losses. Many of the people affected are in their 40s and 50s and have done only that one job throughout their working lives. Although the local jobcentre has provided them with an excellent service, I am aware that few of them have taken up the offer of retraining. Will my right hon. Friend investigate why so few people take up such offers, and will he consider how to improve retraining opportunities for people who are moving from manufacturing to other industries?

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend is right: age is a factor in those considerations. There is a range of options in the Department's armoury and we want to explore all of them, including the possibility of finding similar employment with employers in similar areas of activity. I shall look specifically at the issues that my hon. Friend raised in relation to his constituency and write to him about them.

Child Support Agency

14. **Bob Russell** (Colchester): What progress he has made to check the validity of financial returns to the Child Support Agency by absentee fathers who use the services of accountants or other financial advisers. [89713]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Malcolm Wicks): The agency applies the same level of verification to a case, irrespective of whether its client has used a financial adviser.

Bob Russell: May I ask the Minister to reflect on that answer? If an absentee father can afford the services of an accountant or financial adviser to show that he cannot afford to look after his children, there is a strong possibility that somewhere along the line somebody may

not be telling the truth. May I suggest that inspections of the lifestyle of some of those absentee fathers, who can afford financial advisers but cannot afford to pay for their children, would be well worth pursuing?

Malcolm Wicks: Since October 1999, the Child Support Agency has been able to share information with the Inland Revenue and to base liability for maintenance on self-assessment returns. It would not make sense for the agency to duplicate the work of the Inland Revenue; if people think that fibs are being told to the Revenue, they should be reported. On the hon. Gentleman's final point, the system allows for what is technically known as a departure to be made where it is absolutely clear that the lifestyle of the non-resident parent, or the absent father, does not seem to be in kilter—if I may put it in that way—with their declared income. Those are difficult cases and depend very much on proving, one way or another, whether the income as reported is correct.

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries): I concur with the sentiments behind the question put by the hon. Member for Colchester (Bob Russell), but may I point out to my hon. Friend the Minister that there is another side to the equation? What does he think about a situation in which the agency determines that the profits of a self-employed business man, which are aimed for investment in his company, are in fact income that he can use weekly or monthly? Those profits thus count against him.

Malcolm Wicks: The problem—the rub—in cases of family breakdown is that there are two sides to the story. That is the difficulty. If my hon. Friend has a particular case in mind, I shall ask the agency to look into it, but there are clear rules about what does or does not count as income and we try to apply them. I shall be happy to look into the particular case raised by my hon. Friend.

Statutory Retirement Age

15. **Helen Jackson** (Sheffield, Hillsborough): If he will make a statement on his proposals for changes to the statutory retirement age. [89714]

The Minister for Pensions (Mr. Ian McCartney): There is no state retirement age, only a state pension age—the age from which people can receive their state pension, regardless of whether they have retired or are continuing to work. We have no plans to change that. However, under age legislation, which will be implemented by 2006, compulsory retirement ages are likely to be unlawful unless employers can show they are objectively justified.

Helen Jackson: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer, but may I suggest to him that men and women in their 60s may start to suffer from a bit of an identity crisis unless there is a little more clarification about the age at which they can start genuinely to feel that they ought to be real pensioners and therefore have access to the great variety of Government benefits that are accessible to pensioners?

Mr. McCartney: There are two issues. First, the Government have for the first time launched a pre-retirement guide to help older workers to plan their retirement. *[Interruption.]* I hope that, instead of boo-hooing, Opposition Members will read the damn thing. Secondly, the big problem in Britain has not been workers being able to work up to retirement age, but discrimination in stopping them doing that. Under the last Conservative Government, people with skills, knowledge and commitment were thrown on the scrap heap when they were as young as 45. This Government will end age discrimination and give people a choice to remain in work, and, if they want to work part-time when they retire, we will give them the choice to do that too.

Points of Order

3.31pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Many of our constituents are puzzled—that is somewhat of an understatement and a polite word for it—as to why it was possible for the Ark Royal to set sail, for our troops to go to Kuwait, for the Prime Minister to hold his press conferences and for the press to discuss that endlessly, yet seemingly impossible for the House of Commons to address those very important issues. What does it take in terms of an emergency application to persuade you, Mr. Speaker, that the House of Commons ought to be able to pass judgment on these momentous events?

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. It has been widely advertised that the Prime Minister held a press conference today where the sole topic of questioning was apparently the Government's approach to whether or not there will be a war in Iraq that this country would support. The House has not been afforded the opportunity to question the Prime Minister exclusively for an hour on that issue. Have you received any request from the Prime Minister to afford such an opportunity? If not, what can we do to ask the Prime Minister to attend the House?

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Since this matter was discussed last week and had great publicity, I have been approached by many constituents, not a single one of whom believes that going to war is justified and that there is sufficient evidence to show that Saddam Hussein intends to use his weapons of mass destruction. If the possibility of going to war, putting at risk the lives of our constituents and possibly increasing the risk of terrorist attack are not fit subjects for an emergency debate, what on earth is?

Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): Further to the point of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), will you, Mr. Speaker, give the House some guidance about the circumstances in which war-creep became war without the House having the right, according to a democratic process and in line with the rights of the House, to vote on a substantive motion that endorsed or rejected that proposal?

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it not a fact that, on the very first day that we came back from the recess, the Secretary of State for Defence made a statement and answered questions for quite a long time and that, on the following day, the Prime Minister had a number of questions on this subject? Is it not important that the House should be kept informed, as my hon. Friends have stated, but that it should also be borne in mind that not all of us take the same line and do not accept the Iraqi regime's propaganda about weapons of mass destruction?

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. There may be a solution with which you may be able to help the House. The Prime Minister has just given an hour's press conference to the media, which was mainly dictated by the subject of Iraq. I understand from press reports that the Prime Minister is also due to meet something called the parliamentary Labour party this week, and perhaps, Mr. Speaker, you could organise for the television cameras in the relevant Committee Room to be turned on, so that we can all find out exactly what the parliamentary Labour party thinks on this subject. Obviously, that is one way in which the British people may be able to find out exactly what the PLP feels, as we know that the Prime Minister does not like coming to the House of Commons to answer questions too often.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. This must be the last point of order; I have forgotten what was the first.

Mr. Skinner: I agree with my hon. Friends who have raised this matter, as you probably know, Mr. Speaker, as I have already voted that way. If you allow cameras into Committee Room 14, however, I have news for you: we want the cameras in the 1922 committee, too, and we will cause mayhem.

Mr. Speaker: I am at a disadvantage as far as the parliamentary Labour party is concerned because for two years I have been debarred from attending meetings of the PLP, and that also applies to the 1922 committee. I understand hon. Members' concern. In response to the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson), the Prime Minister can be brought to question in the House of Commons at Prime Minister's Question Time. In addition, I understand that, next Wednesday, there will be a defence debate, which will be an opportunity for the House to examine these matters. I reiterate once again that I am guided by the rules of the House, which I have been given. All that I can say at this stage is that I would hope that Ministers would come to make statements at appropriate times, and that hon. Members who wish to catch my eye should make applications for the debate, which is not too far away.

Mr. Dalyell: On a last point of order, Mr. Speaker, will the motion on Wednesday week be amendable?

Mr. Speaker: At the moment, it is a debate on the Adjournment.

Mr. Dalyell: Does that mean that it is not amendable?

Mr. Speaker: It is a debate on the Adjournment of the House, and it is not amendable.

Opposition Day

[2ND ALLOTTED DAY]

Criminal Justice System

Mr. Speaker: Before I call the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman, I inform the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

3.38 pm

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): I beg to move,

That this House views with great concern the rise in gun crime and domestic burglary, the growing demoralisation of the police, the increasing sense of helplessness of the honest citizen and the apparent inability of the Government to provide a coherent, long-term strategy to resolve these problems; and deprecates the Home Secretary's resort to short-term, irrelevant and illiberal measures to conceal this failure.

As the Home Secretary is well aware—incidentally, I welcome him back to the Green Benches, which is a place that he properly occupies—last night, in Tankersley, not far from his own backyard, there was a dreadful stabbing associated with a dreadful robbery. I wish that I could tell you, Mr. Speaker, that I was naïve enough to suppose that the House would be shocked to hear that. Neither the House, nor the country, however, is any longer in a condition to be shocked at the news that such a dreadful event has taken place.

The Home Office's own figures show that, in the last year, there were some 9,000 reported violent crimes. I am afraid that that is part of a set of statistics that makes dismal reading: we have all become accustomed to such statistics, and we saw them again last week. Robbery—by the Home Office's own account and after its own adjustments—rose by 13 per cent. in the last year. That is on page 10, in table A, of the Home Secretary's own productions. He demurs, but I think that he has some difficulty in refuting what his own office produces. The figure on domestic burglary in the same table, after the same adjustments, shows a 5 per cent. rise. Other kinds of burglary—principally, retail crime—are up 6 per cent., and, by the same token, drug offences are up 12.3 per cent. Furthermore, as the Home Office has spent a great deal of time saying in the last week, gun crime is up—probably by more than the Home Office started by admitting—indeed, it is up dramatically.

If all that was happening was that we had a sad blip in the reported crime figures and if the underlying truth was that the Government had a well-worked-out strategy for dealing with what has been a long-running problem for this country, I do not suppose that I would have bored you, Mr. Speaker, and the House with this debate. However, the sad fact is that over the past five years the Government have shown no signs of having a coherent long-term strategy for addressing this problem.

On 16 July 2000, a newspaper produced a leaked and now famous report from Downing street in which the Prime Minister asked for what I believe he described as "eye-catching initiatives". He has been well served by his Ministers in that regard. We celebrate today—if "celebrate" is the right word—a centenary by our account. As far as we can make out, there have been about 100 eye-catching initiatives in criminal justice since the Government came to power. However, I regret to say that they have largely been in response to headlines and show little sign of achievement.

Twenty-four out of every 25 of the famous antisocial behaviour orders promised by the Prime Minister have not been implemented; instances of benefit docking for the breach of community sentences, which is critical to the Government's current policy—if policy it be—run at 78 a year; child safety orders, another initiative, run at three a year; mandatory seven-year sentences for third-time drug dealers run at one a year; and child curfew orders run at zero a year. Those are the lucky initiatives. Many others have not even started their lives. Benefit docking for truancy has been abandoned; on-the-spot fines at cash tills have been abandoned; and vouchers for good behaviour have been abandoned. I fear that the Government have given us initiative after initiative in response to headline after headline, but the initiatives have often failed and have often never been implemented. There is very little sign of a coherent strategy.

There are two critical elements to a proper long-term strategy for dealing with crime. The first is to get police on to the streets. I do not believe that there is a great difference of view on that between the Home Secretary and me. We shall soon hear from him, and I have never detected the slightest sign on his part of a reluctance to admit what is evidently the truth. The great difference between this country and the American cities that have cracked crime so well is the fact that they have—and that we do not have—police visible, proactive and effective in numbers on the streets.

The problem is, therefore, not one of design but of effective delivery. The fact is that we do not have police on our streets. I do not know why the Home Secretary has not been able to get much help from the Chancellor of the Exchequer on that, but I know that the Home Secretary has not helped the matter himself. He has been keeping the police off the streets, and he has been adding to the reasons why they are not on the streets. He has been adding targets, monitoring, standard units, bureaucracy and rules and he has been forcing the police to keep records and to make notes. That is not the way to have them on the streets. Making a report each time someone is stopped is not the way to increase the time spent catching crooks.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. [HON. MEMBERS: "Right hon. Gentleman."] I apologise. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that he is doing the House and the country a disservice in completely overlooking the role of intelligence-led policing and the way in which police efforts focus on the hard end of crime? Focusing on the activities of criminals is bringing down crime across a whole range of offences to the benefit of communities.

Mr. Letwin: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman gives me the opportunity to reply. I hope that at some time or another he will do what I have to do on a regular basis and talk to police constables the length and breadth of the country, because he will discover that the flip phrase "intelligence-led policing" means something on the streets in Britain by its very absence. In the

United States, as I have seen for myself, the police know the streets and the residents of them because they patrol up and down. As a result, they gain genuine low-level intelligence day by day and hour by hour. They have real-time information on the compliance status information system—the comstat system—and know where the patterns of crime are developing. That enables them to take the required forces to where the criminals operate. We, however, have to wait minutes, hours or days before the police arrive.

What do we find has happened in this country? In the past 24 hours, the Metropolitan police force has been so hampered by the Home Secretary and the Chancellor that its policy of intelligence-led policing on burglary consists of giving up the investigation of all burglaries except those for which it already knows the crook in question.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): I thought we would soon get around to that. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will give me chapter and verse on what the Home Office has, or has not, said to the Met. Did it affect its decision last summer to introduce pilots in Enfield and Southwark? Did it affect the information that the force gave out on 2 December? We have done nothing that the right hon. Gentleman claims. Instead, we have done exactly what he asks us to do, which is to leave the decision making to the commissioner and the Metropolitan police.

Mr. Letwin: I am sure that the Home Secretary is not to blame for that particularly lunacy. I suspect that he—*[Interruption.]* I will answer the Home Secretary. When some journalist rang him as he rang me, I suspect he thought, as I thought, that it was an April fool's joke. I suspect that he had no prior knowledge that the police were going in that direction. My accusation against him is that he has made it impossible for the police to adopt any other system of policing. I do not believe that the commissioner, for whom the Home Secretary and I have a high regard, chose that course of action because he woke up one fine sunny day and thought it would be fun not to pursue most burglars. I suspect that he is bound up with bureaucracy, as the president elect of the Association of Chief Police Officers said just a day ago, and is unable to provide the policing that is required because the Home Secretary has made it impossible for him to do so.

Jonathan Shaw (Chatham and Aylesford): The right hon. Gentleman says that he frequently speaks to police officers, and he criticises the intelligence-led model. Will he come to Kent, where the intelligence-led model has been extremely effective in cutting burglary and gun crime year on year?

Mr. Letwin: I am a huge admirer of Sir David Phillips, the chief constable of Kent, who pioneered the intelligence-led model of policing. That has been a huge success in the restricted examples to which it has been applied at the higher end of crime. At the lower end of crime, however, intelligence-led policing is not possible without having police officers on the street because they cannot collect the intelligence unless they are there to do so. That is what is lacking in this country.

Jonathan Shaw: We have more police officers in Kent doing exactly what the right hon. Gentleman describes than we had last year and the year before that.

Mr. Letwin: The hon. Gentleman and his constituents have more police officers, but not enough of them by a large measure. When the BBC, which is not a supporter of the Conservative party as far as I am aware, discovers in a poll that 28 per cent. of the people in Britain cannot remember when they last saw a police officer, it behoves Labour Members not to make a great song and dance about policing on our streets.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): I think that the right hon. Gentleman is mistaken. We both have flats in Lambeth and I have seen more policemen on its streets in the past few months than I have seen in the 25 years that I have owned a flat there, including two officers on the Brixton road in the past half hour.

Mr. Letwin: I am tempted to say that the hon. Gentleman is in a privileged class of one. I know not what anecdotal evidence suggests about the police officers on the streets immediately adjoining his residence, but his colleague the Member of Parliament for that area does not share his view about the number of those officers or about the Home Office policy on drugs which is occupying most of their time because of the vast increase in drug-dealing networks.

One half of a settled and coherent policy would be to get the police on the streets, but the other half would be to offer young people a way off the conveyor belt to crime, and I regret that the Home Secretary and his predecessor have been as deficient in that as in the matter of the police. We have not seen long-term rehabilitative sentences for young persistent offenders. We have not seen mandatory drug treatment and rehabilitation for young cocaine and heroin addicts. Neither of those measures has been implemented in an effective form. Instead we have seen a rash of initiatives, some of which will be discussed in the next debate, and a flood of money. Those policies are very ill-focused and there is no clear means of lifting the majority of young potential criminals off that conveyor belt to crime. If we do not do that we will never make a serious impact on the causes of crime about which the Prime Minister spoke so eloquently in opposition.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): I share the right hon. Gentleman's concern about that matter. He knows that I share many of his criticisms and those of the public of what the Government have done, or failed to do, in the last five years. However, will the right hon. Gentleman explain to the country why it should now have greater confidence in his party when crime doubled during its 18 years in power and violent crime increased in every one of those years? What would make the Conservative party deal more effectively with crime and law and order now, when during its 18 years in office it lamentably failed to do what the right hon. Gentleman is now calling for?

Mr. Letwin: I do not believe that we can hope to make an impact on these problems without doing the very

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things that I have described: getting police on to the streets and getting young people off the conveyor belt to crime. The hon. Gentleman is well aware that the policies that we have been promoting for a year or more are new, and they offer the possibility of a serious attack on crime, in the way that American cities have attacked crime through policing and in the way that the Netherlands and Sweden have got young people off the conveyor belt to crime.

I want to defend the record of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), because during each of his years as Home Secretary he remorselessly reduced levels of crimes such as burglary, both recorded crimes and those measured by the British crime survey. I shall tackle that in some detail, and I will reflect in a moment on what is happening to that record as a result of the Government's muddled messages and confused thinking.

The second problem that we face, apart from the Government's failure to produce a serious long-term strategy, is the fact that the Home Secretary has sought to mask what people know are the realities of crime through irrelevant and illiberal high-profile measures in criminal justice Bills. That is the eye-catching initiative method of legislation. What has the proposed change to the double jeopardy rules to do with the kinds of crime that we are talking about today? Very little. What has the limitation of trial by jury in fraud cases to do with robbery, burglary or gun crime? Very little. The point of those eye-catching initiatives is to sound tough, and the tragedy is that in sounding tough the Home Secretary has succeeded in being illiberal without being effective. To be illiberal in order to be effective has a justification; to be liberal, admitting that one may be ineffective has a justification, but to be illiberal and ineffective is inexcusable. *[Interruption.]* I am charmed that the Home Secretary is so charmed by my remarks.

Nowhere is that pattern of incoherence masked by lunges for ineffective, irrelevant and eye-catching initiatives more evident than in relation to recent sentencing policy. A little while ago, the Home Secretary made a magnificent discovery. He spotted ahead of the rest of us that his own figures—we had not seen them, but he had—were going to reveal a vast increase in gun crime. I imagine that an order went out in the Home Office saying "Do something—a headline is coming, so let us anticipate it." An order was eventually given: "Let us have mandatory sentences for gun crime." About 24 hours later—I am unable to ascertain the precise number of hours—a counter-order was given: "Let us have exceptions to the mandatory sentences for gun crime." There was a process of order, counter-order and disorder.

The fact is that an initiative on sentencing was produced at short notice in relation to an anticipated headline and that it could not withstand even a day's scrutiny. However, that is small beer, as they say, in comparison with what has been happening on burglary. I admit that I should today very probably be tendering my resignation as shadow Home Secretary. I should have to do so on the ground of sheer mental inadequacy, as I have struggled mightily for many days now, but failed utterly to understand the Government's position on burglary sentencing. I do not know what it is that the Government have been trying to tell us; my powers of intellect have not been up to the task. I hope that, at the end of this debate, the Home Secretary will rescue me from the need to resign by informing me and unclouding a mind that is currently unable to wrestle with the ghastly question of whether the Government have a policy on burglary sentencing, and if so, what that policy may be.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way. I have no intention of attempting to compete with him in my powers of intellect, but I suggest to him that the Government's policy is very simple. It is to say one thing and then appoint subordinates such as the Lord Chancellor and the Lord Chief Justice who will quietly arrange for something else to happen at ground level.

Mr. Letwin: I would assume because of the source and its plausibility that my hon. Friend is right, except that I think it is very difficult to describe the Lord Chancellor as a subordinate. Indeed, I suspect that, were it not said in this House, my hon. Friend's remark about the Lord Chancellor might lead to a legal action. I believe that the Lord Chancellor might think that it lowered him in the expectations of right-thinking men to be regarded as a subordinate. He may well believe that the Prime Minister is some form of subordinate; after all, I believe that he was one of the Lord Chancellor's clerks or pupils. The Lord High Chancellor of the United Kingdom is not a subordinate. He is clearly the most senior Law Officer of the United Kingdom, or at any rate of England and Wales—or at any rate of something.

I heard with my own ears what the Lord Chancellor said when he appeared on a radio programme. It was not an April fools' joke; it may be that the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis was merely trying to fool us, but he was not. In a briefing, Mr. Alastair Campbell or some other Downing street minion who is genuinely a subordinate said that they were not sure what he said, but I heard him, so I was sure. What I do not understand is what on earth he meant. I do not know what the Prime Minister's spokesman meant when he slapped down—I believe that that is the phrase—the Lord Chancellor. I would not like to try doing it myself, but he apparently did so. I do not know what the Home Secretary said when he stood with the Attorney-General and the Lord Chief Justice—

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): Waffle.

Mr. Letwin: Yes, that it is exactly it. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. Nobody in the United Kingdom has the slightest idea what the Government's policy is on the sentencing of burglars, but the burglars are beginning to get an idea. Their idea is roughly that, on the whole, except in appropriate circumstances, as the Prime Minister said—we do not know what those circumstances are—they should not expect to go to jail. That is, of course, if they are investigated. If they are not investigated they are unlikely to go to jail because they will not be caught in the first place. However, if they are caught, and thus among the unlucky few who have been investigated, they might go to jail, but they will not.

Perhaps they will under appropriate circumstances or after the second or third time that they have been caught.

Ian Lucas (Wrexham): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Letwin: I shall give way shortly in anticipation of some blinding insight into the Government's policy.

I have been jesting, but there is a serious issue. Confusion has been sown, affecting a subject that is not a laughing matter for many of our constituents. They regard burglary as serious and they want to be protected against it. They have noticed what we, the Home Secretary and his statisticians and researchers have noticed. The Home Office has paid for a thorough survey, entailing great expense, of sentencing policy and its effects on crime. Lo and behold, it shows that burglary is the one crime that tends to be significantly affected by sentencing policy. It shows exactly the same as the British crime survey and recorded crime figures.

That is why I said to the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) that we would return to the efforts of my right hon. and learned Friend the current shadow Chancellor. From the moment he put pressure on the judiciary to increase sentences for burglary, the trend decreased. According to the BCS, that trend levelled off from 2000 and the burglary rate started rising.

The announcements, counter-announcements, unannouncements and disannouncements of the past week will affect burglary statistics badly and they are therefore no laughing matter. They will affect our constituents adversely.

Ian Lucas: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that sentencing individual burglars in individual cases should be a matter for the individual judge who has heard the facts?

Mr. Letwin: Yes, but—*[Interruption.]* No, I unequivocally agree with the hon. Gentleman, but guidelines exist, and the Lord Chief Justice currently sets them. Under the Criminal Justice Bill, a sentencing council will set them, with some consultation with Parliament. We shall propose amendments. It is time to remove Ministers—of all parties—from the position, which they have held for many years, of well-informed commentators on sentencing policy, holding forth from the public bar of a public house. It is time for the House to take charge of sentencing policy guidelines.

The judgments of judges in individual cases are properly the preserve of the judiciary, but I have long considered the matter in the past year and the events of the past week have crystallised my view.

Mr. Blunkett: Does that constitute a sudden spasm, a new initiative, a knee-jerk reaction or has it taken 18 months, the Bill, our proposals for sentencing guidelines and our decision to involve Parliament for the right hon. Gentleman to make the amazing intellectual leap to wishing to ensure that Parliament has control over sentencing guidelines?

Mr. Letwin: Oddly enough, none of those things. I began speaking about the matter in July, having begun considering it in March.

Mr. Bryant: Began.

Mr. Letwin: No. "Having begun" is a form of the verb that takes one backwards, not forwards, for the hon. Gentleman's education.

In December, I issued a statement that it was official Tory party policy to move an amendment to the effect that I described. Given the circumstances, I do not blame the Home Secretary for not noticing. However, I hope that we can reach consensus on the matter and give the Government room for manoeuvre. I accept that some members of the judiciary will be critical of the step that I would like to take. However, I hope that creating a clear distinction between an individual judge in a case and policy guidelines means that we achieve a lasting settlement.

I am conscious that the Home Secretary's problems with, for example, gun crime, are not unprecedented.

As things stand, Parliament has but three options. It can set a maximum that has little effect in practice, and is modulated through the guidelines into whatever the then judiciary seek to modulate it into; it can set mandatory sentences that are too rigid to accommodate the judgment of an individual judge; or it can set mandatory sentences with exceptions that quickly become the norm through policy guidelines set by the Lord Chief Justice.

None of those methods is satisfactory. Our fellow citizens expect that, when they elect us and send us to this place, they will influence not just the legislative definition of crimes but the effect of so defining them. The ordinary person believes, I suspect, what I believed 18 months ago, before I took on this crazy job. I was under the lunatic misapprehension that Parliament set the basic sentencing framework and judges then interpreted it in individual cases, but that is not so at present, and it is the state of affairs that we need to achieve.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): Is my right hon. Friend aware of a case that arose in my constituency last week? Gary Callaby admitted three offences of burglary, one of theft and one of arson, and asked for four other offences of burglary to be taken into consideration. The judge said that if the latest guidelines had not come out, it would have been a prison sentence. There is one burglar in my constituency who is laughing, and one judge who is extremely angry about the way in which his hands were tied.

Mr. Letwin: My hon. Friend makes a serious point, which relates to a specific case. If he and I were judges, we would be bound to pay the most solemn attention to the guidelines produced by the Lord Chief Justice. That is the problem: there is a disjunction between the view of the very senior judiciary and what I think is the view of about 98 per cent. of our fellow citizens, and—this is the

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irony—the joint view, I suspect, of the Home Secretary and myself. Both sides of the House overwhelmingly support a particular stance on the guidelines; many of the judiciary themselves support it; a vast weight of the population supports it; yet we are powerless to bring it about, which cannot be right.

We find ourselves in a bizarre situation. The current Prime Minister came to power with some great slogans. "Education, education, education" I think I remember, dimly. I recall also "from welfare to work". Above all, however, I recall "tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime". That is well on the way to becoming this Government's version of "Crisis? What crisis?".

The fact is that we have a crisis of police demoralisation. We have a crisis of confidence, or lack of confidence, of the people in the criminal justice system. We have a crisis of old people too frightened to leave their homes, who are in effect subject to a life sentence. We have a crisis of young mothers who dare not take their children to playgrounds. We have a crisis of streets and neighbourhoods that are under the control of gun gangs, pimps and drug dealers. We have a crisis that amounts to a retreat of civilisation and a loss of control of the streets for the honest citizen. The Government are failing on crime, and in so doing they are failing English society.

4.8 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"welcomes the steps the Government has taken and continues to take to reform all aspects of law enforcement including increasing police numbers to record levels and the 6.1 per cent. increase in police funding for 2003–04; further welcomes the steps the Government is taking to modernise the criminal justice system through the coherent long-term strategies and the introduction of the Criminal Justice Bill; notes that for the last five years crime rates have fallen by 27 per cent. according to the British Crime Survey, that burglary has reduced by 39 per cent. since 1997 and that the chances of becoming a victim of crime are as low as at any time in the last 20 years; and particularly supports the decisive action being taken by the Government to tackle street crime and the rise in gun-related crime."

I ask the House to reject a motion, which, if it were not so serious, would be laughable. The right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) has made a supreme bid to outdo the leader of the Liberal Democrats in joining "Have I Got News For You". I was going to say "Drop the Dead Donkey", but after last week I had probably better not.

Let's face it: every time a set of statistics is published, every time a high-profile crime is committed, people believe the evidence of the front page but not the evidence placed before them. It behoves us, in a debate of this sort, to get to grips with the real issues. The right hon. Gentleman said, after an amusing interlude, that this was not a laughing matter, and indeed it is not. He said that confusion did "bad things" to the message to potential burglars, and of course he is right. He rightly said that we need to take much more control of the guidance that goes out, and we do. That is why we put such measures in the Criminal Justice Bill and published them in the White Paper last July. I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman was thinking about that at the time. I do not remember him saying anything when we published the White Paper or the Bill, but I am happy to be corrected on that.

Confusion damages the signal that is sent out, and, therefore, the culture on the streets. The Lord Chief Justice is, rightly, independent—the judiciary must remain independent and I challenge any Opposition Member to suggest otherwise—and he will be as concerned as I am, and as I am sure the Lord Chancellor is, that we get the message right and that it is clear. I am sure that he will contribute, as I intend to do this afternoon, to ensuring that the guidance that has gone out is clarified, and that judges who misunderstand or misinterpret it are left in no doubt that there is a very clear policy coming out as part of that guidance.

Simon Hughes: I absolutely agree with the Home Secretary; it is very important that accurate statistics are given, so that the media cannot misrepresent the truth. That being the case, what does he say to the chairman of the Statistics Commission, Sir John Kingman, who wrote to him on 1 October—I quote accurately—to say:

"We were, however, concerned that you had felt forced by ill-based comments to publish a set of interim figures on street crime in what could be seen as a selective fashion, rather than sticking to your guns and waiting for the national statistics. Not all management information can or should be published, but it is important that when such data are published, whether they are national statistics or not, that there should be no suspicion that Government is picking and choosing, publishing the good news and not the bad."

Mr. Blunkett: I agree entirely with that last sentiment. To publish only good news and not bad would be a luxury I could not afford, and one that we do not have. No one could pretend that we have hidden the facts. This time last year, we made it absolutely clear that we believed that street crime—robbery and snatch theft—had reached a point at which direct intervention was required, and, it has to be said, that intervention was successful. The reason that we published information in the autumn was precisely to avoid the complete untruth that was being perpetrated at the time and is being perpetrated now, namely, that the street crime initiative had failed. In March last year the main Opposition party declared it another initiative on another day, and that it was bound to be a failure, but by October, its own publication had acknowledged that it had succeeded. The reason that we published a full evaluation of the first period of the full street crime programme after six months was precisely because we had said that within six months we would reverse the trend, and that the incidences of robbery and snatch theft would fall. They have, and they are. The statistics that we published last Thursday showed a 10 per cent. drop in robbery figures. So the straight lies that were being told last week, and reiterated and perpetrated, for instance by the leader of the Conservative party on "The World at One" on Friday, when he simply lied *[Interruption.]*—

Mr. Speaker: Order. We had best have temperate language in the House. I would ask the Home Secretary to withdraw that remark. The right hon. Gentleman is a Member of this House.

Mr. Blunkett: Of course, at your request, Mr Speaker, I will.

Let me put it another way. The Leader of the official Opposition completely misunderstood and misinterpreted the statistics that had been published the day before, by declaring that all sectors of crime had gone up when the vast majority of sectors of crime had just been shown to have come down. According to the official statistics, burglary has come down by 39 per cent. since 1997, and, according to the British recorded crime survey—the largest and most highly respected such survey in the world—has come down over the previous 12 months to September by 7 per cent. Street robbery has come down, and the police are proud of their record in terms of what they have done to deal with street robbery over the past nine months. I am proud of them as well, because they have made this work. If, however, someone says that street robbery has risen when it has fallen, I presume that they have either misinterpreted the statistics, that they have a problem with numeracy, or that they are just trying to make mischief. I presume, Mr. Speaker, that that language is acceptable to the whole House.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): The Lord Chancellor said on the radio that the Home Secretary agrees with the guidance given by the Lord Chief Justice on the sentencing of burglars. Was he right to say that?

Mr. Blunkett: The Lord Chancellor was perfectly right to say that he, the Attorney-General and I had agreed with the Lord Chief Justice last March on a clear statement on sentencing, which followed the clear statement on sentencing that I made on 5 July, a month after taking over as Home Secretary and when we had the first ever national probation conference. I spelled out my intentions clearly, which were to ensure that we reduce the incidence of crime and, in particular, reoffending with the aim of cutting the number of people who go to prison through ensuring that they no longer commit crimes, rather than having the objective of sending more people to prison who then reoffend and have to be sent to prison again. I repeat that, because, in my view, it is straight common sense.

I also believe that those who commit repeat crimes should, per se, be sent to custody. The introduction of custody minus was not included in the Halliday report, but it is, I think, a proposal that has commanded support across the House. I say "I think" because a number of proposals that commanded support across the House on 4 December appear not to command the support of the whole House just over a month later, even though the official Opposition did not vote against the Criminal Justice Bill on Second Reading as they agree with a large proportion of what we are putting forward.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blunkett: Let me finish on sentencing before I let the hon. Gentleman intervene. Let us get it on the record properly.

For the first time, we set out in the legislation the objective of sentencing, which is to ensure that our streets are safer whereby those who are dangerous sexual and violent offenders are put away, and put away for longer, and action is taken when they are away to ensure that they do not reoffend if and when they come out. That is clear and I hope that anyone could agree with it. Those who have committed repeat offences—that includes committing a new offence for the first time—should expect to go to prison.

We should expect to mix prison and community sentencing in the way described in the Bill and as I described on 4 February last year at the prison governors' conference—in a new, imaginative way to avoid reoffending. We should ensure reparation to the victim. We must ensure that we tackle the scandals of the intimidation of witnesses and the delays and repeat delays that they have to put up with, which ensure that they do not want to take part in the criminal justice system. Where people have offended non-violently for the first time, we make a sensible judgment in the courts, allowing the judiciary—the magistracy and the judges—to decide whether a new range of tougher community sentences should come into play to ensure that such people have the opportunity of rehabilitation.

It seems to me that, unless we are to go down the road of spending all the money available to us through the criminal justice system on even more prison places year after year, there is no alternative but to have an incremental, stepped approach under which custody minus and custody plus play their part. I heard someone guffawing about tougher community sentences. Community sentences can be not only tough, but as effective as prison in terms of avoiding reoffending if they are rightly designed and if they involve, for instance, proper drug treatment after testing. The investment of £500 million, which we are making, over the next three years will make that real.

A party that is against increased public expenditure, that has opposed the Chancellor's investment in public services and that would have prevented us from having the new deal programme, which has taken the very young people referred to from the Front Bench by the right hon. Member for West Dorset out of unemployment and despair, has no right whatever to take us to task. We have reduced crime, reduced burglary, reduced robbery and reduced street theft and we have turned around a system in which there was no Youth Justice Board and no programme of long-term investment in reducing young people's reoffending. We have turned around young people's reoffending by 14.6 per cent. That is an official figure, which is on the record—*[Interruption.]* I am being told that no one believes official statistics. Does that have anything to do with people who believe that they are intelligent, including highly intelligent and thoughtful leader writers for *The Times,* who have written about the publication of the national crime recording standard—recently revamped by chief constables, not us, so that it is more transparent and involves more recording, for example on CCTV, as well as crimes otherwise recorded? There is more recording, of course, because there are more police to undertake recording and greater confidence that they will do something. Who would believe that a leader writer for *The Times* would be so puzzled as to suggest that publishing that recording standard alongside the British crime survey, involving a 40,000 sample, was a deliberate ploy to confuse the British people? The answer is anyone who had not read previous leaders in *The Times*—for three years, they have been pressing us to publish both figures—or anyone who had not read previous editors of *The Times,*

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such as Simon Jenkins, who pressed us to use the British crime survey rather than the national crime recording standard because it is more accurate and is not subject to the vagaries of recording methods.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Do not knock the media.

Mr. Blunkett: I am not—I am taking up the point that no one believes the figures. Is it any surprise that that is so when people who have the intelligence to know better suggest that official statistics are either confusing or fiddled?

Mr. Cash: Does the Home Secretary remember that during an interview on the "Today" programme about first-time offenders, and in the context of the agreement between the Lord Chief Justice and the Attorney-General, the Lord Chancellor used the words

"only as a last resort".

Does the Home Secretary agree with that statement?

Mr. Blunkett: For first-time offenders, I agree entirely and have just said so. I have made it absolutely clear that people who have committed non-violent offences for the first time should be considered for tough community sentences or drug rehabilitation—that is not a mixed message. The right hon. Member for West Dorset, started off by saying that I would agree with him—I do, on the importance of community policing and the role of the community. I agree with what he said on the "Today" programme in December, which was reprinted in a number of newspapers. He said that

"if we have serious community sentencing"—

an Opposition Member just guffawed when I suggested that—

"if people were engaged in things which were tough, if there was real rehabilitation for the drug addicts, then I think there is a great deal to be said for trying to distinguish between first-time burglars . . . and persistent violent criminals."

I have this on the record. Surprise, surprise, on 9 January the right hon. Gentleman had changed his mind. When Jim Naughtie quoted his own words back to him, he said that, no, he did not have much sympathy with the idea, although he went on to say that he was looking carefully and learning. He had obviously changed his mind between the third week in December—when, in a spirit of Christmas cheer, he was going to give first-time offenders a chance—and 9 January, when it was expedient not to do so. That is the truth.

Mr. Letwin: I am going to do something that the Home Secretary may or may not be surprised by. He is right: I changed my mind. Let me explain why. I started looking at what had happened to burglary, and I found that, since 1992, with more and longer custodial sentences, burglary rates, unlike those for many other crimes, really responded. That was the evidence from the Home Office's own publications. I hope that he will now join me and change his mind, too, because when the facts tell us that custodial sentences can impede burglary, we should listen.

Mr. Blunkett: There are times, I hope, when I am prepared to change my mind. Indeed, I can think of at least one in the past 18 months. However, I cannot remember changing my mind within a fortnight about something that I had said on the radio.

Mr. Bryant: Mixed messages.

Mr. Blunkett: Yes, it would be a terribly mixed message, because if the right hon. Gentleman were Home Secretary, he would have said something before Christmas and then, having heard the Lord Chief Justice, he would have thought about it, then he would have contradicted the Lord Chief Justice, who would then have had to go back to the position that he had held in the first place, before the right hon. Gentleman had had time to think about it.

Mr. Letwin: The Home Secretary has now made my case for Parliament to consider and decide on the sentencing guidelines. Had we been in a position—as I hope he will agree that, through an amendment to the Criminal Justice Bill, we need to be—to debate these matters properly instead of having to react to a comment from the Lord Chief Justice one fine morning, we could have come to a settled view after sensible democratic debate. That is one of the reasons why I have become convinced that we need to make such a change.

Mr. Blunkett: I am very pleased, because I do not disagree at all, other than to say that the suggestion about the Sentencing Guidelines Council was mine, not the right hon. Gentleman's—and it is in the Bill. I give him this pledge. I am very happy for Opposition Members in Committee to table amendments to strengthen the role of the Sentencing Guidelines Council vis-à-vis Parliament. Let us debate it, not least because, a year last July, when I talked about sentencing and we published the White Paper, I said that I would be happy for Opposition parties to make proposals on sentencing. That was part of the nationwide consultation process.

We all suffer amnesia at one point or another. In chiding me about minimum sentences for the illegal carrying of guns, the right hon. Gentleman had a little moment of amnesia, having forgotten that on 2 December, before I went into hospital, I made it clear in Home Office questions, in a reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), that we were in the process of responding to the chief constables' call for a five-year minimum sentence.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): I thank my right hon. Friend for saying again, as he did on Second Reading, that he is prepared to entertain rational, sensible change to make the Criminal Justice Bill a better Bill. That has been his position right the way through. I hope that he will allow sensible amendments not only from Opposition Members, but from his own colleagues. Many of us feel that any sentencing council should include members of the Executive, the legislature and the judiciary, and that had we had such a council, with all our political arms represented, some of the strange decisions that individual members of the

judiciary appear to have made might not have taken place. I thank my right hon. Friend again for his warm expression towards open government.

Mr. Blunkett: I shall weigh those commendatory words very carefully. I am in favour of fewer but good amendments, rather than lots of them, and the Committee will no doubt share that view.

Simon Hughes: This is a very important issue. As it happens, today I spoke to some circuit judges about how one establishes a sentencing guidelines council that reflects the community at large. Will the Home Secretary look seriously at a proposal that, unlike the current one, does not require all nominees to be nominated by the Lord Chancellor, the Lord Chief Justice or the Home Secretary? There should be some way to enable people to put their own names forward, and to enable those who do not hold high office to choose who sits on such a body. Such people should range from 18-year-olds to 80-year-olds, so that the body is really representative of the public at large.

Mr. Blunkett: I am in favour of trying to ensure that we get people on to the Sentencing Guidelines Council who reflect the wider views, age and make-up of the community whom we serve. Someone has to decide who sits on this body, and certain people—the Government—have to take responsibility for the medium and long-term consequences, including the reaction of the judiciary. We do have a separation of powers, and we walk a tightrope in terms of maintaining it. I say to the whole House that it is no good someone's being in favour of the independence of a particular sector of our balanced constitution one minute—or one fortnight—and being against it the next, when it is expedient to change their mind.

Mr. Letwin: I am grateful to the Home Secretary for giving way again—he is being very generous—as we are discussing a very important point and we are near to making progress. Our proposal is not that we should make some minor or major alterations to the Sentencing Guidelines Council, but that Parliament should take the power to set the guidelines. That is a critical distinction, which observes the independence of the judiciary—in the sense of the utter independence of an individual judge in an individual case—but gives to Parliament the right to set the guidelines. Will the Home Secretary consider that proposal?

Mr. Blunkett: I certainly would not rule it out, and for this reason. Often—although not in every single detail, and not in respect of every one of the thousands of sentencing possibilities—for major sentences the House does take that power. What Parliament expects to be done is included in legislation, and that is what we are doing in respect of the Criminal Justice Bill. We are doing that by toughening up enormously on the most dangerous violent and sexual offenders, and I expect us to do so through legislation on sex offenders and sex offences that we will bring forward shortly. So the principle of Parliament's deciding on particular aspects of sentencing is already established; however, the extent to which it could cope with the work currently undertaken by the advisory panel—in future, it will be undertaken by the Sentencing Guidelines Council—is an interesting and moot point.

I know that the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central (Hilary Benn), will want to mull over this issue before we reach the point in Committee where we have to consider how many hours are available in the day, and how many Members—on both sides of the House—would be able to spend their time on this issue. However, getting the principles right is unexceptionable, and we should do so for the sake of the British people's confidence in the criminal justice system, for the legitimacy of our democracy, and for the credibility of Parliament itself. I said all that on 4 December, when we moved the Second Reading of the Criminal Justice Bill.

Mr. Allen *rose—*

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy) *rose—*

Mr. Blunkett: I shall give way first to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd), as I have yet to do so.

Mr. Llwyd: I am much obliged to the Home Secretary, and I am listening carefully to what he has to say. A moment ago, he said that good rehabilitation is vital and he is absolutely right, but what would be his advice to sentencers in Wales, where there are fewer than 40 rehabilitation beds throughout the country?

Mr. Blunkett: We should join together in the variety of funding streams and constitutional responsibilities that lie between Westminster and the Assembly in Wales, not merely in terms of those directly engaged in rehabilitation, but—as the shadow Home Secretary correctly said—in terms of investment in drug treatment and rehabilitation. Common ground would exist there, as it would on a number of the issues that we debated on 4 December, on which we were at one.

Mr. Allen: I thank my right hon. Friend for his generosity in giving way again. Normally the House does what the Government of the day decide. If the Floor makes the decision, it will in effect be the Home Secretary who has the power to make changes to sentencing. He talks about mulling this over; I hope that he will also "mullin" it over with my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), the Chairman of the Select Committee on Home Affairs. There are ways of involving the House other than the Floor, which is often in the pocket of the Executive. Involving the Select Committee might be a way for Parliament, the Executive and the judiciary to decide on a sentencing policy that will command public support and consensus.

Mr. Blunkett: I reaffirm that I am certainly in nobody's pocket, and will remain that way for as long as possible. I remember responding to my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) on this point. I am very sympathetic to the idea of the Select Committee taking a powerful role in this area, and I think that we are moving towards a consensus.

To give the rest of the House the chance to debate this, let me deal quickly with the two central issues raised by the right hon. Member for West Dorset, the first of

[Mr. Blunkett]

which concerned community policing. It was a year ago, almost to the day, that I asked Bill Braddon, the former commissioner for police in New York, now in Los Angeles, to speak to the second of the major meetings of all chief constables and police authorities that I had called in London. Bill Braddon spelled out his view of community policing and how we need to tackle antisocial behaviour so that we send the right signals to those who would otherwise grow into organised crime and therefore violent and, eventually, gun crime. In his view, we needed to ensure that the police were on the street, that they used the variation of the comstat system being developed in a number of police authorities in Britain, and that not only should we increase police numbers, we should consider, as the New York police did, integrating different elements of policing. That is why we were in favour of community support officers.

All those things we have done. The 5,000 extra police officers whom I expect to have, over and above those we inherited, by later this year, the commitment that I have made for another 2,500 on top of the commitment for another 130,000 police officers for this time next year are not only articles of good faith but represent the reality of increased police officers available on the beat. The O'Dowd report on slimming down bureaucracy, the massive cut that we have already made in the amount of paperwork, the "Diary of a Police Officer" and the 400 examples drawn from it, which led to the O'Dowd report, are all examples of removing unnecessary paperwork and data collection. However, data collection still needs to exist. Understanding how we operate intelligence policing and the Comstat system depends on having the information in the first place. New technology, our investment in the new airwave system, people's ability to communicate adequately and quickly and forensic science all make a difference if—and this is the real issue—the chief constable and the immediate command are prepared to take on the challenge.

There is a second difficulty with people saying that they want to be independent of Government in one breath and the tools of Government in the next. The difficulty that we have with the judiciary is mirrored by the police. Everyone, it appears, wants the police to be independent of Government, particularly the Home Office. Opposition Members speak about it all the time—they reiterated it this afternoon. They want the Home Office to be hands-off. They criticise the development of a standards unit. They criticise the direction that we give in the national policing plan. They criticise prioritisation, which includes everything that has been spoken about both today and at Home Office questions and over and over in debate. They cheer when chief constables have a go, as they did when the right hon. Member for West Dorset mentioned Chris Fox, incoming chairman of the Association of Chief Police Officers. Let me quote what Chris Fox said so that we may all understand just what the position is and so that we are not total hypocrites. He said that new laws allow me to send in "hit squads", and that I have set a growing list of priorities for chiefs to concentrate on. He added:

"The police's autonomy is being eroded and it's a dangerous development . . . Any student of political history will tell you that the first thing a revolutionary state does is take hold of the police."

I have read that out only because I want to reassure the Labour party in the weeks ahead that it at last has a "revolutionary state" at its disposal.

What people really want is a police force that responds precisely to the priorities seen and felt by every Member of the House, irrespective of political party. They want antisocial behaviour to be clamped down on. They want a feeling of respect and safety on the street. They want their homes to be safe. They want the police to tackle burglary and to investigate wherever there is any evidence that can be followed up.

As it happens, that is what the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis had in mind on 2 December when, independently from the Home Office and without interference from Ministers, he prioritised after an experiment in two boroughs. In one of those boroughs, the conviction rate for burglary increased by 21 per cent. Should I interfere? Should I tell him to reissue the guidance that he sent out on 2 December? The House cannot have it both ways. It cannot be that passing legislation is interference. It cannot be that issuing guidelines, creating a national policing plan and asking local police authorities to engage with chief constables on real prioritisation on behalf of the community are all considered to be interference, while Opposition Members demand in the next breath that I introduce community policing, order police on to the streets and change the policing priorities of chief constables. They cannot have it both ways.

Nor can the Opposition have it both ways on the second of the priorities set out by the right hon. Member for West Dorset. We cannot invest in getting young people back into work through the new deal and then condemn it and say that there would not have been the funding for it. We cannot have a Youth Justice Board and then say that we would pull the money out. We cannot say that we would cut public spending, then demand more and more public spending, including £500 million on top of what we have announced, which, before Christmas, the right hon. Gentleman said he would invest in drug treatment. I do not know where he is going to get that money.

Mr. Letwin: Not on top, but instead of.

Mr. Blunkett: Instead of what?

Mr. Letwin *rose—*

Mr. Blunkett: Does the right hon. Gentleman mean that we should go back to having fewer police, as was happening in 1997 when we came into office? There were no community support officers, street wardens had been condemned, there was lower investment in probation in the community and less investment in prisons. That is what was happening. We will have 3,500 more prison places on stream by the end of this year than we did last spring when it was announced in the Budget that we had

extra money. All that has cost us, but it would cost the public dear if we did not do it. Let us stop the hypocrisy—

Mr. Letwin: Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mr. Blunkett: Well done. That was just like Sheffield Wednesday on Saturday afternoon in that the right hon. Gentleman almost got me offside.

Mr. Letwin: I am delighted. Before the right hon. Gentleman works himself up into too much of a lather, let me tell him that I shall argue in the next debate this evening that the Government's spending on getting people into contact with about 236,000 treatment agencies is heavily misconceived. That money should be used in the way that we have described. That would happen to cost less rather than more, and we would be able to spend even more than we want to without exceeding the right hon. Gentleman's budget for drugs.

Mr. Blunkett: I am just as cheered by that intervention as I was on Saturday afternoon when Sheffield Wednesday was losing 2-0 but won 3-2, with a brilliant goal to put us into the lead.

The right hon. Gentleman has not taken us any further forward so my diatribe will continue: more police; more community support officers; more street wardens; more prison places; more investment in probation; the Youth Justice Board doing the job we asked of it; and above all a changing culture and climate. That change involves parents and families and a different atmosphere in schools; it involves hope for young people, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, spelled out today with reference to the "splash" schemes that we introduced last summer and our investment in prevention and diversion.

We are ensuring that there is an understanding between the Government and the independent judiciary and that the messages are clear and that they really count: if people commit violent, dangerous sexual offences, are repeat offenders, cause havoc or fail to avoid reoffending, they will go to prison. First-time offenders will be given a chance, which will be backed up by support to repair the damage so that they can put themselves on the straight and narrow.

We want to get the message across: tough where we have to be and common sense where it is needed. We need a stop to the contradictions and, yes, the sneering coming from the Opposition. We need to get rid of hypocrisy and in its place send everyone the clear message that we are getting tough on crime, and that we will not get knocked off course by silly suggestions that thought-through policies are knee-jerk reactions because someone has not read about them in *Hansard* or has not checked their computer to find out what was said. The policies are sensible and address the needs of the British people so that there will be a reduction in crime and common sense will prevail.

4.46 pm

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): Following last week's publication of the recent crime figures, a debate on the criminal justice system and law and order is especially timely. To that extent, I welcome the debate initiated by the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) and his colleagues.

Despite some positive long-term trends, it is clear to us all that crime is a hugely unwelcome feature of everyday life throughout Britain. Statistics published last week show that one person in four was a victim of crime last year—an unacceptably high level.

I want my remarks to be fair, so I must say that the Government have done some good things—but they have not done enough to reassure the public that problems are being brought under control and that crime is going down. The statistics are abundantly clear: the public are not persuaded that we are moving in the right direction. The result, sadly, is that people are losing faith in both the police and the criminal justice system. The hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen), who, like me, is a member of the Standing Committee on the Criminal Justice Bill, regularly makes the point that we are all trying to restore faith in the twin pillars of a civilised society: the belief that the police can and will do their job properly and that, thereafter, the criminal justice system will do its job properly; both might be trying hard, but at present they are not succeeding.

In our view, which we share with the Conservative Opposition, one of the problems is that the Government keep trying to tinker with the system. There have been hundreds of targets and hundreds of headline-grabbing initiatives, but they do not amount to a coherent strategy. There have been too many instances of the Government manipulating the figures to try to make things sound the way they want them to sound. I gave the Home Secretary an example of that when, in respect of something that happened only three months ago, I referred to the remarks of the chairman of the Statistics Commission.

After this debate, I hope that we shall achieve a better consensus, based on independently produced facts and figures. I pointed out to the previous Home Secretary, now the Foreign Secretary, who was keen that we should agree on such things, that if we could reach agreement on the statistics and the evidence about what does or does not work, we would make huge progress. I hope that that is the wish of the Government and I commend the work of Home Office research, development and statistics directorate. If everyone read its work rather than the front page of the tabloids, we should make much more progress.

Policies must be seen to be fair to all people in society, because the poorest often suffer the most. The most deprived areas may suffer from the most crime, but they also have the most victims. Our police service must be much more effective at deterring and catching criminals. The clear-up rate is one in four across the country and one in eight in London, so the statistical odds for those who want to try crime are pretty good and they offer a high incentive to do so.

We need an effective sentencing system. If someone asked me to give a quote or a soundbite, I would replace the soundbite that the Prime Minister used when he was shadow Home Secretary—"tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime"—with "effective on crime, effective on the causes of crime", because sometimes what sounds

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simplistically tough may not be nearly as effective as something that initially does not sound effective but proves to be so in practice.

Mr. Allen: Achieving consensus on which statistics are accurate or even on the need for some new form of sentencing, whatever form the Sentencing Guidelines Council takes, might be classic territory for pre-legislative scrutiny. Instead of hurrying Bills into Committee, as it is apparently necessary to do, it would be better to have at least four, five, six, seven or eight weeks during which we could determine some of the core issues without partisanship. Surely that would be a better way to proceed than the sometimes rather sterile, lawyerly debates that we have in Committee.

Simon Hughes: I agree. To their credit, the Government asked Mr. Halliday to review sentencing and Lord Justice Auld to review the criminal justice process, after which they published a White Paper. I compliment them on the fact that there has been much pre-legislative activity, but it would have been better if there had been pre-legislative scrutiny as well.

Another suggestion is that bodies such as the Select Committee on Home Affairs could nominate people to the Sentencing Guidelines Council, thereby ensuring cross-party agreement. That would command more confidence than the current proposal. However much the Home Secretary does such things on the best evidence available, by definition they are perceived as being done by a party office holder, and I am sure that we could do better than that.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): Is it not the case that parts of the Criminal Justice Bill have not been scrutinised in Committee because the Government's timetable fails to make enough time available? In fact, far from having pre-legislative scrutiny, we are enacting legislation that will not have been adequately scrutinised by a perfectly co-operative Standing Committee.

Simon Hughes: The hon. Gentleman will know that I agree with him about that. I see the Committee Whip on the Treasury Bench, and it is not at all his fault; he has been entirely co-operative and reasonable. We are constrained, and since the election the Home Office's legislative programme has been the greatest victim of such constraints. Bill after Bill has not been fully debated in the House of Commons. Additional amendments have been tabled in this House or the House of Lords, and large parts of Bills have not been debated at all. Whatever we think about the policies, that is clearly an absolutely crass way to legislate on issues of law and order, liberty and freedom, which matter to all of us and to all those whom we represent.

I wish to mention one other general matter. Whether we are talking about the big villains or the little villains, we should not tolerate a lawless society. Violence must be met with a presumption of custody, as I have said at my party's conference and in other places.

I would add three other categories for which the presumption should be custody. Those who drive in such a way that they risk and sometimes cause injury or death should expect to go away. Many families are victims of so-called road accidents that are actually not accidents at all; they involve intentional or reckless activity by drivers. Those involved in child pornography should expect to go away, because it is such an abuse of innocence and childhood. Those who interfere with the course of justice should also expect to go away, so that everybody knows the score. I would include in the violence category those who burgle residential property when they know that there is somebody in the property or that there is a risk that somebody is in the property. For me, that crosses the line between something that does not personally affect or threaten somebody psychologically, mentally or physically, and something that does.

Mr. Cameron: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Simon Hughes: No.

This is a difficult area, and it has been the subject of great debate recently. There are differences. I accept the attempts being made to make sure that the first-time burglar does not go to prison on that occasion, and I shall explain why that would be the wrong course. When somebody enters a property and frightens an elderly lady out of her wits, however, the egg-shell skull principle, as it used to be called in civil law, should apply: one must take a place as one finds it. If there are kids, people on their own, elderly or vulnerable people, the offender must expect the courts to punish him. That is why I am sympathetic to the constituency case raised by the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham), which was reported in *The Sunday Times*, where an offender was returned to live three doors from the person whose house he had burgled. The courts should have taken that into account: it is improper for the victim of a first-time burglar to feel that that person is at liberty, three doors away, having been into their house only a few months previously.

Mr. Allen: I thank the hon. Gentleman for being generous in giving way to me for a second time. One of the comments that we hear most when we are in our constituencies is that a sentence does not mean what is stated when it is passed. Does the hon. Gentleman feel that, in respect of the offences that he has listed or others that the Government may care to add, standard sentences should be set out in a schedule to the Bill that is being considered Upstairs? Everybody would therefore know exactly what the sentence would be in a normal case, and that information would be available in one place. Would he propose that to the Government, along with me?

Simon Hughes: There are several things with which I hope the hon. Gentleman would agree. First, we must get all the legislation in one place so that it can be seen and read easily. At the moment, we struggle with amending Bills, and it is difficult to find things, which is unhelpful. Secondly, a penal code would be helpful—which, to his credit, the Home Secretary favours and which I support, as he has heard me say. I am in favour of there being easy access to information on what the maximum sentence should be for each crime, and to what the guidelines say that the sentence should be. I support both those proposals.

I am clear, however, as Liberal Democrats have always been clear, that there should never be mandatory sentences. We have argued against such sentences for murder and in respect of lesser crimes. In the case of murder, there is all the difference in the world between somebody who plans to go out and shoot somebody with whom they have had a row the previous day and somebody who kills their husband after 30 years of domestic violence. It is entirely inappropriate to have the same automatic starting sentence for those two incidents.

Offenders who do not use violence, however, should expect that a custodial sentence would not be the presumption. I agree with the Home Secretary that we must guard against going down the road of arguing for prison to be the answer to a whole list of offences, especially non-violent ones. For those offences, the option should be supervision and treatment in the community wherever possible. To pick up the point of the hon. Member for Nottingham, North—this is why the Halliday reforms are welcome—we should have a sentencing system in which the first half of a custodial sentence is served inside, but the second half, which is equally part of the sentence, is served outside, as the Government, to their credit, are proposing, by and large, in their sentencing reforms. What has been hopeless in the past is that people have thought that their sentence finished the moment they came out through the prison door, but the reality is that, without support, supervision, probation, drug treatment or alcohol treatment they have started to reoffend. The sentence should continue for an equal period, or at least a significant period, outside as well as inside prison. That should be part of the sentence, and the offender should know that. If he reoffends in that period, he should expect to go back to court to be dealt with.

My final general point relates to an issue that has been debated a great deal since the terrible killing of two young women on new year's eve in your part of the world, Madam Deputy Speaker. Those who carry knives or guns should absolutely expect to go away. Society has gone down the road so that people fuelled by drink or drugs often think that it is acceptable to carry such weapons. Ten years ago, they would have carried knives, but now it is more likely that they will carry guns. It is never acceptable to carry such weapons. There is a difference, however, between a 16-year-old who is given a gun to hold for 10 seconds while his cousin goes into a shop to pick up a newspaper and the 21-year-old who goes out carrying a machine gun as part of a gang. We must distinguish between the two, but the presumption should be that anyone who goes out armed and who is caught will lose his liberty.

The messages must be clear. Anyone who is caught carrying a gun or a knife can expect to lose his liberty. Burglars who terrorise or intimidate people in their own homes should not expect to escape custody either. If we get the measures for such crimes right, dealing with low-level disorder will follow. We will be able to start work on the causes of criminal misbehaviour. As the right hon. Member for West Dorset rightly said, and as experience in New York and other places has shown, criminal behaviour often starts with children of five, six, seven or eight who live in disordered homes with bad parenting and no appropriate discipline at home.

The test is whether the punishments are effective. Sometimes the better punishment is to provide an alternative that offers a good option for lawful activity. That does not necessarily mean locking someone up or treating him in a disciplinary fashion. Other options can be effective in dealing with crime and with the causes of crime if they are used to deal with people who are young when they start their criminal behaviour. We must send clear messages, but I fear that the messages sent in the past few months have been unclear. However, I believe that we could deal with that problem.

Mr. Letwin: The hon. Gentleman knows that there is considerable agreement between us on these matters, but has he considered the statistics that have persuaded me? Burglary is a premeditated crime and the statistics show that the imposition of custodial sentences appears to have had a very significant downward effect on the incidence of burglary as reported in the British crime survey figures and in the reported crime figures for burglary. How does he deal with that point?

Simon Hughes: I have considered those statistics and I accept that point. Interesting articles appeared in the press this weekend. For example, an article in *The Sunday Times* by Minette Marrin went through many alternative statistics on what works and what does not. It quoted a set of statistics that suggested that alternatives to custody had a higher success rate than custody. However, other statistics suggest that that is not the case and that the different options have a similar success or failure rate. I accept that there are different rates of success depending on the offence and on whether the alternative to custody was attached to drugs or alcohol treatment, but if we had a clearer idea about what works we would be able to make progress.

I agree with the Home Secretary that we should criticise those who misrepresent the position. I share his view that, last week, the Leader of the Conservative Opposition and, surprisingly but to a lesser extent, his shadow Home Secretary appeared to get so carried away with the thought that this was a good issue for them that they misrepresented the facts. I do not often criticise the Conservative shadow Home Secretary as he is normally meticulous in his approach to these issues, but my one criticism of him today is that he appeared to show total amnesia when he described the figures published last Thursday as truly terrible. It was a total misrepresentation of the figures that have just been produced independently.

I am not here to sell other people's products, but I commend the Home Office's statistical bulletin, which clearly sets out the trends. For example, it shows that domestic burglary reached its peak in 1994 and has since gone down or steadied and has not gone up again. For the Conservative motion to claim that the number of burglaries is going up flies completely in the face of the evidence in the bulletin.

Mr. Letwin: But it is.

Simon Hughes: Not according to the evidence. The right hon. Gentleman and I are not statisticians, but the figures are clear. All that has happened is that the recorded crime figures show a recent increase, but the British crime survey figures, which are more respected,

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show a decrease. I refer the right hon. Gentleman to page 6 of last week's document. He quoted from another part of it, so presumably we agree that the document is authentic.

Mr. Letwin: Of course I agree that the document is authentic, including page 10, from which I quoted. The problem is that the British crime survey is woefully deficient in two significant respects because it fails to deal with retail crime and multiple occupation. As a result, it does not tell us the same story as the reported crime figures, other than on a broad-brush scale over a long period. Is not it clear that even after the adjustments for the new reporting system, the reported crime statistics show a significant increase over the past year in domestic burglary and other burglaries?

Simon Hughes: I am keen to go outside and pore over the documents. I am willing to go by the work carried out by people who produce statistics independently on a regular basis. A big effort has been made to ensure that the statistics are more reliable and produced more frequently. If we want to reassure the public, it is better to concentrate on crimes, such as firearms crime, about which there can be no argument that they have increased. We should not frighten people about crimes, such as vehicle crime, if the evidence clearly shows that the trend is in the other direction.

The right hon. Gentleman's party has an ongoing problem. Violent crime increased every year when it was in government. There were 2.5 million recorded crimes in 1979. That rose to 4.5 million in 1997, an increase of 81 per cent. The figure peaked at 5.5 million when the Conservatives were in government. In addition, the number of police officers, which had increased, decreased in their last five years in office, contrary to their promises. There were 469 fewer police officers in that period although the Government promised 5,000 more. In London, part of which I represent, there were 1,269 fewer officers. The number of convictions also fell from 1.8 million in 1979 to 1.4 million in 1996. In 1985, there was one conviction for every eight crimes; by 1997, there was only one conviction for every 14 crimes.

The right hon. Gentleman will try to reinvent his party's policy on law and order, as he should do, but its record in office shows that it presided over an increasingly lawless society. In its last five years in government, police numbers decreased and crime increased, so he does not stand against the background of an effective alternative record when we judge his party's time in office. That is not his fault and I do not blame him personally, but the electorate need to take it into account. When they criticise the Government, which I am happy to do when they get it wrong, they also need to ensure that they do not forget what happened in those 18 years when the Conservatives got it badly wrong.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling): I am pleased to say that the number of police officers in Nottinghamshire increased by 10 per cent. in the past three years. On statistics, however, does the hon. Gentleman agree that they are most effective when considered on a local basis? We need to make local statistics more easily available to local communities so that they can judge the effectiveness of the police or the crime prevention strategies in their communities. Surely the way to make communities more confident is to enable them to see the statistics for their own area.

Simon Hughes: Absolutely. My local police force could tell the hon. Gentleman that one of my beefs is that I perpetually say that it is no good merely producing statistics for the past quarter. It has to compare those with the previous quarter, last year and statistics for surrounding areas; otherwise they are meaningless. I have never understood why it is so difficult for the police to produce comparable statistics on a local basis. I simply cannot understand it. It is a great failing that, in the age of the computer, statistics and technology, comparable statistics cannot regularly be produced.

My final points will, I hope, be encouraging. The Opposition may try to exploit statistics, but the reality is that although crime is far too high, overall crime has been falling since 1995, and violent crime has fallen in some years since then. It is troubling that there was, as the Home Secretary well knows, a huge increase in robberies between 1997 and 2001, and the most troubling statistics are those for reported firearms-related crimes, which is why the Government are right to act, although I am critical of the sequence of their actions.

In 2001–02, firearms were used in 10,000 recorded crimes—a rise of 35 per cent. Airguns were used in more than 12,000 crimes, which is a rise of 21 per cent., and handguns were used in nearly 6,000 crimes, which is a rise of 46 per cent. We have to deal with knives and guns, but people are now terrified by guns, either because of an encounter with one or because of the fear of an encounter. That is partly why the figures show that so many adults, 35 per cent., believe that crime has increased a lot, and 34 per cent. believe that it has increased a little. Locally, they do not see sufficient police officers, and they do not yet see sufficient numbers of other people, such as neighbourhood wardens and community support officers, doing a policing job, so they do not yet feel that the system has law and order under control.

Vernon Coaker *rose—*

Simon Hughes: If the hon. Gentleman will bear with me, I will continue; otherwise I will never get to the end of my speech and he will not have his chance to speak.

When MORI, a perfectly reputable opinion polling company—it is based in my constituency, so I would probably have had to say that anyway—did its two-yearly survey of my borough, it asked people what they were most concerned about. The poll went through all the usual crimes, beginning with low-level antisocial behaviour, and asked people about their responses and planned reactions to those crimes. One problem, which is now apparent to us all, is that the public have lost confidence in the system's ability to deliver. When asked why they had not reported a crime to the police, 50 per cent. of people said that there was no chance of catching the criminals.

Until we make the public believe that reporting a crime to the police will deliver a result, they will not have confidence that the criminal justice system works.

I accept what the Met say they have done, although they have not done what they are represented as having done, but if somebody's home is burgled, a police officer should attend. The least that people can expect is that their home will be subject to proper policing and police support and advice. To send out someone who is not a police officer, or to send nobody, strikes me as an unacceptable response.

Having made it clear that statistics must be true, I have also, I hope, made it clear that it is for Parliament to set maximum sentences but not specific sentences. Judges should do that, and just as judges must be autonomous if we are to have confidence in the judiciary, so the police must be autonomous. I share the Home Secretary's view expressed today on that, which is why Liberal Democrat Members have fought to resist Home Secretaries' interference with police authorities, commissioners and chief constables. There should be different responses in different places. What may work in Nottinghamshire, South Yorkshire or Dorset, may not work for the Met, and we have to allow the police to respond to their local community. Judges may be criticised, but in my experience politicians command less respect than judges, and if we tried to usurp their role, we would be in trouble.

I turn now to an idea in which I believe the Home Secretary will be interested, although I understand the personal difficulties in pursuing it. One reason that our justice system is dysfunctional is that we have three Departments running it—the Home Office, the Lord Chancellor's Department and the Law Officers Department. My party has long argued that we ought to follow the model of other countries and have a Ministry of Justice with a Secretary of State or Minister responsible, in the House of Commons, to elected representatives. There would then be a considerable chance of achieving a more co-ordinated set of policies, and we would not hear the Lord Chancellor saying something on the radio one day, followed by a Home Office Minister saying something different the next.

I have argued that we must not have mandatory sentences. I think that they are wrong in all circumstances, but I hope that I have been clear in saying that we should debate the guidelines. I have also argued that we should very clear about the presumption of what should happen regarding gun use and about the sort of burglaries in respect of which people should expect to lose their liberty. However, the real danger of the war cry of the tabloids is that they are increasingly calling for prison for everything. Prison is the last card that can be played in the criminal justice system; there is no other. Once somebody has gone to prison, no bigger penalty can be used. When that card has been played, by definition, it loses its strength and efficacy.

Alternatives can work. In Committee, the Solicitor-General has been proposing conditional cautions, with support from the Opposition parties, as an additional weapon in the armoury at the bottom of the scale of punishment. Where there are enough officers to do the job, the probation service is often very good at ensuring that alternatives work in the community. Earlier today, I was at Snaresbrook Crown court, which is the largest such court in England and Wales. The resident judge told me that Snaresbrook regularly has one probation officer for its 18, 19 or 20 courts. One day recently, however, it had no probation officer at all. If the Government do not proceed more quickly with the Chancellor's help to beef up the probation service, all the outside prison work will be at risk of being highly ineffective, instead of much more effective.

I should like publicly to commend the Youth Justice Board. The Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport are right to draw attention to the programmes that it has been running in my constituency and elsewhere, which can divert energetic young people from criminal activity in the holidays and include all sorts of alternative activities that young people can do well, whether they involve drama, music or sport. We need more of those diversionary activities throughout the country.

As Mr. Giuliani said in New York, one can make a difference, and a difference was made there. However, that requires more police, and I hope that the Home Secretary is now big enough to admit that one of the biggest mistakes that the Labour Government made after their election in 1997 was not to increase police numbers from the beginning. It is not only me who is saying that. The "Narrowing the Justice Gap" document produced by the Government states in very small print, under the title "Recent performance in bringing offences to justice",

> "Because there are so many points in the criminal justice system where a justice gap may occur, when performance gets worse, it can be difficult to pinpoint exactly why that has happened. The fall in police numbers in 1999–2000, which the Government has now reversed, is likely to account for at least part of the widening of the gap."

I commend the Home Secretary for having record police numbers, which need to increase further, as he knows. However, it was a big mistake—it was not made under his stewardship of the Home Office—to let them decrease for the first three and half years of Labour government. If they had not done so, not nearly so many offences would have been committed and there would not be so much worry about crime.

Vernon Coaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way again. He is right to point to the welcome increase in police numbers and the fact that that should put more police on the street. Does he agree that we could consider how many extra police are on the street in relation to particular police forces? One police service with 2,000 officers might get 1,600 of them on to the street, while another with the same number might get 1,300 on to the street. Should not we consider that difference in performance and tell people how many operational officers they have got, as well as how many police officers?

Simon Hughes: Absolutely. Like the hon. Gentleman, all my hon. Friends with all their different police forces know that we need auditing, comparisons and the sharing of best practice. The reality is that merely having more police does not deliver results. It is what they do that counts. I have suggested, including to the Police Federation—it did not like my doing so—that civilians should be allowed to do any jobs that they are capable of doing. That could even include taking witness statements. Volunteers can work on the desk in a police station during the night. As I discovered when I stopped in Exeter once, a volunteer was perfectly able to do the job and could call a police officer if that were needed.

[Simon Hughes]

Lots of jobs can be done in such a way. It is a question not only of more numbers, but of more numbers and more effective use.

I am proud that we had an early neighbourhood warden scheme in Bermondsey. It has been in operation for a year and a bit and has been hugely effective in reducing graffiti, vandalism, antisocial behaviour, environmental damage and racist attacks. Members of the scheme have been able to do the work on the ground, thus releasing the police for other activities. That means that we are more effective across the board. Although I have argued about powers, I have always supported the family of the police.

It is important that we do not change Ministers every two seconds and I therefore hope that the Home Secretary remains in post for the remainder of the Government's term of office. *[Interruption.]* I am serious about that. We need continuity.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): We do not say the same about the Lord Chancellor.

Simon Hughes: That comment does not need to be made more than once. But I ask the Home Secretary not to believe that an initiative a day keeps the criminal away. It does not. I hope that he will ensure that we aim for medium and long-term solutions, not short-term quick fixes. If the Prime Minister draws up an idea on the back of an envelope to catch people on a Friday night outside the pub, and delivers it in a lecture to academics in Tübingen, I hope that the Home Secretary ensures that it is examined, piloted and tested before it becomes policy—

Mr. Cameron: And is subsequently ignored.

Simon Hughes: Indeed. If we had half the schemes and they were twice as effective, we would have done better than the record of the past four years shows. Labour Members and people outside share that view with Liberal Democrat Members.

I hope that we can agree about statistics because we must take on the media distortion. I hope that we can agree about what works—that would be productive. I also hope that we can agree about good alternatives to custody and give them the necessary resources. I hope that we all realise that if young people get constructive things to do from their primary school, and if there are more male teachers, mentoring, good role models and much more sport, they have a much better chance of a productive life.

My colleagues and I are not going to subscribe to talking up the crisis. The Conservative party is trying desperately to rescue itself and it therefore wants to make matters sound worse than they are. However, the weekend poll shows that eight out of 10 members of the public do not believe that the Government have law and order or crime under control. I hope that, from now on, the Government will lead the debate and therefore the media rather than following the media. There is a danger of government by headline; that is not the way to reduce crime.

5.22 pm

Ross Cranston (Dudley, North): My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has no case to answer on the motion. I commend the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) for his dispassionate approach to the problem in his 36 minutes. I hope to adopt the same approach in my 10 minutes.

Let me begin by dealing with the figures because the Opposition tabled their motion on that basis. The recorded crime figures involve what the police set down about crimes. Any first year criminology student can say that that depends on the way in which the figures are recorded and the recorders' behaviour. For example, it depends on whether control staff deal with calls in a specific way, the behaviour of the police and the public. The number of victims with insurance policies might drive up the reporting rate.

The new national crime recording standard, which was introduced in April last year, tries to take a more objective view. It adopts a prima facie approach to reports from the public and takes what a person reports at face value even if there is no sound evidence that an offence has occurred. None the less, grave problems are attached to recorded crimes. Page 342 of the most recent edition of the "British Handbook of Criminology" states that

"variations in recording practices can have such a great effect on the totals produced as to render 'face value' comparisons almost meaningless."

As I said, the recorded crime figures have been used by the Opposition. There is no doubt that the figures for the 12 months until September 2002 show a 9 per cent. increase on those of the preceding 12 months, although when the changes introduced by the national crime recording standard are taken into account the increase is only 2 per cent. The figures for the quarter between July and September 2002 show a 1 per cent. fall if the NCRS changes introduced in April 2002 are taken into account.

As the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey pointed out, the British crime survey involves asking people what crime they have experienced. I accept the shadow Home Secretary's point that that will not always represent all crime experienced—it may not take account of commercial burglary, for instance—but the important aspect is the 7 per cent. drop in all crime during the 12 months to September 2002. The BCS figures also show a 2 per cent. drop in violent crime, a 7 per cent. drop in domestic burglary and a 14 per cent. drop in vehicle theft. That is very good news. Nevertheless, even those figures show problems.

As my time is limited, I will concentrate on firearms offences, especially in the light of the tragic deaths of Charlene Ellis and Letisha Shakespeare in the west midlands conurbation. Fortunately my constituency does not experience gun crime, but—like your constituency, Madam Deputy Speaker—it is part of that conurbation, and it is worrying that those tragic deaths occurred in our region.

According to the figures I have, firearms, excluding air weapons, were used in 9,974 recorded offences, an increase of 35 per cent. on the previous year. In 24 per cent. of those offences, the firearm was fired. Those statistics should be seen in perspective, and should be

compared with what happens in other jurisdictions. The number of firearms deaths per 100,000 of the population varies from 26.6 in South Africa to 6.2 in the United States, 0.4 in Australia and 0.13 in the United Kingdom—although that last figure must be adjusted in the light of last week's figures.

I have acknowledged that the total number of firearms offences has risen in each of the past four years, although I should point out to the Conservatives that the current figures are only slightly higher than an earlier peak in 1993. 100 deaths and 558 serious injuries in crimes involving firearms represents a serious problem. The deputy chief constable of the west midlands struck the right note the other day when he said, according to the *Birmingham Post*,

"Gun crime is increasing in many city areas and although it is still relatively rare, accounting for less than one per cent of all crime, it has devastating consequences . . . People are less likely to become the victim of crime in the West Midlands than they were last year or indeed for many years"

I want to talk about three factors. The first is the guns themselves. We banned handguns, which obviously has not worked. According to a National Criminal Intelligence Service report picked up by some of the newspapers, many of the guns are coming from eastern Europe. Many are made in small back-street factories in Bulgaria, Croatia and Slovenia, and some have been bought on the internet.

There is also the problem of replica firearms. Hon. Members will have read that the Manchester police recently seized nearly 1,800 replicas in a raid on three Manchester shops. The guns had been imported mainly from Italy. They fired blanks but could readily be adapted to shoot real bullets. There is also a problem of illegal firearms coming into the country through the post. Customs and Excise has found weapons hidden in parcels from a range of countries. Most are concealed alongside drugs. I welcome the measures taken by the Government to address the problem of guns. The national forensic firearms intelligence database will enable the Forensic Science Service to track the provenance of guns and ammunition more effectively, and there is also the possibility of an amnesty. We must, however, address the problem of guns getting into the country and being sold either by rogue dealers or through the internet.

Who is using the weapons? Last week, I appeared on a media programme with a community activist in south London, Charles Bailey, who is also a producer of rap music. Charles explained to me that there had been an influx of people coming from Jamaica over the last 10 years, and that

"a certain element of them are a criminal element and they've seen us as soft targets."

His explanation was that, whereas in the past local criminals might have targeted banks or building societies, they are now targeting drug dealers, because drug dealers have cash. So the dealers arm themselves and those committing an offence by trying to get money from them are arming themselves as well. The shadow Home Secretary rightly pointed out the other day that the drug culture is an important contributory factor in the gun culture, so we also have to address the problem of drugs.

My third point relates to culture. There has been some discussion about violent video and computer games, and about rap music. I do not want to make a point about how they might contribute to the gun culture, but rap music can be used, as Charles Bailey explained to me, to counter the gun culture among young people. He is working with local authorities round the country to try to get young people away from the notion that violence is a good thing. I would commend to my hon. Friend the Minister Charles's latest rap CD, "Don't Shoot!". The Home Secretary will be as agitated as he was when he returned from Sheffield Wednesday's performance at the weekend when he listens to it, but I commend efforts such as this, in which young people can get the message that the violence associated with weapons is not a good thing.

In conclusion, I agree that crime is a major social problem. Freedom from crime and from the fear of crime is as important for our constituents as improving standards in our schools and in the national health service. The figures demonstrate, however, that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and the Government are doing a good job, and the assertions in the Opposition motion are largely fantasy.

5.34 pm

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): I agree with earlier remarks that the sooner the criminal law is codified, the sooner we will stop having these debates, because it will be so much easier for the Home Secretary of the day to understand what the law is, without having to leap unadvised, or ill-advisedly, on to the media.

I do not want to spoil the very good speech made by my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), but I urge some caution on him in relation to sentencing guidelines. It seems to me from my experience—I sit as a Crown court recorder, although my practice as a barrister is entirely in the civil sphere—that the flexibility given to the guidelines by having them designed or promulgated by the Court of Appeal is far greater than that which would be achieved by having them set by the House of Commons.

Parliament is usually several years out of date when it comes to discuss any particular criminal justice problem. It may be that we have a difference of language and that my right hon. Friend is not proposing that the House of Commons should play quite the same role as the Court of Appeal, criminal division. Anyhow, I urge a little caution there.

Mr. Bellingham: Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that burglary sentencing was going quite well and that it was unnecessary for the Lord Chief Justice and the Lord Chancellor to intervene?

Mr. Garnier: That involves two different problems. I do not know whether my hon. Friend has read the judgment issued just before Christmas by the Lord Chief Justice in the two cases that have caused the controversy, but it is well worth reading.

Mr. Bellingham: I shall read it.

Mr. Garnier: I am sure that my hon. Friend, as an assiduous studier of these matters, will rush to the Library and do so.

The recent shootings in Birmingham have brought once again to public focus a particular aspect of the criminal justice system—namely, gun crime. It is right

[Mr. Garnier]

that we are turning our attention to it once again in the House, although I am not sure, as other speakers have suggested, that the Government's response to those shootings has been thought through coherently.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset said, the Government are notorious for their love of a good headline. Indeed, the Prime Minister desperately pleaded with his staff in the last Parliament to find him eye-catching initiatives with which he could be personally associated. Lately, he has had to contend with an eye-catching Lord Chancellor and a Lord Chief Justice—two figures at the very top of the judicial tree who are not quite so adept at anticipating the consequences of interviews with the press as he would like.

The Prime Minister, of course, wants to be seen as leading a Government who are tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime; one of his glibber little phrases that was so pleasing to the eye and the ear when invented and first spoken, but which has returned to haunt him again and again as the public have come to realise that he and his Ministers have done nothing of substance to make this a safer country to live in.

The Government have promised much and delivered little in a vast swathe of public policy areas, but in the sphere of criminal justice that criticism is particularly accurate. Much of their failure has been entirely of their own making. We have a Home Secretary who celebrates his antipathy to judges and lawyers—the very people who work hard to make the criminal justice system work—and we know that he is a reasonably canny operator who never says anything without having first worked out whether it will resonate well with his chosen audience.

That is all, I suppose, the stuff of politics and one should neither be too surprised nor too precious about the approach of the Home Secretary or of the entire Government to public discussion of their failures, but I sometimes think that they would not be in such a muddle if the Government had occasionally thought before putting their spin machine into operation. The desire to fill the available air time or newspaper page has led them to believe that the announcement is the answer and that the soundbite is the substance.

To identify a target is to hit it in the bull's-eye, so we had last week two conflicting messages and a lot of tongue-tied and confused junior Ministers trying to reconcile the irreconcilable. We must have tough new minimum sentences for gun crime, but we must not send burglars to prison.

May I deal briefly with the second of those two issues? All criminal sentencing is based on both the offence and the offender. The first-time defendant is likely to receive a lesser sentence than a defendant on a similar charge who is back for his third or fourth offence. First-time burglars, be they burglars of domestic or business premises, are not sent to prison if at all possible because sentencers realise that jail is not always the answer to the defendant's problems, albeit that prison is likely where the victim would like him to go.

The Lord Chancellor's remarks on the "Today" programme were, frankly, fatuous and an object lesson in that it is better to say nothing if one has nothing sensible to say. Repeat, professional burglars must go to prison, because, to put it at its lowest, they are a public nuisance. If there are insufficient prison places, the Government must provide more temporary or permanent ones. They should not go on the radio to tell the public that their concerns about burglary and its consequences for the home owner and his family are exaggerated or misplaced.

As for the five-year minimum sentence for gun criminals, yet again I fear that the Home Secretary said what he thought would go down well in a saloon bar, but failed to recognise what is already happening in the courts. It is hardly surprising that he has had to step back. Had he taken the trouble to find out what the courts are already doing he might not be in the mess in which he now finds himself. The offences and the penalties associated with them are set out in the Firearms Act 1968, the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1994 and the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. The existing penalties range from non-custodial sentences to life imprisonment and, in appropriate cases, the courts have imposed lengthy prison terms.

However, the number of years' penalty determined by statute does not deter the criminal. By and large, if he thinks about the long-term consequences of his actions at all, he does not believe that he will ever be caught. Announcing new minimum sentences merely makes the politicians think that they are doing something positive, whereas what is needed is a vastly better resourced and increased police force, Customs and Excise service and intelligence service, and far greater co-operation between our drugs and gun-crime teams and those overseas. If £1 million is spent on diverting drug-crop farmers in south America or Asia, that is far more productive than spending the equivalent sum on the criminal justice system here to deal with the gangs, the guns and the dealers.

However, that is not to underestimate the problem that we face. The unlawful possession and use of firearms has long been recognised as a grave source of danger to society. The reasons are obvious—firearms may be used to take life, cause serious injury or further the commission of other serious crimes. Often the victims are those charged with enforcing the law or the protection of persons or property. In conflicts between competing criminal gangs, often related to the supply of drugs, the use and possession of firearms provoke an escalating spiral of violence. When imitation firearms are used, the risk to life and limb is absent, but those weapons are often used to frighten and intimidate victims to reinforce unlawful demands. It is often hard to distinguish them from the real thing—for practical purposes, it is impossible in the circumstances in which they are used. Victims are usually as frightened and intimidated as they would be if genuine firearms had been used, and are often isolated and vulnerable. Sometimes, genuine firearms are disabled and cannot be fired, or cannot be fired for want of ammunition. In those cases, the risk to life and limb is again absent, but the use of the weapon to frighten or intimidate remains, and it may be used in earnest on another occasion.

The appropriate sentence for a firearms offence, as for any other offence, depends on all the facts and circumstances relevant to the offence and the offender. It will, however, usually be appropriate for the sentencing court to ask a series of questions. First, what sort of

weapon is involved? Genuine firearms are more dangerous than imitation ones; loaded firearms are more dangerous than unloaded ones; unloaded firearms for which ammunition is available are more dangerous than firearms for which no ammunition is available. Possession of a firearm that has no lawful use, such as a sawn-off shotgun, will be viewed even more seriously than possession of a firearm that can be used lawfully. Secondly, what, if any, use has been made of the firearm? The more prolonged, premeditated and violent the use, the more serious the offence is likely to be. Thirdly, with what intention, if any, has the defendant possessed or used the firearm? Clearly, the more serious the intended act, the more serious the offence. Fourthly, what is the defendant's record? The seriousness of any firearms offence is inevitably greater if the offender has an established record of committing firearms offences or violent crimes.

The cases decided in the Court of Appeal are diverse in nature. Any rigid and formulaic approach to sentencing could produce injustice in some cases. Even offences which, on the face of it, appear to be very grave may, on examination, turn out to be less so. Given both the clear public need to discourage the unlawful possession and use of firearms, whether real or imitation, and Parliament's intention, expressed in a continuing increase in maximum penalties, the courts should treat any firearms offence as serious—and they do. It is fair to say that some sentences imposed for such offences in the past have failed to reflect their seriousness and the justifiable public concern that they arouse. Save for minor infringements, which may be properly dealt with summarily, firearms offences almost invariably merit custodial terms, even on a guilty plea and in the case of an offender with no previous record.

When the courts deal with serious offences under the legislation, the custodial term is likely to be of a considerable length. When the four questions that I have posed yield adverse answers for the offender, terms at or approaching the maximum may, in a contested case, be appropriate. We do not need more legislation to deal with gun crime but the sensible application of existing law and clarity of approach from the Government. I urge them not to rush to the newspapers and media studios to sound off the latest half-witted saloon bar idea that comes into their head. They should ask their advisers what the law is and how it is being applied, and if it is being applied sensibly they should leave it alone. We have far too much legislation mucking up the criminal justice system and confusing the courts. The Minister is a man of integrity and common sense, and I urge him to take that lesson back to his masters.

5.45 pm

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier), who brings to the debate the perspective of today's sentencing judges. If he reflects judges' attitudes accurately, I would say gently to him that there is a little bit of complacency on the part of the Bench in relation to their role in assuring the public that everything is under control. The motion talks about the honest citizen's feeling of helplessness. It is fashionable to blame all woes on the Government, but as a constituency Member I hear complaints against the police, the prosecutors and, indeed, the judges. The feeling of helplessness has more than one source.

Before I begin citing statistics, let me make it clear that I never lose sight of the human effect of crime. Clearly, in serious crimes such as homicide people lose their lives and families lose loved ones, and crimes involving guns, violence or sexual assault can create an enormous amount of misery. We should remember that when we consider the dry statistics.

Today's debate is based on figures from the Home Office statistical bulletin No. 2 of 2003. The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) praised the accuracy and good work of the Home Office statistical unit. The figures show that the trend in overall crime continued to be flat up to September 2002, showing little difference from the year up to March 2002. That picture of crime neither going up nor down over 18 months or so is allied to the British crime survey picture of all crime having diminished by more than a quarter since 1997, which is a pretty happy picture, not a miserable one, even though we can all say that crime is still too high and more measures are needed to drive it down further. This is certainly not a crisis.

It is easy for people to pick out the statistics that show a worse picture than the others. That is what the media did last week and what the motion is based on.

Mr. Cash: Will the hon. Gentleman, whose constituency is adjacent to mine, confirm that, according to the figures for 2001–02, sexual offences in the Stafford area have increased by 42.4 per cent., and burglary from dwellings by 16 per cent? That certainly does not sound very good to me.

Mr. Kidney: In the words of Ronald Reagan, there he goes again: the hon. Gentleman has picked out the statistics that show the worst picture. I pay great tribute to Staffordshire police and the agencies with which they have worked in partnership, because they have taken sexual offences and domestic violence very seriously and have encouraged the public to trust them and report such crimes in greater numbers. The increase in the statistics is partly the result of increased reporting of crime that was happening in any case, because people trust the police more.

That brings me to the reliability of one set of statistics. In April 2002, those police forces that were not already doing so agreed to adopt the national crime recording standard and started to record figures more accurately for the crimes that were reported to them. That is bound to create a difference, probably for a couple of years, and I warn people not to take too much account of one set of reported crime figures until they have bedded down correctly and accurately.

In support of that warning, I want to talk about the situation of Staffordshire police. While some reported crime has shown an increase in the quarter up to September 2002, Staffordshire police were able to announce, for the six months up to September 2002, that crime fell in their area by 8.8 per cent., putting Staffordshire at the top of the national crime reduction league table. In key priority areas, crime fell: burglaries dropped by 20 per cent.—the third biggest national reduction in this type of crime—and there was an overall decrease in vehicle crime of 24 per cent. There were also smaller falls in incidents of public disorder and nuisance complaints. In addition, the detection rate improved, jumping to 30 per cent., against a national average of 22 per cent.

[Mr. Kidney]

Those are startlingly good figures, and I expect Members to listen raptly as I tell them Staffordshire's secret so that they can duplicate it in their constituencies. The truth is that there is no secret: Staffordshire adopted the new "ethical", or victim-focused, method of crime recording two years earlier than the rest of the country. Because we recorded more crime, we experienced an apparently big increase in crime two years before everybody else, and the Staffordshire police force was panned for those big increases. We appeared in *The Observer* as the fifth worst performing police force in the country, and yet just 12 months later, everybody else has adopted that method of recording figures. We have worked through those figures and maintained a steady sea, as it were. Now, we are somewhere near the top of the best performing police authorities in the country.

That is not to belittle the efforts of all who have played their part in Staffordshire's good performance. The force is very well led by the chief constable John Giffard and his astute senior officers. All the officers are committed to their work, and they are supported by a large civilian work force that does dedicated work on their behalf. So everyone deserves credit for those figures, which show that the police are doing well.

Nor are the police sitting on their laurels. This year, we are introducing a system of 219 designated community beat officers, whose job is to be seen on the ground and to talk to local community members, thereby picking up the street intelligence to which the shadow Home Secretary referred. Staffordshire is also slightly ahead of the game in terms of changing shift patterns to try to match police numbers and police presence to the places and times at which crimes are known to be committed. Indeed, the Police Reform Act 2002 has tried to establish that principle across the whole country. So the police are doing all the right things, and when we are satisfied that that is so, our job as politicians is to call for the public to support them. For me, that is the message that we should be sending through this debate.

That is the statistical argument, and I am glad that other Members have accepted that, in statistical terms, more police officers are engaged in police work throughout the country than ever before in our history. That is a useful tool in the fight against crime, but there is more to that fight than policing. We should also consider the effectiveness of the prosecution service, and of the rest of the criminal justice system. That is why we are trying to make changes to ensure that every component of that system plays its part in reassuring the public about crime.

An announcement has recently been made concerning mandatory five-year sentences for gun crime, and I want to say something about the reporting of such announcements. When the British crime survey released its quarterly statistics on reported crime, the media picked out the worst parts. They are entitled to do so, but I did not hear many of them balance that by pointing out that crime was flat overall.

Mr. Grieve: Surely one problem is that the Government played exactly the same game in reverse in respect of street crime. They can hardly be surprised if people apply the same importance to quarterly statistics as Ministers apply to street crime statistics.

Mr. Kidney: I am not attempting to pick out the best statistics to enable Labour to justify the current situation; I am making a plea—the hon. Gentleman will have heard me make it a moment ago—for people to show patience over time, so that we can see how the trends develop rather than focusing on one set of statistics. I am not particularly interested in playing that game with the hon. Gentleman.

My point is that, just as the media picked out the dramatic aspects of last week's figures, so when the announcement was made that the Home Secretary intended to table an amendment to the Criminal Justice Bill—the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) and I are currently deliberating that Bill in Committee—the media reported that announcement as the Home Secretary's changing the law by introducing five-year mandatory sentences. That plainly was not right. When the judges responded the next day by saying that there should be exceptions so that they can continue to use their judicial discretion, and the Home Secretary agreed, the headlines were, "Home Secretary does U-turn and changes the law". The truth is that we have yet even to debate either of those propositions.

Mr. Grieve: The hon. Gentleman highlights one of our precise criticisms of the Government. Even after the Home Secretary accepted that mandatory sentences for firearms offences were not really what had been proposed, last Wednesday the Prime Minister repeated at the Dispatch Box a reference to mandatory five-year sentences for firearms offences—presumably precisely because he wanted to see that copy in the newspaper the following day. So again, the Government can hardly complain about the way in which they are reported, because that is exactly the spin that they themselves have tried to engineer, in order to cover discussion of the true nature of the problem.

Mr. Kidney: I do not accept that it is spin; I regard it as inaccurate reporting of that announcement. There will be a discussion in Committee about an amendment to introduce mandatory sentences, and the hon. Gentleman and I will be among the first to have it.

The final important aspect that I want to mention is the effect on the mind of the public, and the reference in the Opposition motion to the

"sense of helplessness of the . . . citizen".

The British crime survey tells us that a majority of the public still feel that crime is rising, even though it is in fact stable and has fallen for five years or more. We need to deal with that by addressing the public's concerns. Despite the seriousness of homicide, gun crime, violence, sexual offending and so on, what affects people most in their day-to-day lives is antisocial behaviour. As we debate serious matters such as gun crime, we must not lose sight of the fact that day-to-day issues such as antisocial behaviour still need to be tackled, and that is what we are going to do in this Session.

5.57 pm

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): I congratulate the shadow Home Secretary on his excellent speech. It is also a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney), who made a thoughtful and well-informed contribution.

A lot has been said about the comments of Lord Woolf and the Lord Chancellor, both of whom have shown that they are completely out of touch. Burglary is never a victimless crime. It often involves the threat or fact of physical attack, and many victims are permanently traumatised. Many move home because, once their home and their prized possessions have been violated, they feel unable to stay in the same place. As my right hon. Friend the shadow Home Secretary made clear, the figures are rising at an alarming rate. In the year to September, burglaries were up by 8 per cent. to nearly 500,000. Robberies were up by 13 per cent., and firearms offences by 35 per cent. Handguns are now used in 5,800 crimes—a rise of some 46 per cent.

We must have proper deterrents, and I really do feel that the statements by Lord Chief Justice Woolf and the Lord Chancellor are totally at odds with public opinion. The shadow Home Secretary made it clear that there is overwhelming evidence that custodial sentences for burglary do indeed deter. In looking at the new guidelines, we should note that a couple of cases have already shown clearly how much damage is being done. In an intervention, I referred to the case of Gary Callaby, who lives in west Norfolk. He admitted to three offences, including one of burglary and one of theft, and asked for four other offences of burglary to be taken into consideration. They were not minor burglaries. The first involved stealing a quantity of food and compact discs from Park lane, in Helhoughton; the second involved a break-in and the theft of £1,500-worth of property in West Raynham; the third, occurring four days after the second, involved the theft of a jewellery box and jewellery worth £1,500 from Weasenham. A few weeks later, Gary Callaby stole a number of fittings and other equipment from West Raynham farm.

That person committed three burglaries and one theft; in court he admitted four other offences of burglary which he asked to be taken into consideration. Judge Darroch made it clear that he felt a custodial sentence was the only answer. However, he said:

"If the latest decision had not come out, it would have been a prison sentence.

These are very serious offences, and in my view there are two particularly aggravating features: One, they occurred over a period of time, and two, you misused information obtained from customers."

This man was a painter and decorator; he used insider knowledge of the particular homes and the families whose trust he betrayed when he burgled them. That case rightly gave rise to a great deal of local and national coverage.

Another case since then involved the Crocker family who live at Bedlington in Northumberland. A burglar broke into their house and tried to stab Mrs. Crocker with a kitchen knife. Fortunately, he was overcome and the police were called. He came up in court two or three days ago and has escaped a prison sentence, much to the dismay and anger of the victims.

Damage is being done, and I feel strongly, as do many of my right hon. and hon. Friends, that Lord Woolf must move into the real world. An overwhelming number of people in my constituency believe that he is out of touch; I have had very many letters on the subject.

I have had even more letters on the case of my famous constituent, Tony Martin, who is due to come out of prison next week. The facts of his case are well documented. He was a victim of crime; what happened was an appalling tragedy for him and for the people who were killed and injured. He has made it clear that when he comes out of prison, he will campaign for the victims of burglary. He will also push very hard for changes in the law on exactly what householders can do to defend their property.

Rural police forces up and down the country are overstretched. Burglars know this and they are targeting homes in my constituency and in those of my hon. Friends the Members for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), for Witney (Mr. Cameron) and for Stone (Mr. Cash). People in rural areas feel particularly vulnerable. Their natural instinct is to protect themselves. The law clearly states that one can use reasonable force, but recent cases have resulted in total confusion. Tony Martin fired at someone who was facing away from him and shot him in the back. A man was recently convicted for repeatedly stabbing a burglar who had broken into the flat where he believed his children were sleeping. However, when a householder stabbed to death one intruder and seriously wounded another, the Crown Prosecution Service found that the force used was reasonable and did not prosecute. Clearly the CPS cannot decide where the boundary between reasonable and unreasonable force lies and what the law actually is.

How can it be right to prosecute people when the law is confused and contradictory? If lawyers, safe in their offices, cannot work out what is right, how can the householder be expected to weigh up the pros and cons in the middle of a violent struggle in the dark? Is it reasonable to expect that same householder, during a few fearful seconds on the stairs when he is being menaced by broken bottles, to guess what the law would say when lawyers themselves do not know?

We do not want new, over-prescriptive laws; we certainly do not want a firearms free-for-all, but we need a much more sympathetic approach by the police and the CPS towards householders who defend themselves. There needs to be a presumption in favour of their innocence rather than the other way round, which appears to be the case at present. There needs to be a presumption against further prosecutions. I am not suggesting that the Government should immediately change the law, but we should have a report from the Law Commission. It should be tasked with examining whether we need a new law whereby the relevant test is not based on the "reasonable man" but a new, subjective test of what the householder believes to be appropriate at the time. That would allow for the fact that every case is different and every set of circumstances unique. As a result, householders would not be prosecuted unless they were launching revenge attacks on burglars.

There is a strong feeling in west Norfolk in particular that burglars who enter properties should leave their civil rights outside. That, too, needs to be addressed by the Law Commission. At present, burglars and robbers can profit from their crimes if injured, which is

[Mr. Henry Bellingham]

ludicrous. Brendon Fearon, who was injured during the burglary of Tony Martin's property, applied for legal aid, and tried to sue Tony Martin for damages and loss of earnings.

I am not advocating American-style laws with people being shot for trespassing into gardens to retrieve footballs. However, homeowners and householders need to know that they can defend themselves. That would send a clear message to members of the criminal fraternity that if they enter other people's property, they do so at their peril. That would be a significant step forward in the fight against crime, which every party is rightly determined to win.

6.6 pm

Vera Baird (Redcar): The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) talked about the dangers of trying to understand crime by headlines. I suggest that this debate has been brought about by headlines, and misunderstood headlines at that. No sooner is there a headline about burglary and a difference in emphasis about what should happen to burglars than there is a debate demanding that the whole criminal justice system be saved from what is perceived as the brink of collapse.

Even the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) could not sustain his scream of outrage at the outset of his speech. He concedes that there must be guidelines on sentencing and that judges must individualise the sentence in the specific case. In that situation, it is inevitable that some burglars will not go into custody. The right hon. Gentleman would not, I am sure, send to prison a 12-year-old who entered an empty house to steal scrap. He would not sentence a man of 16 or 17 who had committed that kind of burglary to prison, particularly if he had a drugs problem that could be dealt with far more adequately by a drug treatment and testing order. So the scream of outrage cannot even be sustained by the Conservative Front Bench.

The criminal justice system is not just about burglary, important as that is, but about many more offences. Let us consider what the Conservatives did regarding two offences in which I am particularly interested. Home Office figures for 1985 showed that convictions for rape stood at 25 per cent. By the mid-1990s, the figure was 9 per cent. The Tories were firmly at the helm for all that time. What did they do about that? After all, it is of great concern to women. The evidence shows that one in four or five women is raped or sexually assaulted. With the Tories firmly at the helm, the conviction rate hurtled down a banana slide to next to nothing. What did they do?

The Tories had the perfect opportunity to legislate in the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996. It has been well known in many circles for many years that the admission of previous sexual history is a massive deterrent for women to come forward and a huge block on them sustaining a prosecution when they have started. This is not about upping conviction rates but about the core of what the criminal justice system should do for victims—giving them support so that they have the confidence to come to court, do themselves justice and let a jury decide.

The admission of previous sexual history put the complainant on trial instead of the defendant, and women were discouraged. It is in all ways irrelevant to the issue before the jury in 90 per cent. of cases. Research shows that in so far as previous sexual history comes into a trial about a complainant, the jury's conception of the guilt of the defendant declines. That is true even if the woman or man complainant denies every bit of it. In other words, it contributed to wrongful acquittals.

The Tories had the opportunity to legislate in the 1996 Act. Did they make any attempt to help with the vast decline in rape convictions at that stage? Was there any mention of it in any aspect of Tory debate on the matter? None whatever. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, then in Opposition, introduced an amendment to that Bill to limit the admission of previous sexual history and to exclude it from being introduced to show consent. She and the then shadow Home Secretary, now my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, had, unlike the Tory Government, consulted survivors and practitioners, of which I was one, and they know of the importance of that amendment. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport set out then everything that I have said now, but the Conservative Government simply voted it down. They were not interested in stopping the decline in the conviction rate.

Mr. Grieve: Will the hon. and learned Member give way?

Vera Baird: I will in a moment.

Change has since been enacted, and it is having an effect. Since 1999 no previous sexual history has been admissible to show consent. I suggest that when the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) stands up, he should apologise to those rape complainants who had to be cross-examined needlessly about their sexual past during the intervening three years between the Conservative failure to act and our acceptance of responsibility. Will he consider doing that?

Mr. Grieve: I will not. I have two things to say. First, notwithstanding the amendment to which the hon. and learned Lady refers, the rate of conviction remains very low, as she is aware. Secondly, I am sure that a legitimate point was made at the time about concern that any change in the law should still ensure that a fair trial could take place, and I am sure that she was alive to that.

Vera Baird: The reason given for rejecting the amendment at that time was that existing provision was perfectly adequate. In other words, the old law, which had repeatedly since the 1970s allowed previous sexual history to go into court, was considered perfectly sufficient and women's complaints were put at naught. There was little mention then of the other issues that the hon. Gentleman now raises.

In addition to making an important change, the Labour Government have conducted a sex offences review, "Setting the Boundaries", they have produced a White Paper, "Protecting the Public", and they propose legislation. In addition, specialist prosecutors for rape now exist so that proper concentration may be placed on the issues in the case. Did the Tories take any of those fairly obvious measures, which are bound to be effective? They did not.

Codes of practice are in place for how the police and the Crown Prosecution Service should deal with rape. Did the Tories introduce any such thing? Not at all. There is a power for the Attorney-General to challenge unduly lenient sentences, which were a further reason why women did not come forward. Small sentences were insufficient satisfaction for women who managed to sustain their complaints. Did the Tory Government try systematically to use that power in the aid of rape victims? No, they did not.

Mr. Cameron: I know that I am going back into ancient history, but the hon. and learned Lady will find that the power to challenge lenient sentences was introduced by the Conservatives and opposed by Labour.

Vera Baird: The hon. Gentleman will find that the Tory Government made no attempt at any stage to use that power to come to the assistance of women rape complainants in the way that the current Attorney-General has systematically done over the past few months. His action has resulted in clear and helpful decisions for women: for example, in sentencing for culpability, no distinction should be made between a rape carried out by a stranger and a rape carried out by an intimate. That important principle could have been established 10 years ago if the Tory Government had had the slightest interest in an issue of high concern to women.

I acknowledge what the hon. Member for Beaconsfield said about the conviction rate still being poor. It takes a long time for crime figures to come into the system and I have been trying, preparatory to consultation on sex offences, to carry out as best I can a survey to see what is happening. Chief Inspector Walton from Project Sapphire, the highly successful Metropolitan police unit at the forefront of dealing with rape, is pretty sure that conviction figures are improving. He told me last Wednesday that it is still too early to prove that, but that he knows more cases are coming to court. I had a meeting at the University of Teesside last Friday with people from my local rape crisis centre and women's support network. The women I met also know that more cases are coming to court and that more convictions are being sustained because the Government, unlike their predecessor, are tackling that aspect of criminal justice.

Another aspect of the criminal justice system that received not a mention among the screams from the Opposition Front Bench was domestic violence. One quarter of all violent crime is domestic violence. One woman in four will experience it in her lifetime. The police receive a 999 call every minute about domestic violence. Between one quarter and one third of homicide victims are killed by a partner or former partner. The impact on children is monumental. The last domestic violence legislation was introduced in 1976, in the dying days of the Wilson Government by the then hon. Member for Barking, Jo Richardson. For 18 years was anything significant done by the Tories about domestic violence? I suggest that there was nothing whatsoever.

When Labour came into office, there was a White Paper within months. There is now a ministerial group, and a specialist cross-departmental domestic violence unit that is recruiting an experienced head. It intends to increase safe accommodation choices for victims of domestic violence, and that is in progress, and it is getting health care initiatives under way and improving the interface between civil and criminal law so that one court knows what another court is doing about domestic violence. It is ensuring that the police and the CPS, who are committed to best practice, play a supportive role. Now domestic violence cases can be prosecuted without the need for a victim to give evidence. A national network of domestic violence specialists co-ordinates prosecution policies. Did the Tories do any of that? They did not.

Every domestic violence murder is now the subject of an inquiry to try to ascertain just where the risk factors should have been picked up to stop the case from escalating to its appalling conclusion. The Government have gone out to consultation and there will be domestic violence legislation, a free-standing Bill that will allow scope for amendments and expansion. That Bill has been announced well ahead of its passage, and there will be consultation and pre-legislative scrutiny with every prospect of significant steps forward in solving the epidemic of domestic violence crime that is not even mentioned by Conservative Members when they call a debate about the criminal justice system.

I hope that the Conservatives will not, as they did with changes to rape law, oppose changes in domestic violence law. I have some hope. Domestic violence was not even debated at a Conservative party conference until this year, and I am pleased that a debate has happened. I hope that the Tories are turning the corner and will come along with us.

To the right hon. and hon. Gentlemen on the Opposition Benches who were rash enough to summon this debate, I must say that women are in no doubt about who failed to deliver on rape and on domestic violence. They are in no doubt about who is trying to assist them now.

I have spoken of specific items and shall widen my speech for one minute. I shall go to Eston in Redcar two weeks on Friday to talk about crime and community safety. When I walk in, people will say to me that more needs to be done. They will add, however, that they are glad to talk to me rather than to a representative of the previous Government, during whose period in office recorded crime doubled—including that in my constituency—and the number of criminals convicted by the courts fell by a third. During that time, the chance of being a victim of violent crime trebled—including in my constituency—and crime increased faster than it did in any other western country. I can return to the source of the debate by saying that the chances of being a victim of burglary increased from one in 32 to one in 13 over the Conservative period in office. They criticise us, but we may ask whether they were generally effective on crime. The answer is no.

The two gender hate crimes of high concern to women were not even on the field of play during those years. Thank goodness that the Labour Government are not only on the field, but scoring good goals.

6.20 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stone): I rise to speak in my role as a Back-Bench Member on a matter of intense importance not only to my constituents, but to the public at large.

[Mr. William Cash]

When the Lord Chancellor was interviewed on the "Today" programme a week ago, I was astonished to hear him say that first-time offenders should be sent to prison only as a last resort. As I pointed out in this place, it had apparently been agreed between him, the Home Secretary and the Attorney-General that, in general, that methodology would be employed even for serious offences.

Having criticised the tabloid newspapers for presuming to comment on such questions, the Lord Chancellor went on to assert that the people of this country were not so unworldly as to disagree with what he had to say. However, a west midlands newspaper, the *Express & Star*, held a poll a few days after the Lord Chancellor made his comments and I was asked to comment on the fact that no less than 98 per cent. of the respondents disagreed with his analysis and thus, by implication, that of the Lord Chief Justice as well. Furthermore, in a poll taken by *The People* on 12 January, 93 per cent. of people said that they want burglars to be locked up for a second or third offence rather than being given community sentences.

One of the lessons to be learned from all that is that it is extremely important that our senior Law Officers and judges should have regard—as politicians do—to public opinion. Those extraordinary percentages suggest that the Lord Chancellor was entirely wrong, not only in what he said but in the way that he said it. I suspect that the publication of newspaper reports about the guidelines has, in effect, suggested to burglars that they have been given a green signal.

One cannot draw criminological or academic conclusions about the construction of such guidelines because no one reads them, except to extract a few bits and pieces—as I shall do myself. I am extremely sceptical as to their value. When I was asked for my comments on them last week, I said that it would be better to put much greater emphasis on the judge's discretion—as my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) also suggested. Furthermore, there should be much more parliamentary supervision or surveillance of such things. The law and political developments in the law should be kept in kilter with the needs of the times in which we live and with public opinion.

I have read the guidelines with great care and I am deeply concerned about the emphasis in interviews with Law Officers and in the guidelines themselves that the reason for what is being done is to deal with overcrowding in prisons. There is a severe danger that judicial guidelines, which should be dealing with questions of justice, are actually being used for political purposes. The Lord Chief Justice may not have realised that, but the unelected Lord Chancellor should certainly have done so and should not have associated himself with the tendency to focus on the question of prison populations.

It is part of my job to read the guidelines, but I would not criticise hon. Members for not having done so. However, if they have, they will have been astonished to note that paragraph 10 states:

> "The pressures on our prisons and the extent to which it is possible to address an offender's criminal behaviour during a prison sentence are not matters of which the public can be expected to be aware."

That is an extraordinary comment of great complacency. Indeed, it is somewhat contemptuous of the public at large—to return to the point that I made earlier about the mismatch between public opinion and sentencing policy, especially on burglary.

The guidelines send out hugely confused and contradictory messages, but there is a bottom line. As my right hon. Friend the shadow Home Secretary suggested, it relates to the fact that, in the last resort, judges should be allowed to make their own decisions. Paragraph 19 states:

> "The width of the definition of burglary in section 9 of the Theft Act 1968 underlines the fact that the court can do no more than provide guidelines. The application of the guidelines must be subject to all the circumstances of the particular case and sentencers in applying the guidelines must tailor their sentence to meet those circumstances."

To put it simply, that means that after considering all the facts of the case—as I hope any judge would—the sentencer considers the law and uses their discretion in reaching a verdict.

There are serious questions as to the value of the guidelines. They create a theatre in which we shall see judicial dancing on the head of a pin, whereas I should be happier if much more emphasis was put on the discretion of the judge. I have faith in our judiciary, if it is given an opportunity. My hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) referred to a judge who felt constrained by the guidelines. One could enlarge on that example, although I do not intend to do so this evening.

In a burglary, the most important fact is that of entry—no one knows what is going to happen after that. For example, in the Tony Martin case, with which I am not familiar in detail, things happened as a result of the burglary. We have heard ideas such as the suggestion made by the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) about the burglar being able to guess that someone was in the house. However, the burglar does not, and cannot, know about that and we have to deal with the physical reaction that might result.

It is wrong for the guidelines to suggest that there should be a presumption against prison. There should be a presumption in favour of prison, but extenuating circumstances should be taken into account and it should be left to our judges to form their own judgment in the courts. That would be a sensible way to proceed and I commend my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset for his suggestion that such matters should be properly discussed in Parliament. They should already have been considered in this place and most people are astonished that that was not the case.

6.30 pm

Ian Lucas (Wrexham): I should like to focus my brief remarks on the statement in the Opposition motion that the Government have an

> "apparent inability . . . to provide a coherent, long-term strategy to resolve"

the problems of crime. I profoundly disagree with that statement because I believe that when the Government took office in 1997 there was a major change in the approach to crime in our communities. The key word is

"community". It is much over-used, but, importantly, it was recognised from the outset that crime is a community issue.

Another hackneyed phrase is "tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime". It may be a soundbite, but it has a resonance. It was important because it expressed our constituents' knowledge that crime cannot be confronted simply by sentencing criminals. Crime is a community issue that needs to be confronted jointly by all the organisations in our communities, and that has happened since Labour took office in 1997.

We have had the introduction, for example, of crime and disorder partnerships and young offenders teams, both of which are highly respected throughout the criminal justice system. They reintroduced the role of local authorities, of which the Conservative party appeared to have a pathological hatred in the years leading up to 1997, to the extent that it would simply not recognise the fact that they had an important role in dealing with crime.

Whenever I speak to those involved in the criminal justice system in my community—from the police, the Crown Prosecution Service and the probation service to defence solicitors—they all praise the structure that has been set up, involving crime and disorder partnerships and young offenders teams, and the work that is being done in our communities.

A coherent approach is being taken across our communities and it is having a major effect on crime, but we all recognise that there is a continued problem with persistent young offenders, on whom the Government's current policy is focused.

The Government have confronted many offenders who committed crimes in the 1980s and the early 1990s by providing them with routes out of crime through work and other measures—for example, opportunities through the new deal scheme. Those measures have provided people with the chance to work in our communities and not to commit crimes. However, we still have a problem with the young people who continue to commit crime, often because they are drug-related offenders.

The Government instituted a process to consider our criminal justice system—the Halliday report and the Auld review—and to try to find a better way to deal with repeat offenders. That coherent, measured and considered approach has developed over a number of years. It is important to adopt that approach, and I sometimes hear echoes from the Conservative party that it is buying into it, but it should try to avoid the temptation to create headlines such as those sought in today's motion.

It is simply not true to say that there has not been a long-term approach to the proposals in the Criminal Justice Bill. Two years ago, I held a sentencing conference in Wrexham to discuss the proposals set out in the Halliday review. Victims of crime, magistrates and the police attended, and we put our submissions to the Home Office. Those submissions and many others led to the proposals in the Bill, so there is a coherent view.

I share many hon. Members' great distaste of catching and seeking headlines, which, in my view, always creates bad law. We politicians must try to resist the temptation, which is felt by Members on both sides of the House, to react by trying to introduce legislation to confront single events. We must follow the coherent, positive approach of consulting as widely as possible, trying to reach consensus on criminal justice matters if at all possible and introducing sensible measures that the courts can apply.

We have debated the Sentencing Guidelines Council and the possibility of Parliament taking a more prescriptive role in setting sentencing guidelines. I have some sympathy with the suggestion that the courts should be more responsive to public concerns about certain offences. I suspect, however, that Parliament is not the right forum in which to devise a sentencing policy. I should want a much broader forum to be consulted, so that the issues raised by the victims of crime, the police and CPS could be taken into account more directly.

The Sentencing Guidelines Council represents a sensible approach, but we need to ensure that we draw directly on the experiences of those in our communities who are concerned and feel helpless. I shall draw my comments to a conclusion by saying that I profoundly disagree with the suggestion that no coherent approach has been followed since 1997. The approach that has been taken has led to major improvements on our streets.

6.36 pm

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I should like briefly to focus my remarks on the need for honesty in sentencing and on the effect of overcrowding on the quality of rehabilitation programmes for persistent offenders.

First, let us deal with honesty in sentencing and consider the Crime (Sentences) Act 1997. That Act provided for the imposition of mandatory minimum three-year prison sentences for adult domestic burglars thrice convicted. It is true—it is important to put this on the record—that the legislation contained a provision for the exercise of judicial discretion to facilitate a 20 per cent. reduction in a sentence when the person charged made a timely plea of guilty. However, the legislation specifically emphasised that the mandatory minimum sentence itself could be waived only in exceptional circumstances. So Parliament thought that it was legislating to create a new mandatory minimum sentence that would apply in the overwhelming majority of relevant cases.

The legislation itself took effect in December 1999 to a fanfare of trumpets and was announced by the then Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw). In rightly referring to burglary as a sickening offence, he emphasised:

"People need to know that criminals who make a living from house breaking will face a period of imprisonment which reflects their crimes."

Moreover, I must emphasise that the Government's apparent intentions and seriousness of purpose on that subject were further underlined by the then Minister of State, Home Office, the right hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Clarke), who is now, of course, the Secretary of State for Education and Skills. He emphasised in an answer published at column 137W of *Hansard* on 23 April that the Government intended to persist with that policy and to undertake an evaluation of it

[Mr. John Bercow]

throughout the criminal justice system, including its effect on the incidence of burglary in 2003–04, with a final evaluation of its efficacy to be undertaken in 2010. As right hon. and hon. Members will have already noted from my remarks about the time scale, however, it has been in effect for more than three years, so we are entitled to take an interim review. At the end of two years of the policy, only six such individuals, thrice convicted, had suffered the mandatory minimum imprisonment term of three years. I have not so far been able to obtain the statistics, which would be significant as they would tell us the other side of the equation: the number of individuals to whom that mandatory minimum sentence could have applied. Has the mandatory minimum sentence been applied to a tiny minority, or has the incidence been relatively small? We do not know that for certain. What we do know, however, is that, during 1999–2000, the police in England and Wales recorded 442,600 domestic burglaries, and no fewer than 16,800 people were sentenced for the commission of that offence. It therefore looks at least dangerously as though what Parliament willed and intended to be the application of a majority cases policy has somehow transmogrified and deteriorated into a policy applied in exceptional cases, rather than one that is waived in exceptional cases.

That leads to the obvious question: do the Government believe that their policy in the implementation of the mandatory minimum sentence is right, and that the judiciary has been wrong to circumvent it? Alternatively, do the Government believe that they are wrong in their insistence on the mandatory minimum sentence of three years and that the judiciary have been right to circumvent it? I put it to the Minister who will wind up the debate, to whose response we look forward, that only one or other of those positions can be correct. It is not possible for both to be correct. We need to know the answer.

On the subject of parliamentary oversight and scrutiny of sentencing guidelines, I largely endorse what a number of my right hon. and hon. Friends said. I am bound to say in support of the eloquent testimony of the shadow Home Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), that a Sentencing Guidelines Council that is chaired by the Lord Chief Justice and appointed by the Lord Chancellor is no substitute for the rigorous parliamentary scrutiny that I favour. That scrutiny could, and, I would suggest, should take place under the auspices of the Home Affairs Committee, which is admirably chaired by the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin). What is not an option is the do-nothing approach. What we need—I say this to hon. Members on both sides of the House, and not in a partisan spirit—to counter the pervasive cynicism that characterises the conduct of our public life and the attitude of most people towards politics is demonstrable evidence for the public to observe that we say what we mean and we mean what we say. To do nothing would be an abdication by the Government of the responsibility to Parliament, and would simultaneously be an abdication of responsibility by Parliament to the public, who desperately seek the reassurance of a predictable, robust, credible and honest sentencing framework. That is the first issue of importance.

The second issue is the impact of overcrowding. We know that, in June 2002, the prison population was 71,220. It is variously predicted to rise to 99,000 or 100,000 by 2009, and, dependent on the incidence of criminality and the length of sentences imposed by the courts, to as high as 109,000 or 110,000, even before we take account of the provisions of the Criminal Justice Bill. It is estimated that 14,000 current prisoners are effectively doubling up in shared cells that were originally designed for occupation by only one person.

What more do we know about the effect of that overcrowding? We know that, in young offender institutions, for example, what operates is the phenomenon entitled "the churn": the process of constant transfer and movement of prisoners, including young offenders, from one institution to another, often taking place with little or no notice. That is exemplified by Glen Parva young offenders institution in Leicestershire, where, astonishingly and shamefully, only 4 per cent. of the 800 occupants are there for more than a month. We know the damage done to rehabilitation programmes and to the opportunity of training, education and job preparation in those circumstances.

We know, too, because the evidence testifies to it, that purposeful activity has been declining since this Government took office. In only one of seven years, to the eternal discredit of Labour Members, has the target for purposeful activity, which is critical to the chances of reformation of character of criminals, been achieved. Six out of 15 key performance indicators have been flunked. The people affected are those persistent offenders in aid of whom the hon. Member for Wrexham (Ian Lucas) spoke sincerely and with integrity a few moments ago. Eighty-four per cent. of 14 to 17-year-old young offenders are reconvicted within two years of release from custody—we are talking about people in secure training centres, typically aged 14, who have been brought up in local authority care and have had no fewer, on average, than 22 convictions. Those people need more, better-funded and increasingly effective and tailored programmes of rehabilitation if they are to get off the conveyor belt of crime and have a chance of success in the future.

My judgment is that the Government are guilty as charged of two serious offences in relation to sentencing policy and the effects of overcrowding on the critical objective of reforming prisoners. That reform must not be a Cinderella service, an optional extra or a belated afterthought in pursuit of the banner headline for the eye-catching initiative, the effect of which, whatever its intention, is invariably to betray the very people whom it intends to serve.

6.47 pm

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow). He can speak for many hours without a note, to which it is always good to listen, but he has given me a couple of minutes to raise a particular constituency case to which I would like the Minister to listen.

Many residents in my west Oxfordshire constituency have been terrorised by a particular criminal gang of violent burglars, who are believed to live in Cheltenham, next door in Gloucestershire. They have been

responsible for dozens of burglaries. To illustrate, the Heyworth family, who live in the Cotswold wildlife park, said:

"Often burglaries are repeated in the same houses, leading to great stress for the occupants. One house of a couple in their 70s was broken into, at night, twice in 48 hours."

Another lady from Bampton told me:

"At least six friends and acquaintances have recently been targeted, the majority of whom like ourselves are elderly. The situation is intolerable."

Clearly, this gang are causing great distress to all concerned.

The police have had some success, but there are problems, which I would like to share with the Minister. One problem is that, while the clan or group believed to be responsible for these burglaries live in the Cheltenham area, they rarely commit offences on their own patch. John Liversidge, the area commander concerned in the Thames Valley police force, has written to me:

"Consequently, the level of importance attached to the group by Gloucestershire is less than that given by surrounding forces, who bear the brunt of the gang's criminal activity."

His second point is about the difficulty of calling on central resources when there are so many other calls.

I have met the chief constable of the Thames Valley force and have visited, with Lord Hurd—my predecessor but one—the assistant chief constable of Gloucestershire. One issue arose, which I would like to raise in the remaining minute. I am concerned that some of the crime is falling between what the regional crime squads used to do and what is done now , on the one hand, by the National Crime Squad—which was set up to replace the regional crime squads—and, on the other, by the county forces. If we look at the National Crime Squad's mission document, we see that it is focused very much on class A drugs, organised immigration crime and high-tech crime. There is very little about cross-border burglary and I hope that the Minister will consider that point. The report refers to a

"perceived void in relation to activity . . . which deals with cross force/regional crime."

The crime has been identified, but an answer to it has not been found.

I wish to make three quick pleas to the Minister. First, will he not give forces too many targets that mean that they cannot deal with crime outside their own area? If he does, they will not deal with such crime. Secondly, will he ensure that the national crime squad deals with burglary because that is a serious problem? Thirdly, after this debate, will he also give the attack on burglary a much higher priority than it has had so far?

A huge problem has not been mentioned sufficiently in the debate. The Lord Chief Justice's sentencing guidelines overturn what the sentencing advisory panel recommended and, God knows, that was weak enough in the first place. Ministers say that the Lord Chief Justice is talking only about not imprisoning a few first-time burglars, but they should read his judgment in the cases of Regina *v.* McInerney and Regina *v.* Keating. In two instances, which include aggravating circumstances and in which people could be put in fear and victims experience a dreadful burglary, Ministers will see that he is saying that the starting point should not be custody. Conservative Members firmly believe that it should be.

6.51 pm

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): We have heard a great deal in the debate about statistics. Several Labour members, including the hon. and learned Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston) and the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney), made the point that it was possible to be blinded by statistics. I entirely agree with them. Statistics should be approached with the knowledge that we all get from our constituencies, from what people tell us and from the experience of our lives. In that context, I point out to the hon. Member for Wrexham (Ian Lucas) that the suggestion that the Conservative party does not take an interest in neighbourhood and community issues in respect of crime is bunkum. I was the vice-chairman of a police community consultative group in Lambeth and those of us who have been involved in groups dealing with local crime prevention will find that a startling assertion.

I always start not with the statistics for what has happened over the past five years but with the statistics for what has happened in this country over the past 50 years. Although those statistics may be misleading in their detail, the picture that they paint is horrific. I receive from septuagenarian constituents angry letters telling us that this country is an entirely different place in terms of crime from that they remember from their childhood, and they are absolutely right.

I take as just one example the offence of wounding or other acts endangering life. In the year in which I was born, 1956, 1,227 such offences were committed. In 2000–01, the figure was 15,662 offences and, even under the old rules, there was a consistent upward trend in the late 1990s. Burglary has been spoken about at great length in the debate. In 1956, 85,000 burglaries were committed and we know that the figure peaked at 1.3 million. By 2000-01, the figure was more than 800,000 and surely the most significant thing about the latest statistics is that they strongly suggest that the bottoming out and gentle reduction have now been lost. If that is not the proper basis for an Opposition to initiate this debate, I cannot think what is. We should also consider the statistics for violent crime. The figure was as low as 3,000 in 1942, but it is now at an enormously high level.

The Government say that things have not got so bad over the past five years. They are entitled to be judged by their performance and, over the past five years, it has been extremely poor. They came to office committed to building on the improvements of the previous four or five years of Conservative Government in matters of crime. They told us that they would be tough on crime and tough on its causes, and they have had five years in which to show their mettle. As has been pointed out in the debate, the statistics for burglary—but, above all, those for violent crime—show that, in the past 10 years and particularly since the Government came to office and notwithstanding a rising tide of national prosperity, the willingness of people to resort to casual violence, to violence for the sake of gain and to graduate from the punch-up to the use of the knife and to the use of the gun is one of the most worrying aspects of our society. I would have thought that the Government would agree with us on that. I also assume that the Government would agree with us about burglary in the mid-1990s. That is an example of what happens when a particular crime is targeted.

[Mr. Dominic Grieve]

What has been the Government's reaction? There has been plenty of discussion in the debate about two examples that show the Government's muddled thinking. The first example is the so-called mandatory sentence for gun crime, and the second is the message that they have put out about burglary. My hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) made a powerful speech about the way in which the mandatory three-year sentence for the repeat offender was implemented by the Government. They did not need to implement it if they did not want to, but its implementation has led nowhere.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) pointed out, the judicial guidelines have been tailored and transformed to meet the immediate crisis in prison numbers. There is no other explanation and the public are entitled to question the new guidelines when they do not appear to have any other basis and when the evidence is that the introduction of tougher guidelines in the mid-1990s was the very thing that brought about the one reduction in crime for which the previous Government and this Government could claim some credit. The Conservative Government could claim credit for initiating that policy and the present Government at least maintained it. I fear that that policy has now been almost totally abandoned and we will rapidly see the consequences of that. They are already manifest in the rising rate of burglary.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) made the same point and made a plea for flexibility in the sentencing guidelines. He is absolutely right. Mandatory sentences in themselves very rarely work, so what happened at Prime Minister's questions 24 hours after the Home Office had accepted that the mandatory sentence for gun crime was nothing of the kind beggars belief. In answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk), the Prime Minister said:

"The five year mandatory sentence is not yet law, but we want it to be, and of course it would apply to such a person."—[*Official Report*, 8 January 2003; Vol. 397, c. 170.]

He was referring to someone carrying a gun. In one of the most unpleasant passages that I have heard in the House, the Home Secretary suggested that my right hon. Friends the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) and the leader of the Conservative party were—he used an unparliamentary expression—being misleading, so what on earth are we to make of a Prime Minister who, 24 hours after the Home Office had corrected a wholly mistaken impression, decides to reinforce that impression in the House because he believes that that will make good copy? That was a disgrace. *[Interruption.]* The Home Secretary only has to read *Hansard* or to have it read to him to discover what was said. It was a wholly misleading statement, and quite deliberately so.

The Home Secretary has also told us how things will improve in future. For example, he told us that the Halliday report on sentencing would be implemented in the Criminal Justice Bill and that we would have custody plus, custody minus and greater flexibility. In fact, that will not happen. He knows that, although the Bill will introduce many changes—including the possibility of custody plus and custody minus—the Government have already indicated that the changes cannot, at present, be implemented, presumably because the resources are not available. I have to say to the Home Secretary that that was another extremely misleading comment.

The remedies that the Government have come up with are a series of ersatz ideas. We have talked about the 100 initiatives and mandatory sentences, but all the Government do is make headlines saying that they will attack and undermine the principles of jury trial—we will consider that tomorrow in the Committee considering the Criminal Justice Bill—when the number of people affected by that in terms of reducing crime is totally irrelevant. Yet the Government's proposal is an illiberal measure characteristic of their approach.

Then the Home Secretary told us about Mr. Braddon's visit. That fascinated me. He came over to tell us how New York has achieved its lowest violent crime rate—indeed, its lowest crime rate overall—since 1900. That is a complete contrast to this country and the Home Secretary seems to have accepted that we should study that example. This Home Secretary's tenure, however, has been characterised by a period of maximum police demoralisation because they are unable to carry out the task that they want to do. It is small wonder, therefore, that the crisis is so marked in my area of Thames Valley and no surprise that the Dyfed-Powys police force has the highest clear-up rate for crime. Dyfed-Powys police has the highest number of police officers per head of population; Thames Valley has one of the worst clear-up rates and one of the lowest number of police officers per head of population.

The Home Secretary has been unable and unwilling to tackle that issue. It is ultimately a matter of priorities. So let us consider the Government's priorities. At the moment, they are happy to spend £2.5 billion per annum giving us bureaucratic structures for regional government. If they had different priorities, that could be used instead to provide 25,000 police officers. The choice is theirs. They know from our Committee work that they will have reasoned support from us for sensible measures, but they have chosen to hide behind a series of spins and deceits to conceal the fact from the general public that they know, just as much as the public do, that there is a serious problem with violent crime. The Home Secretary is like a raging bull in a china shop: he can smash the crockery and smash civil liberties in the process, but he produces limited results for his exertions. He would do well to step back, consider the matter carefully and embark on sensible and long-term policies rather than a series of gimmicks.

7.2 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Hilary Benn): I think we were subjected to the nice cop, nasty cop routine at the beginning and the end of the debate. I definitely prefer the nice cop even if there were elements of Gilbert and Sullivan to the speech by the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin). I am grateful to him for being honest enough to admit that he had changed his mind on sentencing. I agreed with him wholeheartedly on one thing. He said that we were debating a long-running problem. He is right about that. The hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) made the same point. In anticipation of tomorrow's debate, let me make it clear that the hon. Gentleman's criticism of

changes to jury trial does not bear examination if one considers the measured comments of the Home Affairs Committee, which did not manage to get as excited about our proposed changes as he did.

The debate focused on several issues. Statistics received a great deal of attention. I agree with the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) that we must have faith in them, but my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) and my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston) gave the most balanced account of the Government's record on crime.

On gun crime and firearms, I listened with great interest to the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier), who dissected the circumstances that might arise when dealing with possession of a firearm. I think he acknowledged, however, that the existing law is not being properly applied. That begs the question of how it can be better applied. There is no doubt of the need for the changes proposed by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary so that the exceptional circumstances are clear. Of course the judiciary have to judge what the sentence should be for carrying a firearm in public. What possible purpose could someone have for doing that? There is also a strong case to ban the carrying of replica weapons in a public place.

The hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) spoke with passion about the position in which householders find themselves when faced with burglars. He knows that the law allows someone to use reasonable force. For the reasons that the hon. and learned Member for Harborough gave, that has to be judged on a case-by-case basis. I do not understand how a subjective test, which is what the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk argued for in relation to the use of force against burglars, could replace it. From a different perspective, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Redcar (Vera Baird) spoke with equal passion about the need to take the crimes of rape and domestic violence seriously. She welcomed the Government's steps to do precisely that.

We also heard a range of views on sentencing. I am sure that we will have a lively debate when we discuss the clauses in the Criminal Justice Bill in Committee and on Report which deal with the Sentencing Guidelines Council. I hope that the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) will support the proposed changes. The position on third-time convicted burglars is not as he set out. To get to a third conviction under the Crime (Sentencing) Act 1997, a burglar would need to have two previous convictions and sentences since the Act came into force in December 1999, so the clock needs to tick a little longer. However, I am happy to write to him with more information on that. He is right about the impact of the "churn" on the prison population.

The hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron) raised the problem of burglary. He may be interested to know that Peter Hampson, the chief constable for West Mercia, is leading ACPO's work on that.

Notwithstanding the ritual denunciation of the Government by the Opposition, the truth came out in patches. We are trying to deal with a problem—the causes of crime and its terrible consequences—that will not be solved by soundbites issued by any party or by a fruitless argument about who is harder than whom when it comes to punishing criminals. Of course people must be called to account for what they have done, but surely years of experience under Conservative and Labour Governments have taught us that the real question is what will work best, as the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey said. We need to consider what we need to do to prevent people from offending and reoffending.

Those of us who represent inner-city constituencies understand perhaps better than anyone the effect that crime and the fear of crime have on the people we represent. I am sure that we have all had constituents in our surgeries who have been in tears and in despair, and wondering why they are forced to live in a certain way. No doubt every MP has shared my feeling of anger and helplessness at that time. Even though crime overall has fallen under the Government, that does not matter to that person at that moment because he or she has experienced a crime. The challenge is to put the emotion felt by our constituents, by us as Members and by society as a whole to effective use. That is what the Government and my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary are trying to do.

We have heard contradictory criticisms of the Home Secretary. On the one hand, he is accused of trying to do too much; on the other hand, he is not doing enough. One of his defining characteristics is that he will try to make a difference.

The hon. Member for Beaconsfield asked what are our priorities. Very simply, they include a determination to increase the number of police officers, which is why we now have a record number, after the disastrous decline that occurred under the last Conservative Government. We are determined to give community support officers better equipment, so that they can support police authorities by talking to communities about what kind of policing they want. We need to audit what the police do, and we need to try to cut bureaucracy.

It is determination that lies behind changes to the criminal justice system. The proposal for street bail in the Criminal Justice Bill has been welcomed by hon. Members on both sides of the House. That is a practical measure to cut bureaucracy and to help police officers to do their job. We are determined to provide new sentences for the courts—indeterminate sentences, which will mean at last that people are not released when everybody knows that they are still a risk to the public. We are determined to invest more money in offending behaviour programmes, drug treatment and sex offender treatment. We are determined to support people who are imprisoned by their drug habit, which is the subject of the next debate.

In the best example of the Government's priorities, we are determined to tackle offenders when they are young. Members on both sides of the House have paid tribute to youth justice reforms because, despite the cynics, they recognised that something could be done. We have halved the time that it takes to get people from crime to sentence, and we have reduced reoffending.

Finally, I concur with the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Ian Lucas) because we cannot solve this problem if we leave it only to the police, the courts, the probation service and the prisons.

[Hilary Benn]

This is a problem for the community and for society. We have to make clear our values: we want to treat people with dignity and respect; we call on people to account for what they have done; we want to protect ourselves from those against whom we need protection; we want to give help to those who have offended, if they are prepared to change the way they live. If we do not have those values in our society, we will never solve this problem and find effective ways of tackling crime and building a safer society.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 152, Noes 365.

Division No. 46] **[7:11 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, rah Michael
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Curry, rh David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Hunter, Andrew
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, rh Michael
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Redwood, rh John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, rh David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Hugh Robertson and Angela Watkinson

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, rh A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, rh David
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*

David, Wayne
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morris, rh Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr. John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, rh Clare
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watts, David
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ivor Caplin and Derek Twigg

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House welcomes the steps the Government has taken and continues to take to reform all aspects of law enforcement including increasing police numbers to record levels and the 6.1 per cent. increase in police funding for 2003–04; further welcomes the steps the Government is taking to modernise the criminal justice system through the coherent long-term strategies and the introduction of the Criminal Justice Bill; notes that for the last five years crime rates have fallen by 27 per cent. according to the British Crime Survey, that burglary has reduced by 39 per cent. since 1997 and that the chances of becoming a victim of crime are as low as at any time in the last 20 years; and particularly supports the decisive action being taken by the Government to tackle street crime and the rise in gun-related crime.

Drugs Policy

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): I must announce to the House that Mr. Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

7.26 pm

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): I beg to move,

That this House recognises the fundamental importance of the link between hard drugs and crime; and believes that the only means by which an effective onslaught on the hard drugs culture can be made is through mandatory intensive treatment and rehabilitation for young heroin and cocaine addicts.

We have already had a rather vigorous debate, part of which the Under-Secretary was lucky enough to miss, and inevitably a rather political one, about the Government's record on crime in general. I should like to take the opportunity of this second and slightly shorter debate to do something quite different. I want to try to make a plea to the Under-Secretary which I do not expect him to accept on the spot, but which I hope may influence his thinking and perhaps lead us to some sort of agreement over the coming months on what I regard as a critical and tragic error that the Government are currently making.

I do not doubt for a second the genuine intention of the Government and indeed the Under-Secretary, who has spoken about the matter frequently and passionately, to reduce significantly the menace of hard drugs in Britain. That is common ground in all parts of the House. Nor do I doubt for a moment that the hon. Gentleman and the Government are willing to devote resources to the effort to reduce the menace of hard drugs, both in pursuit of the supply side and the drug dealers themselves—both remotely and in the United Kingdom—and through demand-side measures, if I can put it that way, or the effort to rehabilitate those who are caught in the vortex of heroin, cocaine and crack cocaine. I do not doubt that, alongside the resources that the Government have already devoted and the increased resources that they are now devoting to that pursuit, they intend to construct what they conceive to be the best possible way forward.

I doubt none of that, but I genuinely believe that the method that the Government are currently employing will mean that a large proportion of the very many hundreds of millions of pounds-worth of taxpayers' money that they are spending on this matter will be tragically wasted. I believe that the sort of proposals that the Opposition have been making offer not necessarily the only alternative, but a serious and plausible alternative that could provide some serious and lasting benefit to society.

It is the Minister's regular taunt that, roughly speaking, I became interested in drugs at the last Conservative party conference. That is not so.

At the beginning of last year, I began investigating what was happening to young people who were on drugs. I freely admit that until I occupied my current position, I knew little about the subject. When I began investigating and talking to young people who were caught in the nexus, to those who had been caught in it, to those who were on the way out of it, and to those not only in this country but in the Netherlands and Sweden

who had been trying to help young people out of it, I realised that there is an appalling gap between reality and rhetoric confronting this country.

The Minister tells us that 118,000 people have contact with drug treatment. He also said—honestly and correctly, I am sure—that he intends roughly to double that number through hundreds of millions of pounds of further expenditure. In practice, that means that many young people visit a form of agency or doctor's surgery and receive something that keeps them going. It may be heroin, methadone or counselling. It may help them for a while to remove themselves from the crime statistics. However, in many cases, it does little or nothing to remove them permanently and properly from the vortex into which they have descended.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): Does my right hon. Friend remember visiting my constituency and the drug abuse resistance education—DARE—project, which is run so successfully in our local primary schools by the Ministry of Defence police? Does he realise that, despite the Government's good intentions, the alcohol and drug advisory service in south Wiltshire is so understaffed that it takes six months before people can see a counsellor?

Mr. Letwin: I remember the visit. I have the highest regard for DARE and its work and I am aware of the overstretch in referrals. However, even if the alcohol and drug abstinence service in my hon. Friend's constituency receives additional funding in the next round, referrals will be almost useless in many cases. They will maintain and perhaps reduce the ability, desire and, in some cases, need of some young people to engage in criminal activity, but they will not reconstruct lives.

All my experience shows that reconstructing a life that has been severely damaged and almost destroyed by heroin, cocaine or crack cocaine addiction, almost always accompanied by a cocktail of other drug and alcohol-related problems and a range of psychological and social problems, cannot be done on the cheap. Such a life cannot be reconstructed in an amateur fashion or by maintenance. That can be achieved only through repeated, intensive psychological effort in residential or crypto-residential care. If the House were so organised, a stream of witnesses could appear to testify to that from their experience.

I do not claim that every young life that needs rescuing can be saved only if the young people live on top of the shop. However, there is a chance of genuine success only if the relevant people are, from morning till night and through the night, in conditions that allow them to focus entirely on rebuilding their lives. Even then, all my experience shows that the success rate is far from 100 per cent. Relapse will occur, and people will have to go through the system twice and sometimes thrice to escape.

The power of the drugs that we are considering for an addictive personality is so great that rescue is an arduous undertaking. I do not believe that the Under-Secretary and I would disagree; I suspect that he has seen and heard many of the same things as me. I am sure that he has talked to the same sort of people as me. Much of what I am saying probably rings bells in his mind, too. I appreciate that the Government do not have a bottomless coffer and I therefore recommend focusing and using the limited available resources, including the additional money, on the youngest who are caught in the vortex, and not trying to deal with every case.

It is evident that if we can deal with the flow, we will tackle the stock over time. When I visited the Netherlands, I was told that the average age of cocaine and heroin addicts is currently increasing by 360 days a year. Almost no one is joining the queue. That is the most striking statistic that I know, and I have mentioned it before. The Netherlands has reached the tipping point and succeeded in persuading young people that the drugs are loser drugs and worth avoiding. That has also happened in Sweden. Enough people have been cured to begin to make the cure social. At that point, funds can be released for referrals for older people who are on drugs and to place them in intensive treatment.

We will reach the tipping point in this country by focusing and spending the money on the young and subjecting them to intensive, residential rehabilitation. We must find a means of forcing those young people into treatment. Without that, nothing else will work. Offering treatment is not enough because although the offer may be taken up, in most cases it will happen four or five years later.

Ms Dari Taylor (Stockton, South): Does the right hon. Gentleman support supervised prescriptions of heroin? That was one of the most strategic planks of the policy in the Netherlands to persuade young people not only to accept treatment but to get out of the dealer's grip.

Mr. Letwin: The techniques that have been used in the Netherlands vary. However, the genuinely impressive part of the Netherlands experience is not the maintenance programmes for those who are old, but the intensive rehabilitation through abstinence of young people who have subsequently managed to escape the vortex. I do not discount the possibility of what the Under-Secretary effectively sanctions in the United Kingdom—maintenance of older drug users. It is better for people to receive methadone—bad as it is—than to rob old people to pay for that or heroin. However, that is not a cure; it simply dockets the problem. I urge moving young people out of the drugs culture through intensive, rehabilitative abstinence programmes. It is impressive that the Netherlands and Sweden have managed to achieve that.

Ms Taylor: Like the right hon. Gentleman, I have considered the way in which the matter is tackled throughout the world as well as in Britain. All the evidence shows that if young or older people do not wish to come off the stuff, it does not matter how much we try to force them. Does the right hon. Gentleman not accept the research?

Mr. Letwin: No. That is not my experience from talking to people who are in the programmes or those who are conducting them. I have been told repeatedly that the hon. Lady's contention is false. I am prepared to subject the matter to empirical investigation. I do not propose leaping at the problem. I propose conducting pilot studies of mandatory treatment for the young and

[Mr. Letwin]

ascertaining whether that works. The hon. Lady and I would not then have to hold a discussion in the abstract, because we would know. We should conduct the world's first serious experiment to ascertain whether we can crack the problem empirically.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): What my right hon. Friend is saying is compelling, but does he agree that we also need dedicated, determined, committed GPs who understand drug addicts and want to work in drug rehabilitation clinics? Will he look at the case of my constituent Dr. Adrian Garfoot, who, having been struck off by the General Medical Council, is doing absolutely nothing and who wants to be out there helping to save drug addicts' lives?

Mr. Letwin: I will indeed look at that case. I have been vastly impressed by the work of people in or near my constituency. GPs involved in the Providence project have reached the same conclusion as my hon. Friend's constituent and are devoting their lives to exactly the same goal—and it is working.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware of the prevalence of drugs in our prisons? It is possible to go into a prison such as Holloway drug free and come out with a drug habit. I think that, before embarking on extensive treatment programmes, Ministers could do more to make our prisons drug-free zones.

Mr. Letwin: Over the last week or two I have observed an alarming tendency on my part—which I had never suspected probable—to agree repeatedly with the hon. Lady. That may be as disturbing to her as it is to me. In my view she is undeniably right.

I find it extraordinary that there are still drugs in prisons. I do not find it extraordinary that there are drugs anywhere else; but if a prison is about keeping people in, one would have thought that it might be able to keep substances out. I do not speak for open prisons, but one would have thought that making closed prisons drug-free zones was a feasible operation. Not only are they not drug-free zones but, as the hon. Lady says, in some cases—tragically—people go in unaffected by drugs and come out affected by them.

I hope the Government will produce measures to make the Prison Service more effective in excluding drugs. I think we shall have to accept more restrictions on visiting by relatives. That will be a sorry loss—there is no doubt that physical barriers distance prisoner from visitor, and there is no doubt that that may have an effect on rehabilitation—but so bad is the drugs menace in our prisons that we may have to contemplate it.

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on what strikes me as the most courageous and pragmatic Front-Bench speech made during my 15 years in the House. During his observations on Holland, he accurately stated that heroin and cocaine were seen as the drugs of losers. Is that not the result of 25 years in which Holland has separated the markets for hard and soft drugs? Soft drugs are seen to be undesirable, but are not associated with an underworld or with low life. As a result, those taking or selling hard drugs are isolated, which has led to a reduction in the use of all drugs and a marginalisation of suppliers and users of hard drugs.

Mr. Letwin: As I think I have said here before, two models appear to have been successful. One is, indeed, in the Netherlands, where the very strategy described by the hon. Gentleman has been adopted—separation of the markets. The other is in Sweden, where serious efforts have been made to eliminate both markets. The one strategy that shows little or no promise of success is, I regret to say, the Government's approach to soft drugs—a muddled approach that neither separates the markets nor seeks to eliminate them. I will continue to inveigh against that approach.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Letwin: I will give way one last time.

Mr. Weir: The right hon. Gentleman seems to see intensive treatment in prisons or young offenders institutions as in-patient treatment of a sort. Specialist drugs corps are about to be piloted in Scotland. They will deal not just with drug-dependent but with criminal behaviour, and try to get young people off drugs in that way. I agree with the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott): unless people are willing to stop taking drugs in the first place, no system will work.

Mr. Letwin: I repeat my view—and, as I have said, I am prepared for the Government to subject it to empirical investigation. I do not think it essential for people to want to stop at the beginning of treatment; what is essential is for the reconstruction of a life to be such that by the end of the treatment the person wants to stay off drugs. I do not envisage programmes in young offenders institutions or prisons; on the contrary, it is clear to me that they should take place in clinics. They are separate from the issue of punishment, and need to be kept separate from it. But a life can only be reconstructed in the right way if the person concerned is purposeful, and that must involve constructive rather than criminal purpose. For many of the young people who commit today's burglaries and robberies crime is virtually a necessity, because it is impossible to feed a drugs habit without being either very rich or prone to crime.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): I think my right hon. Friend is on the right track in considering compulsion in rehabilitation, but will he also consider prevention? As he knows, the first use of any drug by a young person often occurs under the influence of alcohol. Is it not regrettable that, in the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001, Labour removed police officers' right to take unopened cans and bottles of alcohol from young people in public places? Will my right hon. Friend encourage the Government to reinstate that power, so that the police can save youngsters from getting involved in drugs in the first place?

Mr. Letwin: My hon. Friend is right to mention the severe problems of binge drinking among the young.

We need to think again about how we can prevent the habit from becoming widespread. There is no doubt that it is associated with being dragged into the drugs culture as a whole.

I am outstaying my welcome—[HON. MEMBERS: "More!"] No. This is a short debate, and I want both my hon. Friends and Labour Members to have a chance to speak.

I hope I have made clear the contrast between this debate and the earlier piece of splendid political knockabout on both sides of the House. In this second debate, I have argued passionately for a position I believe to be right, which need not separate the political parties. It can be adopted by the Government now. It could prevent a tragic waste of resources, and—at least as important—could save thousands of young people from being drawn into the vortex that so afflicts not just them and their families, but the many victims of the crimes that they find themselves compelled to commit.

7.48 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Bob Ainsworth): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"recognises that focusing on Class A drugs, educating young people about the dangers of all drugs, preventing drug misuse, combating the dealers, reducing availability and treating addicts are all essential in tackling drugs; and welcomes the Government's updated Drug Strategy and the 44 per cent. increase in planned expenditure on combating drugs, from £1.026 billion in the current financial year to nearly £1.5 billion in the year starting April 2005."

I thank the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) for the serious way in which he presented his case, and I will try to respond seriously. I must say that so far I have not taken his alternatives to the updated drugs strategy very seriously, for what I believe to be good and practical reasons. I see a number of holes in what he suggests, and a number of real inconsistencies in what we hear from the Conservatives about drugs strategy.

I want to ask the right hon. Gentleman some questions—let him by all means intervene if he wishes—about his proposals. He seems to be suggesting that an awful lot more should be spent on the rehabilitation of relatively few people. It would be good to know exactly what he proposes. Does he propose a substantial increase in spending, or does he propose to take money away from some parts of the strategy in order to pay for others? I understood him to say the latter—that he intended, in large part, to abandon rehabilitation treatments for many people in order to concentrate on the young.

Mr. Letwin: I am grateful to the Minister for the spirit in which he is approaching this, and I will answer his question. I do not have the precise figures in my mind, but I believe that his intention to increase by about 118,000 the number of people in contact with treatment is scheduled by the Government to cost about £325 million, or perhaps somewhat more—perhaps even £400 million. The proposal that I make to the Government today—because I understand the requirements that the Home Office faces in dealing with the Chancellor—is that that money, which would otherwise be increasing the numbers of those in contact, in some vague sense, with some set of agencies, should instead be spent on the kind of programme that I am describing. We have costed such a policy at £460 million a year. Almost the entirety of that sum could be found from the additional sum that the Minister has in mind. For our own part, I have agreed with my colleague, the shadow Secretary of State for Health, that if we were in government we would find the money from the health budget, because the savings to the national health service alone would, over time, justify that. I am not, however, asking the Minister to agree to that. He already has a budget of the same order of magnitude as ours—perhaps not to the last £10 million, but of the same order none the less—and if he could spend it on the policy that we are proposing, it would be vastly better spent.

Mr. Ainsworth: Presumably the right hon. Gentleman would spend that money by withdrawing interventions that are available for other people who would then not be covered. So, under his proposals, there would be no new money such as that outlined in our updated drugs strategy. Let us take an example of what that money needs to be spent on. One of the biggest gaps that we have identified is the need for through-care and after-care for people leaving prison. We have found that, unless there is adequate provision for picking those people up as they are released and carrying them through into community treatment services, they will go straight back to the market, and to the dealers. They will begin committing crimes again, and that is one of the main causes of the revolving door syndrome in which people go back into criminality almost as soon as they are released from prison. I suppose that that money provided in the updated drugs strategy would no longer be there under the right hon. Gentleman's proposals, because he would just have spent it on rehabilitation. That is one example of an important gap that we are seeking to plug and to provide for effectively being taken away by the Conservatives.

Mr. Letwin: I am grateful to the Minister for giving me the opportunity to engage in what I think is constructive repartee. Let us test his proposition. Why do we not try piloting the proposal that I am suggesting, and the one that he is suggesting, in relation to picking people up as they come out of prison? Both are worthy objectives, but I suspect that the empirical evidence would show that his methods would fail to have much impact on ex-prisoners and that my methods would succeed in getting those people off drugs. If I am wrong, however, the empirical evidence would show that, and we need not nationalise it.

Mr. Ainsworth: It would be worth the right hon. Gentleman's while considering his own policy and putting it up against some of the proposals in the updated drugs strategy. I do not know what opportunity he has had—with all his different responsibilities—with the research facilities that he has available to him, to go into the detail of where we are planning to spend the additional money. One of the other areas is that of making early interventions through the criminal justice system to oblige people into treatment. That is something that the right hon. Gentleman is advocating, yet he seems to think that he can lift the pot of money

[Mr. Ainsworth]

allocated for piloting presumptions against bail, for extending the drug testing programme, and for doubling the amount of drug testing and treatment orders. I know that there has been criticism from the Conservatives about the failure rate, or success rate, of DTTOs, but when we look at the kind of people we are dealing with in relation to the orders, we can see that, in the circumstances, we are doing very well in terms of the interventions that we are trying to make. All that additional money would be taken away by the right hon. Gentleman to provide residential rehabilitation across the piece for a particular group of people.

The right hon. Gentleman asks for empirical evidence, saying that he believes that the Government are honest in their intentions, but misguided. Well, from whom should we get our information? I would have thought that we should get it from people with a long record of working in the field, who have experience of providing drug treatment and services in our communities. In preparation for this debate, I spoke to Geoff Cobb, the chief executive of the Swanswell trust, which provides drug and alcohol services in Birmingham, Coventry and Warwickshire. He has had 30 years' experience of working in that area. He said of the right hon. Gentleman's proposal:

"Residential rehabilitation is very expensive, and very often inappropriate. Increasingly, those who need it are getting help because of the growth in the quantity and quality of community services."

He makes a plea:

"Let the NTA"—

the national treatment agency—

"get on with the work that they are doing, because we are beginning to get to the point that we need to get to."

The right hon. Member for West Dorset must have received DrugScope's response to his consultation on the proposals that he is now putting before the House. He is asking the House to consider the evidence. I do not know what he thinks of DrugScope. It does not agree with Government policy in every area, but it appears to be one of the more serious organisations and it is taken seriously by almost everyone working in drug rehabilitation, treatment and services in this country. DrugScope's response to the Conservatives' consultation states that their costings are incorrect, their policy is too rigid, there is no evidence base to support what they suggest, and the basis on which they make their analysis is flawed. Its recommendations to the Conservative party go on to say:

"We would urge the Conservative party to reconsider their proposed drugs policy."

DrugScope suggests that the evidence on which the policy is based is "partial and inaccurate", and says that it is worried that the policy would be "unworkable" and that it would

"harm the young people it seeks to help".

There is the first evidence in response to the right hon. Gentleman's proposals.

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): I know that the Minister takes this issue very seriously and, like the rest of us, is keen to do what he can about the issue of drugs. Is he sure, however, that his existing policy is working? The police in Plymouth told me last Friday that, of 38 DTTOs issued to people in Plymouth over the last few months, 28 of those people were arrested while still subject to one of those orders for offences related to their drug habit. They were committing crimes while still subject to a DTTO. That is the picture that is emerging from the police's empirical studies of the Minister's current system. If it is not working, why does he not open his mind to alternatives?

Mr. Ainsworth: If the hon. Gentleman wants to examine whether there is a local anomaly in Plymouth, compared with the national situation, I would be happy to study that with him. Yes, there are failures relating to DTTOs, but the orders are aimed at people who would otherwise go to prison because they have a drug problem that has led them into serious crime. Yes, there are people who fail, and who are brought back in, but taken overall, when we consider the nature of those with whom we are dealing and the size of the problem, DTTOs are working in a high proportion of cases.

One of the areas of funding that the Conservatives are suggesting that we remove relates to the ability to introduce DTTO-type policies for a lower level of criminality at an earlier point of intervention, as an addition to community sentencing. We would then be able to put a requirement for drug testing and treatment on the very people whom the right hon. Member for West Dorset says he is trying to cut off before they become serious drug offenders and provide us with the levels of crime that we are experiencing. That is the funding that is in the updated drugs strategy, which the right hon. Gentleman proposes to remove to pay for expensive rehabilitation that everybody working in the field says is inappropriate in the overwhelming majority of cases.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): The Minister has preyed in aid the views of DrugScope, which is well respected and which I have visited as it is based in my part of south London. Is he willing to take its advice on other areas of drugs policy on which it suggests that the Government ought to choose a different route? In particular, does he accept that DrugScope is clear that if public policy concentrated on the class A and serious drug users and did not pursue people who possess cannabis for their own use and the like, there would be a much clearer message, much more concentrated resources and, on the basis of all its evidence, a much more successful policy on separating the casual user, referred to by the hon. Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn), from the addict, who regularly uses criminals to supply his addiction?

Mr. Ainsworth: I always take seriously what DrugScope says and I am always prepared to listen to it, but the Government do not agree with it on every single area.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): So DrugScope is right only when it attacks Conservative policies, not Labour ones.

Mr. Ainsworth: The comments on the Conservative party paper are a little more scathing than anything that has been said about the updated drugs strategy.

DrugScope has not said things in such strong terms in response to our updated drugs strategy. *[Interruption.]* We began the debate with a serious attempt to study the issue, but if we are going to descend into heckling, we can do something else by all means.

Let me say to the right hon. Member for West Dorset that that is not the biggest dispute between the Government and DrugScope. The Government have moved on the issue and we want the police to concentrate their efforts on the dealers and traffickers. We do not want the police to let up on cannabis traffickers, because they are often the same people who deal with class A drugs, but nor do we want them disproportionately concerning themselves with simple possession cases, which is why we reclassified cannabis. I know that the Liberal Democrats would go a lot further, but we have decided not to. However, we certainly listened to the sense of what was being said.

I have tried to take the right hon. Gentleman's comment seriously and I abandoned the speech that I had prepared so as to run across all our proposals on the updated drugs strategy, but the problem is a lot more complex than he seems to think, with his single initiative, which appears to be rehabilitation, rehabilitation, rehabilitation. We must try to hit the drug problem across the piece. We must tackle supply as best we can. We must co-operate with Governments abroad, such as those of Afghanistan, Jamaica, Turkey and our European partners, to try to cut off the supply.

We must improve our policing. We must improve the input against what we call the middle market—the linkage between the traffickers nationally and the problem on the streets. We plan to apply money to that. We must have intensive policing in those areas that suffer from problems of crack cocaine with all that flows from them, such as the connections with violence and gun crime. We must protect our communities by having a comprehensive programme of inputs, using the criminal justice system wherever appropriate, to oblige people into treatment. We do not disagree with the right hon. Gentleman on that in principle. At every stage, we want to use the criminal justice system to get people into treatment.

We are going to run a pilot involving presumption against bail. We are going to have new community sentence DTTO alternatives. We are going to double the number of DTTOs. We already have mandatory testing in nine police force areas and we are going to roll that out to all high-crime areas. There are a lot of issues on which we do not disagree with the right hon. Gentleman in principle.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Given that the Minister is arguing for a multifaceted approach and that he has criticised what I thought was the shrewd and noble focus of my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset on a specific and valuable proposal, can he tell me and the House his specific proposal today to tackle the horrifying exacerbation of the drugs problem that comes about through the virtually unrestricted circulation of drugs in prison, to which reference was made earlier?

Mr. Ainsworth: If the hon. Gentleman believes that there is some easy answer on the total eradication of drugs in prisons, please let us have it, as we have put in a lot of effort on that over some time. We have mandatory testing in prisons and the positive results have fallen considerably, which probably indicates a degree of success. The comprehensive counselling, assessment, referral, advice and through-care services programme is considering how to advise people and providing them with treatment wherever possible, carrying them right through. We are looking to beef up the back end of the CARATS programme to provide effective through-care and aftercare for prisoners, but of course the Prison Service needs to do everything it can to try to keep drugs out of prisons. All of us in the House would urge it to continue to do that.

Mr. Osborne: My constituency contains Styal women's prison, which is the second largest women's prison in England. The chief inspector of prisons, who recently inspected it, estimated that some 40 per cent. of the prisoners were on heroin, although the Government think that the figure is much higher. Styal still does not have a proper drug detoxification unit, partly because it has changed from a small to a large prison in the past couple of years. Will the Minister consider the particular case of Styal prison and its desperate need, as identified by the chief inspector, for a drug detoxification unit?

Mr. Ainsworth: Yes, I will. We are happy to consider that case, but I ask the hon. Gentleman—this is as true in the community as it is here—to consider who should take the decisions as to where and whether a detox programme is needed in a particular area or in a particular establishment. I suggest that there are many other issues on which he would come to the House and argue that, in imposing a rigid system, rehab would be provided across the board, even where it was not necessarily the most appropriate input, which is exactly what I am arguing now. That is not a decision for Ministers. It would be far better taken in the locality following consideration of its needs. Detox is about 10 times more expensive than some other interventions, so we are talking about big money here. If we provided residential rehabilitation where it was not needed, we would be wasting money that badly needs to be spent in other areas.

Ms Abbott: On the question of drugs in prisons, my hon. Friend will be aware that I was a graduate trainee with the Home Office many years ago, and I worked in the prisons department. There are no easy answers, but some straightforward things could be done, including regularly searching warders for drugs, which does not happen at present. Restrictions on visitors were referred to earlier. Also, we must make absolutely sure that there are no vestiges of the attitude that I saw in the prisons department 20 years ago among those at prison governor grade—at least if the prisoners are spaced out of their heads, they are easier to manage. I do not have a magic solution, but those simple things would go some way towards clearing drugs out of prisons.

Mr. Ainsworth: One hopes that those attitudes have been eradicated from the Prison Service and that we are seriously considering how to help people as much as we can, but, as the right hon. Member for West Dorset says, the drugs strategy also needs to address the problem of

[Mr. Ainsworth]

young people, as the right hon. Member for West Dorset says. If we do not cut off tomorrow's problematic drug users, we shall wind up having treated one set of people as others are coming along behind them to provide the same problem. We estimate that there are about 250,000 problematic drug users in this country. If he is suggesting, as he appears to be, that many of them can effectively be abandoned so that we can spend the money that is available on a relative few, that will not help us to cut the crime that is caused by the drug problem in our country.

John Mann (Bassetlaw): My hon. Friend says that decisions on what forms of treatment should be available need to be made at local level. Who should make those decisions, and what criteria and evidence base should they use to judge success?

Mr. Ainsworth: In the first instance, it has to be the drugs action team. We must ensure that the DAT is properly structured and can make a good analysis of all the area's needs, and that all the relevant local agencies have a proper input. It is our responsibility to ensure that there are adequate resources for DATs to commission services, and then we must hold them to account. I do not see how we can impose a rigid system from the centre on every area, insisting that there should be so many rehab places. People nearer to the problem in a particular area will understand its size, structure and complexity and will seek to commission services to deal with it. That is common sense, and it would use the money available in the most cost-effective way.

John Mann: The majority of people on my DAT, like every other, are not from the health professions. What other part of the national health service makes health decisions through people such as council officers, police and probation officers, rather than health professionals?

Mr. Ainsworth: DATs cannot consist solely of health professionals. Other people, including some from the local authority, need to have an input.

I have spoken for longer than I should. I commend the updated drugs strategy to the House. I ask the House to reject the motion and support the amendment. There are no simple solutions to this problem, but the updated drugs strategy builds on the work that has been done and the lessons that have been learned over the past four years. Only by pursuing it with vigour and ensuring that we deliver do we stand a chance of reducing the significant drug problem that we have in our country, which causes so much crime and misery. The Government are absolutely pledged to that. It is a major priority for us. I commend the amendment to the House.

8.13 pm

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Something rather interesting is happening. We are edging towards the point at which we have a sensible, rational debate on the problems of drugs in this country—the second debate on the subject in this Chamber in about five weeks, and that is a precedent. The issue is no longer a peripheral one and it is being approached sensibly, without sloganising or fixed attitudes. The Home Affairs Committee report was a great help in that process, as was the approach taken by the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin). I do not agree with everything in the motion, and I will explain why, but I commend him for the manner in which he set out his ideas.

We are witnessing a retreat from certainty, and that is a very good thing, because none of us can be certain about what is the right approach. There is conflicting evidence, and various initiatives have been tried but have failed. We all edge our way forwards. What is the firm ground? We can all accept—it is explicit in the motion—that the drugs trade is a motor of crime. I was certainly convinced of that when I was chairman of a police authority in Avon and Somerset. I saw that the drugs trade was a significant problem not only in inner-city Bristol but throughout the force area, driving burglary, street crime and car crime in rural as well as urban areas, as people often found that the pickings were richer out in the country, where property was perhaps less well defended. On the back of that, circumstances were created in which organised crime and gun crime could prosper, and many evils resulted.

We can also all agree that we want to be effective in dealing with the supply and distribution of hard drugs. Importation is clearly a factor. I am still critical of the extent to which the Government's efforts have been focused on closing down some of the import routes, especially in central Asia. I have been concerned for some time that the diplomatic effort in that area has been insufficient. Police officers in Bristol have also complained strongly about the West Indies, suggesting that every plane arriving from Jamaica for some time has been a source of hard drugs in the Bristol area. I am not convinced that the interdiction efforts of either Customs and Excise or the intelligence services have been robust enough.

I am sorry to say that recent figures from Customs and Excise show that, far from an improvement in performance, less cocaine and heroin have been seized recently. In 2000–01, 9,463 kg was seized; the following year it was down to 9,007 kg; and in the first half of the current year the figure was only 3,639 kg, which suggests a marked decrease in seizure rates. I accept that there is an element of serendipity about whether there is a big seizure at a particular time, but the figures do not suggest that Customs and Excise is winning the war. Perhaps more effort should be made.

I hope that we can all agree that not all drugs are the same in their harmful effects. I find it hard to identify a psychotropic drug that does not have any harmful effects. However, even if we accept that all drugs have some harmful effects, it is nevertheless a nonsense to pretend that class A drugs—the hard drugs—are equally as dangerous as some of the drugs classified as class C, or which are about to be reclassified as such. The problem with not recognising that fact is that it undermines everything else that we say about the subject. It is no good asserting to young people that cannabis is as dangerous as heroin, because they do not believe it. They know that that is not true, and to do so undermines everything that we do. We must therefore look at the problem not only of insulting the intelligence of the community whom we are trying to influence but of misdirecting police effort and resources away from where they can be effective in dealing with drugs that are

proven to kill, towards those that are not proven to kill and which may have a less harmful effect than fully legal drugs such as alcohol and tobacco.

My fourth point concerns dealing with the user, and this is where the motion of the right hon. Member for West Dorset really comes into effect. We are, I hope, reaching a consensus that dealing with the possession of drugs as if it were a criminal offence requiring a custodial sentence is nonsense. Apart from anything else, to do so puts the person in question into a context in which they will be encouraged to take drugs. Indeed, as has already been discussed, on coming out of prison they may find themselves on drugs that are harder than those that they were on when they went in. There is some evidence of an improvement in the Prison Service's performance in that regard; nevertheless, a very real risk exists.

It is clear that that point does not apply when there are aggravating circumstances. Much was said in a previous debate about driving under the influence of drugs. We do not treat that problem seriously enough, and there should be greater awareness of it. It has been suggested, not least by the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe), that a halfway stage of "substantial possession" should be recognised. That would create a threshold that both the police and the user can identify and understand by establishing a quantity that is considered likely to be used for purposes other than personal, or directly social. In my view, there is a strong argument for that.

The question, therefore, is: what do we do with the user? The motion of the right hon. Member for West Dorset advances the proposition that any new money should be put solely into the treatment of the young. Although I accept that his proposition would have merit in the context of a wider approach, my worry is that other improvements would not result. I am thinking of the older user, who needs continuing and enhanced assistance. As we know, the availability of facilities across the country is patchy, and in many parts there is an unacceptably long period of referral and an unacceptably weak support system.

Pilot schemes and initiatives are under way to couple release from prison with continuing rehabilitation. Here, I pray in aid a chief superintendent in my constituency, who has written to me commending the pilot scheme in Bristol known as the prolific offender scheme. The Minister nods, so he is obviously familiar with it. The chief superintendent says that what is desperately needed is for that scheme—which provides continuing support for prolific offenders within a regulated environment outside prison, including support with drug addiction—to be extended across the police force area. That requires money and resources. It requires resources from the Home Office, and support from the health service in providing the right mix of personnel. I do not agree entirely with the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann), who said that only medical staff have a role in this regard. A more holistic approach would be of benefit. The probation service clearly has something to say on the subject of prolific offenders in particular, and something to do if we are to protect our communities effectively.

John Mann: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, although drugs action teams should not consist exclusively of health professionals, at least half of the membership of their governing boards, rather than a small minority, should consist of health professionals?

Mr. Heath: I am less worried about that issue than the hon. Gentleman clearly is; I want the right package to be developed for the individual. I want that package to contain a very strong health component, and I want general practitioners to form a part, because they have something very important to say and to do. However, that is not to decry the efforts of others who are taking a sensible position on this issue, and who are able to provide support for the individual. Nevertheless, I do think that we need to establish a package that works for the individual concerned, and for the wider community, because the two are inseparable in this instance.

There is a further point about the young drug user. Let us not lose sight of the need to prevent a person who is taking drugs from becoming addicted. If we put all our eggs in one basket and adopt the one-club approach, I am not convinced that we will have the additional support for education, youth services and the alternative opportunities afforded to young people that will prevent them from becoming involved with this pernicious trade in the first place. That would worry me; it is right to have several stages in an effective drugs strategy, and prevention is just as important as cure.

I have a problem with the motion but not with the speech of the right hon. Member for West Dorset, which I found interesting. This debate is almost like a seminar; that is a good thing for this place because it does not happen often enough. It was spoiled by some of the barracking, but let us hope that this positive tone continues.

We must not focus all our attention on the young addict, however important that is. Let me say gently that I am not convinced that the sums add up when it comes to providing the level of support that the right hon. Gentleman wants. I want to see a more diverse approach for young people to ensure that, as far as possible, we prevent them from becoming addicts in the first place.

My basic motto in all matters to do with law and order is that the two most effective preventive measures regarding crime and the distribution and supply of drugs are the certainty of being caught—which, in turn, requires resources for policing, intelligence and other services—and the certainty of effective action, whether in sentencing, support or rehabilitation, for the people who emerge at the other end. I am not convinced that the right hon. Gentleman's formula achieves that, but it was a valuable contribution to the debate. I hope that continuing the debate in a similar tone and format will enable us to alight on the strategies that work. Not only will we spend our resources in the most effective way, we will ultimately move towards the position that we have heard about in the Netherlands and Sweden, where heroin and crack cocaine, instead of being cool, are identified as the killers they are.

8.28 pm

John Mann (Bassetlaw): I listened with interest to the speech of the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin). In the spirit of the good dialogue that is breaking out tonight, I shall be visiting the same places, and some others, that he visited in the Netherlands and

[John Mann]

Sweden. I shall be going with a couple of local general practitioners to see what evidence I can glean that could contribute towards our situation. I do not dismiss the proposals, although I believe that the Conservatives have fallen into the trap of looking for the simple solution to the drugs problem. There are no simple solutions.

Following a public inquiry into heroin, I recommended that more residential rehabilitation provision should be made available to people in my area. Some people in the drugs world immediately leapt on that and proposed having a residential rehabilitation centre in the middle of the drug-dealing area in my constituency. I have nothing against having everything in my constituency. Rationally, however, as the social services department which holds the budget confirms, my local social services would not refer local people living at home to a residential rehabilitation centre in the middle of the drug-dealing area in their own town. That is clearly nonsense, but it has been proposed and I am trying to unravel bids to the Government for up to £500,000. I and others in my inquiry have drawn the conclusion that money itself is not the biggest problem. The issue is how it is used. Simply targeting young offenders is a fundamental error.

My most important point relates to the figures. I have analysed drug and alcohol action team returns from Nottinghamshire, which contain interesting figures. I have challenged the way in which figures are quantified and the evidence base many times both in and out of the Chamber, and I shall do so again tonight.

The DAT returns from Nottinghamshire tell us that all 58 secondary schools—100 per cent.—are providing anti-drugs education. Yet I have visited the schools and met many pupils, without teachers or others being present, and most of them have told me that they have had no anti-drugs education at secondary school. Something is clearly not adding up. I have recommended that the national curriculum should be tightened, and I believe that dialogue is taking place on that at present. I hope that other hon. Members will contribute on what the national curriculum should contain. The principle is clear, however, that a key part of the curriculum for every age between 11 and 16 should be coherent anti-drugs education. My schools clearly do not include it at the moment.

Mr. Simmonds: To my mind, the critical question is who goes to schools to educate children on the dangers of drug abuse. Students at secondary schools perceive teachers, police officers and others to be part of the establishment and will not listen to the advice that they give. Systems should be in place to allow rehabilitated drug addicts and members of their families to go to schools to explain to pupils exactly what it means to be an addict or part of a family that contains an addict.

John Mann: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that. I am offering local schools something that arose fortuitously on the back of my constituency inquiry. A television company made a hard-hitting programme that began with the drug addicts themselves and their view of life. They did not provide a positive role model. It then moved on to the families, particularly the mothers, of those who have died from drug overdoses and those who have survived for a long time as heroin addicts. Their stories are powerful testimony, spoken by many local people.

We need to consider what works. On education, I would not rule any method out or any method in. One thing is clear, however: young people in my area do not believe that they are receiving anti-drugs education, and we can therefore say unequivocally that they are, by definition, not receiving it, no matter what DAT returns or anything else might say.

The DAT returns are even more interesting than that. For primary schools, the return says that 36 out of 36 schools are receiving anti-drugs education. I had to scratch my head when I read that because there are around 60 primary schools in my constituency alone. The statistics are becoming a little obscure.

More important even than schools is drug treatment. In 2001–02 in Nottinghamshire, we are told, there were 1,473 new clients and 2,297 people receiving treatment. If we add the previous year's figures, we find that the same number of people appear to be receiving treatment. Some people—but not many—will have been on the lists in previous years. The evidence shows that many people who drop out of treatment programmes subsequently re-present themselves. People who want treatment are thus likened to those who are being treated and the numbers add up. Approximately, 2,400 people have asked for treatment, but 2,297—only 110 fewer—are receiving it.

If we consider the average for waiting lists for all forms of treatment, we can discount the two most recent months, because those people will still be waiting, so again the figures add up. The statistics suggest that everyone who wants treatment is receiving it, yet in my constituency alone I have spoken to more than 150 heroin addicts and their families who tell me that they are not getting treatment. They do not say that they are not getting good or effective treatment or that they would prefer one form rather than another—although such information could be found out—but that they are not getting treatment at all.

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): When the hon. Gentleman refers to treatment, does he mean maintaining an addict's supply of clean needles and a safe form of the drug, or a programme of withdrawal and abstinence?

John Mann: I thank the hon. Lady for that intervention. The DAT returns do not specify that point. That is one of my questions: what is the definition of treatment? In Nottinghamshire, it is clear: any relationship with the treatment services is defined as treatment. That is how we arrived at a figure of 118,000. That is not a criticism of the Government but of the professionals in the field—the drugs establishment—who create the statistics.

I shall elaborate on waiting times in Nottinghamshire. According to the current DAT annual returns, the longest time that anyone has waited for residential rehabilitation is 10 weeks. However, person A and their parents visited my surgery 14 months ago and I followed person A's progress monthly. Person A requested residential rehabilitation and I followed the dialogue.

Person A's parents have visited me regularly. I encouraged that; indeed, in some ways, my office team and I have become part of the support mechanism for person A and their family. Person A went into a residential rehabilitation scheme only in late November, after I had raised their case in my inquiry. Perhaps it was a coincidence. Leaving that aside, however, person A had been asking for residential rehabilitation for 12 months.

Although person A is happy to be named, I do not think that it is appropriate or relevant to the further details that I shall give about the case. Person A is in a stable situation. During those 12 months, they were not involved in any crimes although they had been previously. Person A is living at home with their parents—previously they were not. The father has been buying drugs for person A to ensure a downward progression of intake before rehabilitation. That is known and the father has, rightly, not been arrested—an instance of appropriate policing. The father has been maintaining person A, stabilising them and preparing them for rehabilitation, precisely as the national treatment agency suggests.

I have two questions. First, why was person A not referred earlier, and secondly, why did the information given to the Government about waiting lists state that the longest waiting time was 10 weeks when person A had to wait 12 months?

Mr. Streeter: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

John Mann: May I continue my point before taking interventions?

The waiting time for community prescribing is three weeks for priority cases and 11 weeks for non-priority cases. Clearly, I have a problem in judging what is priority and non-priority, but I have asked the questions and believe that person B is likely to be deemed a priority for various reasons.

Person B has been involved in a range of semi-criminal activities. She may have been involved in prostitution, like many people of her gender. She has not volunteered that information to me, but the advice workers in the field suggest that the vast majority of women heroin addicts in my constituency are regularly involved in some form of prostitution to fund their habit. I believe that information to be accurate. Certainly, if person B has not been involved that activity, she is very rare among her cohort of young women drug users.

Is person B in the three-week or 11-week category? I have followed person B's case on a weekly, not monthly, basis because she gave evidence at my inquiry nearly five months ago. Person B said, "I was due to meet a drugs worker outside Boots the Chemist for an appointment to discuss a potential detox." Why the meeting was supposed to happen outside Boots the Chemist is a separate issue, but it was not person B's choice. The drugs worker did not turn up. Person B then had to wait while the drugs worker went on holiday.

Person B happens to have a mobile phone on which the drugs worker has left messages. I have listened to those messages. Frankly, they are extraordinary, showing the most patronising and worst aspects of any bureaucracy and any section of the health service. Person B was asked whether or not she was ready for a detox. That is a professional decision. Who takes it? One person, not a team of people—it is not a multi-agency issue, like DATs or drugs reference groups. So person B has been waiting and waiting.

I have a letter that was sent to person B on 24 December. It says:

"We have recently received a referral on your behalf to our service at the Maltings"—

the name of the drugs treatment centre—

"Would you please telephone the referral worker . . . on a Monday, Wednesday or Friday afternoon . . . to confirm that you require contact with our service and to discuss your present situation? If we do not hear from you within the next seven days, we will assume that you do not require our service."

That letter was written despite my involvement as the Member of Parliament and despite the fact that I and other people from my office and the community rang up the drugs treatment service on behalf of person B. Is person B on the waiting list or not? On what basis has that decision been made? Who is sending out a new referral letter, and how does that equate to the statistics?

I could give many more examples, but the two that I have mentioned are particularly poignant, as they happen to be ones that I followed in the first instance purely because the people involved came to my surgery.

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: We all appreciate the depth to which my hon. Friend has been prepared to go into this issue. I would not stand at the Dispatch Box and seek to suggest that every decision taken in his DAT or any other is right. Of course I do not know the identities of person A and person B, but no one seeks to pretend that we will provide residential rehabilitation on demand. My hon. Friend should talk to a number of people who work on drugs issues. The person whom I quoted, Geoff Cobbe, from my own area would say that providing such treatment on demand would be totally wrong and that many millions of pounds would be wasted on inappropriate treatment, as happened until 1993, when, in effect, such treatment was available in theory, but nothing else besides.

John Mann: I thank the Minister for his intervention. My response is straightforward: person B does not want residential rehabilitation but community-based treatment. If person A is suitable now, why were they not suitable previously? What has changed, especially as the drugs treatment budget was underspent for the last year? I suspect that the only thing that has changed is that a year end is coming, there has been an inquiry and some pressure, and people are spending up the budget. I am not an advocate of residential rehabilitation as a panacea. People come to me for quick solutions, which I do not offer or recommend. A range of possibilities exists. All I wish to see in my area is a menu of treatment provided for people when they want it, straight away, and not further down the line.

A Home Office written answer to me on 12 December stated:

"DAT plans are analysed by regional teams consisting of Home Office officials, National Treatment Agency representatives . . . They give careful scrutiny to all the information provided. Any quantitative information is rigorously checked to ensure its accuracy."—[*Official Report*, 12 December 2002; Vol. 396, c. 476W.]

[John Mann]

I hope that the statistics for my DAT are unique in the country, but they are meaningless, fairy tale statistics, in relation to both education and drugs treatment. That is very worrying, because what I ask for repeatedly—I would ask for it from the Opposition, too, with regard to their proposals—is an evidence base in relation to what succeeds and what does not. Let us be honest with people. Of the 150 addicts in my constituency whom I have seen—the number is increasing, as more and more come to see me—and who are officially documented in the inquiry, all of them want treatment. Some of them will be good bets, and some will be bad bets. Some of them are heroin addicts who became criminals, and some are criminals who became heroin addicts. Some will get through treatment, and some will not. The one thing that is common to them is that they want treatment, and they want honesty. They want people to be straight with them. If they are told that they must wait six months for a residential rehabilitation place, but that, if they do certain things, they will get one, many of them—although they may not be delighted—will be prepared to wait on that basis. The problem in my area is that they do not trust a word that they are told by the drugs treatment services.

To explain partly why that is, let me read from a leaflet produced by a neighbouring drug reference group within my DAT:

"If you choose to use remember . . . The effects from eating dope are hard to judge. You will save your lungs but may lose your head—pace yourself . . . Sometimes using cannabis may not agree with you, it can lead to feeling sick or scared. Tell a friend, find a quiet place to relax, and in an hour the worst should be over . . . Use and possession of cannabis is illegal—a criminal conviction is nothing but hassle . . . One of the biggest risks to a user is being caught."

The evidence from my constituents is that one of the biggest risks is moving on to other drugs. I would include cigarettes and alcohol in the same equation as cannabis in terms of drug experimentation by young people. Some young people in my constituency move on to heroin, and commit crime as a result of addictive use.

That kind of publication is not what Government money should be spent on in my area. I want effective education. The question of DARE has already been raised in this debate. It originated in Nottingham, and it is education run mainly by the police in primary schools. There is no evidence base, although I am now constructing my own, with the consent of users: an effective database detailing when they started using, who they are, where they are from, and what interventions there have been. One thing that is interesting is that there seems to be clear evidence that DARE has had success: the 16-year-olds, 15-year-olds and 14-year-olds are not getting addicted to the extent that, three or four years ago, their older brothers and sisters were. It is early days, and we are dealing with the first group of 16-year-olds to go through the programme. However, I understand that the blueprint programme has a budget of £9 million while the budget for the DARE organisation is only £80,000, and that money is provided by local businesses in and around Bassetlaw. Let us consider what could be done if we experimented with DARE for every year in secondary schools, in sure start and, crucially, with parents. I would like pilots to do that.

DARE has recently extended successfully into parts of south Wales, and I would like the experience to be shared across the country. There is no question that it is beginning to have an impact. My view and that of many of the 16-year-olds to whom I have spoken is that, if the programme continues at ages 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16, we will have informed school cohorts who, at a minimum, will not make irrational decisions. However, DARE provides more than that. It deals with issues such as bullying, pride and self-respect. That is why it works. It is not so much a drugs message but a message about an individuals' self-respect wherever they come from and whatever their parents are like. We face the problem of quite a large number of second-generation kids whose parents are heroin addicts. The sum of £80,000 is not a lot so let us imagine what might happen if the figure was doubled, tripled or quadrupled to allow DARE to expand and pilot other programmes in secondary schools. That would be a cheap, cost-effective and valid use of resources.

I hope that the Opposition will take heed. They offer a simple solution and they need to get their line right. On 7 January in the Committee considering the Criminal Justice Bill, the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) referred to their policy involving an eightfold increase, but I am sure that that was a slip of the tongue. More worryingly, however, he said that the money was for residential and non-residential treatment. I urge caution against accepting the view that there is a panacea for a particular age group. The proposal equates in my constituency, as in everyone else's, to 12 new places for young people, and we need considerably more than that in residential rehabilitation, community-based treatment and everything else. We need significantly more places and we need them now. The Opposition's policy must be reconsidered.

I want in my area drugs courts that give people a choice. The moment that young people enter the criminal fraternity, they should be given immediate treatment. Drugs testing should also be introduced in the way that it has been by the chief constable at Worksop police station.

I have a final request for the Government. Pilots have all too often been based on where the maximum amount of crime is perceived to take place—that is, the cities. One of the problems with pilots in cities is that the population in them is highly transient. The population in my area is highly immobile. Because it is not transient, we can provide better than any city an evidence base that shows what does and does not work. The same people who are in my area now will be there in 10 years. We should not work on the overall statistics that mean that my consistuency is masked by an average that relates to it and to the constituencies of the hon. Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) and my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping). The problem is in Worksop, and the drug-related crime rate there is as high as anywhere else. We want to be part of the pilots so that we can provide an evidence base and offer real hope to young people.

8.54 pm

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): The motion recognises the irrefutable link between hard drugs and crime and the need for mandatory treatment and

rehabilitation for young heroin and cocaine addicts. I hope to persuade the House that the Government's updated drugs strategy published last December, focused as it is on providing more and more treatment, is deficient and is heading for inevitable failure. As admirable and as necessary as it is, the simple provision of treatment will do nothing to deter drug use or reduce the number of drug addicts.

Such a strategy cannot succeed without robust prevention measures to stem the never-ending flow of new addicts and an equally robust enforcement of the law. Given that the majority of drug abusers come into contact with the police after committing another crime, such as burglary, shoplifting or assault, tolerance, understanding and the provision of treatment without meaningful sanction will do nothing to deter repeat offending. Indeed, it will encourage it. Nor will it bring offenders to understand the devastation that they have caused to their victims' lives. The violation of a family home and the loss of personal possessions, often of sentimental value and irreplaceable, can permanently deprive the victims of their sense of security and peace of mind.

To the law-abiding majority in this country, the recent statements by the Lord Chancellor and the Lord Chief Justice were an outrage. They were a licence for burglars to go about their vile activities without fear of punishment. If the appalling crime of burglary is so widespread that the police do not have the means to deal with it and if our prisons are too overcrowded to accommodate all the burglars, the answer is to increase the number of police on our streets and to build more prisons, not to make burglary a non-crime, which is what happened with cannabis possession. When I opposed the downgrading of the law on cannabis in the Home Affairs Committee report on drugs policy, I asked, tongue in cheek, how long it would be before the strategy was applied to other crimes such as burglary. Little did even I think that it would happen so quickly. I shudder to imagine what will be the next crime to be neutralised in that way out of expedience.

Let us not kid ourselves that lenient community sentences are anything other than a slap on the wrist. Many are never completed and monitoring of attendance is patchy at best because of a lack of resources. If offenders face no real consequence as a result of their actions, they will see the offence itself as being of no consequence, its effect on their victims as being of no consequence and, indeed, the victims themselves as being of no consequence. That is what the policy will teach them. Never has there been such a gulf between justice and the law.

Similarly, just as treatment cannot succeed without prevention, so attacking the supply of drugs cannot succeed without also attacking the demand that sustains the market—although it is, of course, a fundamental element of drug strategy. It is unrealistic to regard all drug addicts as victims. They must take some responsibility for their actions alongside the dealers. The market is demand led. That is why prevention is so important in enabling the provision of treatment to be sustainable in terms of cost and the numbers needing it.

The declassification of cannabis is pivotal to the success of any drugs policy. Whereas it is acknowledged that hard drugs such as cocaine and heroin do the greatest damage, there is overwhelming evidence from both medical professionals and the police that the majority of hard drug users start on cannabis. I am utterly convinced by the gateway theory. That is why the reclassification of cannabis from class B to class C was so wrong. In February 2001, the Government rejected that idea, yet eight months later they changed their mind—a decision which I suspect owes more to the difficulty of managing the scope of the problem than to a reassessment of the inherent dangers.

The message is now so confusing that many young people think that cannabis is harmless, legal or both. Its mind-altering capabilities are complex and the cannabis on sale today is several times stronger than it was in the past. It is able to induce psychosis, mood swings, confusion, delusions or even hallucinations.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): Is the hon. Lady aware that there are roughly 23 different forms of cannabis? If a person purchases cannabis in a Netherlands coffee shop, the person selling it will offer advice. It is not true to say that all cannabis available in this country today is of such high quality. There is a wide range of qualities.

Angela Watkinson: I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not suggesting that we should require dealers to explain the strength of the cannabis that they sell. I would much prefer it if they did not sell it at all.

Paul Flynn: The point that my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) is making is a fair one. In a market in which the consumer has a choice, most drug users, particularly alcohol users, choose the mildest form of drug, so most people use wine or beer rather than spirits. During prohibition in America all that was on offer was distilled spirit, which was highly concentrated. In a market such as that in Holland, in which there is a choice, the majority of people use a safer drug and take it in a way that avoids smoking, which is the most dangerous way of taking it.

Angela Watkinson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his contribution, but I would claim that all forms of cannabis are undesirable and harmful. I should like to eradicate it altogether—a rather long-term strategy, I know, but that should be our aim.

The number of marijuana-related emergency room incidents in this country reached nearly 90,000 in 1999. Worst of all, the use of marijuana so often leads to a hard drug habit and all the misery that that entails. A sentencing regime that does not use the lighter penalties for class C drugs will inevitably find itself dealing with more and more class A offences, some of which could have been avoided. Reducing the number of cannabis users would in turn reduce the number of heroin and cocaine addicts. Cannabis is by far the most widely used drug, and a policy that does not take seriously the part that it plays in the spectrum of drug use cannot possibly succeed.

The scale of drug-driving is also increasing at an alarming rate. In a snapshot survey by police over the Christmas period, more than half of those stopped for erratic driving were found to have drugs present in their bloodstream. The variety of illegal drugs commonly in use means that a roadside test would be much more

[Angela Watkinson]

difficult to devise than the test used for alcohol, but research is urgently needed to find an effective test to help the police to start combating that growing problem.

The first essential in prevention policy is proper drugs education. Some of the literature that passes for education in our schools is information of the most undesirable kind. We have heard something on that subject from the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann). Lifeline, a Manchester-based charity, in a booklet about cannabis, showed how a joint is rolled. The first piece of advice in "How to survive your parents discovering you're a Drug User" is "Don't get caught in the first place." Other Lifeline publications are full of four-letter words, shockingly graphic illustrations and instructions on how to inject.

A favourite phrase is "informed choice". Anyone advocating informed choice for other widespread illegal activities such as speeding or shoplifting would be severely censured. Why is it tolerated in the case of drugs? Even if children were properly informed about drugs—and most are not—there should be no choice because drugs are illegal. Anyway, children are not mature enough to choose: they are not miniature adults and they should never be put in the position of having to make critical life decisions.

In 2000, DrugScope, our largest drug charity, distributed a booklet on cannabis in its "What and Why" series. One illustration showed a young man in the midst of a crop of cannabis plants wearing a cap that says "Have fun, take care". What sort of message does that send to our children? Harm reduction education does not tackle drugs; it accommodates them. Ofsted inspections must start to address that problem.

Thankfully, the majority of teenagers do not use any illegal drugs and never have. Our biggest weapon in prevention is normalisation. We must help those under pressure to see that abstention from illegal drugs is normal at any age—childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Prevention can and does work, as seen in America between 1979 and 1991. Parents got fed up with trendy excuses for drug taking, and collaborated with teachers, the police, Customs and Excise, social workers and students to foster the idea that taking drugs is not normal or socially desirable, and that it is indeed harmful. It worked. The number of drug users fell from 23 million to 14 million, a 60 per cent. reduction. Use of cannabis and cocaine halved.

An American survey done at the time of the campaign is very instructive. More than 70 per cent. of high school students who were non-users of cannabis were concerned about psychological and physical damage. Parental disapproval deterred over 60 per cent. Some 40 per cent. were put off by illegality factor. More than 50 per cent. were worried about progression to stronger drugs and slightly fewer thought that they might become addicted. Real drugs education must carry robust warnings of the disastrous effects of ignoring all the available advice—damage to health, education, career prospects and financial stability, the slippery slope to criminal activity to fund a habit, the misery and worry caused to family and friends and the cost to society at large through the NHS and the police. Young people need to be told that when they are offered drugs, the dealer whom they may have thought was a friend does not want them to have fun or a good time but simply wants their money—not only today or tomorrow, but next week and next month. In other words, the dealer wants a regular income and gives no thought to the suffering that lies ahead.

Policy has to tackle two separate but very closely related issues: treating and rehabilitating existing addicts and preventing young people from becoming addicts. Without prevention measures to address the latter, the former will never be achieved. Let us have as our national aim a drug-free society. It may take a very long time to achieve, but it is a goal on which we should not compromise.

9.6 pm

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): The policies advocated by the hon. Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson) are precisely those that this country and all parties followed from 1971 until very recently. The result of those policies is that the number of hard drug users has moved from fewer than 1,000 in 1970, when there was virtually no drug crime and drug death was very rare, to the current position, where there are 280,000 hard drug users. Perversely, it is prohibition that has caused that increase in drug use.

I shall follow the example set by those on the two Front Benches and not speak from notes, but respond to the debate. It has been suggested, I know in good faith, that education is one of the ways in which we should invest very large sums on tackling drugs. The DART—drug abuse resistance taskforce—and DARE schemes have now been running in America for almost 30 years. A recent independent assessment suggested that they were ineffective. The people running the schemes said that they used to be ineffective, but that they now had a new approach. They made the same excuse eight years ago and also 15 years ago, but unfortunately the only genuinely independent and scientific examination that has been conducted of the effect on a control group of a drug education group has shown that there is no effect whatever.

The hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Mr. Simmonds) proposed the new wheeze of sending ex-drug users to teach in schools. A celebrated study was conducted in America in about 1955, when drug use was endemic in cities but rare in the countryside, whereby ex-drug users were sent into the country areas. Ex-hippies in their late 20s or 30s, with long hair, handsome attractive figures and guitars, were talking to 15-year-olds and saying "We've been through all this; we've been through all the drugs and had it all, degradation and sexual orgies, and it was dreadful. You must not take drugs because your parents do not want you to have them and they are wicked and dangerous." Wickedness is just what 15-year-olds are after. Danger is what they long for, because they all know that they are immortal and will live for ever. Not unsurprisingly, drug use followed those anti-drug campaigns as surely as night followed day.

Mr. Simmonds: The hon. Gentleman has long been a known expert on this subject, which is why I am slightly surprised that he is drawing a parallel between what happened during the pre-hippy movement in the 1950s in the United States and the serious situation of many

heroin addicts in semi-rural and town areas, about which we heard from the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann). Indeed, the problem is rife in my rural constituency.

Paul Flynn: In trying to follow the spirit of this debate and the way in which it was opened, I want to say that none of us has fallen back into the armchair of our own certainties or believes that we have the answer. What we want is some humility, and an admission that decisions taken by serious and conscientious people in this House have resulted in an enormous increase in drug use. We have the worst instance of drug use in Europe. We have the most deaths per head of the population and the worst problems.

I have been attending these debates for 15 years. The Government announce new plans, wheezes, money and programmes; the Opposition congratulate them and everyone makes speeches similar to that of the hon. Member for Upminster. They make hon. Members look tough and guarantee favourable headlines in the tabloids. However, that has not worked; indeed, nothing has worked.

We are often in the distressing position of receiving calls about this matter from constituents, usually mothers. A mother will tell us that her daughter, who has been prostituting herself for years, has had a baby, and asks when she will receive treatment. Sometimes a mother will ring up about a suicidal son, who has had a distressing experience and perhaps reached the point where he might change. She asks whether treatment is available. Those are real cases in which I have been unable to help.

Sometimes a mother says that she is buying heroin for her son because she has a clean source and asks what she should do. What can we say? We make the law. Can we tell people to break the laws that we make? I would break the law if I had a son, grandson or granddaughter in the position that I described. If we do not respect the laws, how dare we continue to impose them on the nation?

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary mentioned Afghanistan. We must examine our past failures and not simply say that we shall have great success in Afghanistan. When we went into that country, the Taliban had reduced the cultivation of poppies in their area by 90 per cent.; the Northern Alliance have increased theirs by 300 per cent. There is no reduction in the growth of poppies. We risk committing the same mistake as the United States did in Colombia two decades ago. The United States decided to sort out the problem in Colombia and coca growth in Bolivia. People used coca as an appetite suppressant because they were starving, and as an antidote to altitude sickness. Only western man—I am sure that it was a man—discovered that when the beans were ingested without touching the saliva in the mouth, coca was a powerful drug.

If we take the same line in Afghanistan and follow President Bush, we will not stop the flow of drugs because they are being sucked in by demand in Europe and other countries. If cultivation ended in Afghanistan, it would improve in Pakistan, Uzbekistan and Burma, the current source of many drugs. If we took the war against drugs to those areas, we would end up with the Colombianisation of central Asia. In Colombia, a war is being waged between three armies, two of which are financed by the drugs trade.

The right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) took a pragmatic approach and did not go in for the cheap party political knockabout that would give him a headline in tomorrow's *Daily Mail*. He has seriously considered two interesting countries, Sweden and the Netherlands. Sweden has achieved the most remarkable reduction in the use of a drug anywhere in the world. It has reduced by more than 50 per cent. the use of the most deadly and addictive drug, which, according to its maker's instructions, kills half its users. Sweden has achieved that by accident rather than deliberate policy. It is almost embarrassed about it. I refer to the use of smokeless tobacco.

In 1980, 36 per cent. of Swedish males smoked cigarettes. That figure is now 17 per cent. The hon. Member for Upminster said that she was against drugs, no matter how they were taken or whatever their strength. Tobacco continues to be used in Sweden but by a method that avoids smoking. Nicotine is no more poisonous or harmful than caffeine, but when it is set on fire, the smoke contains carcinogens and other damaging chemicals. Drawing them into the lungs causes problems such as cancer and respiratory diseases. On average, Sweden's male population suffers half the deaths of the rest of Europe through smoking. The Swedish female population, which does not use the form of moist snuff, has exactly the average number of deaths.

I am critical of Sweden in one respect. It is the only country in the world that has adopted a line we have never adopted—that of total non-drug use. As a result, it starts from a very low base. According to an analysis of changes that have taken place in Switzerland, Sweden, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom between 1987 and 1999, Sweden and the United Kingdom experienced the greatest increase in drug-related deaths—50 per cent. higher than in Switzerland and the Netherlands. The story is not all good: Sweden has its problems with illegal drugs.

Again, there is no simple solution. The right hon. Member for West Dorset mentioned the Dutch experiment. Significantly, he accepted at least one thing. The average age of addicts in the Netherlands is rising: it was 28 in the early 1980s, and is now over 40. It may shock Members to learn that there is a home for geriatric heroin users in Rotterdam. They spend their lives there, and their grandchildren turn up to visit them. Perhaps it is shocking that they are still alive at that age.

We should not dismiss those who are addicted to any drug, whether it is alcohol, tobacco—many people are addicted to tobacco, and will be for life—or an illegal drug. The best we can do is what has been done in the Netherlands, in Australia to a small extent, and in Germany, where such people are treated as patients rather than criminals. One celebrated centre in Rotterdam treats some 250 addicts who are supplied with clean needles and take their drugs under supervision, in hygienic surroundings. I visited the centre. It was upsetting and shocking to watch people abuse their bodies in that way, but I was struck by the contrast between what happened there and what happens in our constituencies. After people have taken their drugs they have someone to talk to; there is a social club and training in information technology, and they

[Paul Flynn]

even produce their own newspaper. In our country we see people taking drugs in foul back alleys, using dirty needles in unhygienic conditions and being helpless afterwards: someone is likely to kick the living daylights out of them.

We can treat this issue with the seriousness that it deserves and with the humility that we should bring to it because of our past failures. It is not the best idea to go to the practitioners in the drug industry who, like us politicians, have been associated with failure for 30 years. It is time for fresh thinking. It is time to do what the present Government and the Opposition are doing—to look at what has happened elsewhere, and pursue policies that have worked to reduce drug use and the number of drug deaths.

9.18 pm

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): I have enjoyed listening to the debate. I was particularly struck by the speech of the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann). Like many others, I knew of the inquiry he had conducted in his constituency. He demonstrated the importance of a practical knowledge of the issues, and how that could inform a speech in the House. I also thought it courageous of him to attack the professionals and their advice rather than attacking Ministers and other politicians—we are not supposed to do that in politics. That was brave, and not just in a "Yes Minister" way.

I know that others want to speak, but let me say a brief word about Styal women's prison in my constituency. I want to refer to it partly because, apart from Holloway, it is the largest women's prison in the country—it is known as the Holloway of the north; I am not sure whether that is something of which it can be proud—and partly because I visited it just before Christmas, at about the time when a report on a full inspection of it was published by the chief inspector of prisons. I have to say that it was one of the most depressing and enlightening experiences that I have had as a Member of Parliament.

Styal women's prison has about 450 female prisoners. It has doubled in size in the last couple of years from a reasonably small local training prison to one of the major women's prisons in the country. There is a whole debate to be had, incidentally, about why the female prison population has risen so dramatically. When I spoke to the governor at Styal, what struck me was the endemic heroin abuse that takes place both in the prison and among those who come into it. The chief inspector of prisons estimated in her report that some 41 per cent. of prisoners in Styal were heroin addicts. The chief executive of the Prison Service thinks that that is a gross underestimate by the chief inspector, and the governor told me that probably more like 70 to 80 per cent. of her inmates at least came in as heroin users.

The sad thing about Styal is the total devastation of the lives of the people there. The governor has spent all her professional career in the Prison Service working in male prisons. Interestingly, she said that there were problems with law and order and with control and security in male prisons, but that in female prisons she had found that the individual prisoners were much less predictable and that they often came from much more difficult family circumstances. I was shocked to meet people who had been born in the mother and baby unit of the prison and were now back as inmates. I was physically shocked to meet people whose faces were almost skeletal through heroin use. I was also shocked to meet a lady who was about to be released the next day but did not want to be, because she knew that the following night she would be back on the streets of Manchester working as a prostitute, and that her food would be cold baked beans out of a tin in a bedsit somewhere. Indeed, she was asking the governor what she could do to stay in prison, saying, "What would happen if I attacked one of the warders?" The governor tried to discourage her from doing that.

Mr. Simmonds: Is my hon. Friend aware that it is not unusual for heroin addicts to ask for longer sentences to be passed, so that they can spend longer in prison, for the very reasons that the case in the prison in his constituency highlights?

Mr. Osborne: I am certainly aware of that now, after my visit to Styal. I have not had direct experience of heroin use, although I have had experience of other drug misuse in my family, and my visit to Styal was very striking.

My point is that I would have thought that prisons would be the place to start if we are going to have a national drugs strategy. I am not making a party political point, because I do not think that previous Conservative Governments have helped these people any more than the current Government are doing. I would have thought that we would have started with these people. They are some of the most desperate heroin users, who happen to be in the total care of the state for a period of time because they are in prison, but Styal has no drug detoxification programme—a point that I made in an intervention on the Minister. When the chief inspector came to the prison, she found that to be one of the most serious problems that the prison is facing.

The governor, Madeline Moulden, is doing a brilliant job, and the chief inspector praised the relationship between the governor and the staff, and between the staff and the prisoners. It is clear from going round the prison with the governor that she knows the names and histories of all the prisoners, but she is really fighting against the tide because she does not have the resources to provide a proper drug rehabilitation programme, despite that being the No. 1 problem in the prison. I want briefly to quote the chief inspector, who said that

"at the time of the inspection, Styal had no proper detoxification unit, and the Governor's bids for funding such a unit had been rejected. We describe"—

in the report—

"women, in their early days there, fitting and vomiting in their cells, with staff unable to do more than observe and try to alleviate their distress. This is unacceptable. The lack of proper detoxification had profound and damaging effects, both in the short and medium term. Women were unsafe, in terms of their physical and mental health and the risk of self-harm and bullying. Their chances of effective education and training during their stay in prison were undermined, as initial assessments were carried out when they were virtually incapable of participating. It is clear that the absence of properly resourced and supervised detoxification was preventing Styal from effectively carrying out many of the tasks that it wants to, and needs to."

I accept the Minister's comment that it is not necessarily a ministerial decision as to what resources are put into the prison, but Ministers set an overall framework. If it was expected within that overall framework that all prisons of a certain size should have a proper drug detoxification unit, that would of course have an impact on Styal. The director general of the Prison Service, Martin Narey, said in December when the inspector's report was published that it was fair and that he shared

"the inspectorate's anxiety about the need for proper detoxification facilities. I am determined to do all I can to find the resources, but they are not currently available."

It costs about £25,000 to keep a prisoner in Styal every year. Surely, as a society and across all political parties and divides, we must start considering how we are spending the money on tackling drugs misuse in this country. If some of that £25,000 were spent on proper drug rehabilitation, a real strategy to help those women in Styal to kick the heroin habit and, in particular, helping them after their release—not just weeks, but hours after they leave prison, which is another matter to which the inspector referred—we would go a lot further in dealing with at least some effects of heroin abuse.

I listened with interest to what others said about preventing people from using in the first place, but my speech is about dealing with those in our care in our Prison Service, particularly in women's prisons, where we can deal with such problems. We have good ideas for how to get them off their drug habit and we should implement them.

9.26 pm

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): This has been a good debate and I have enjoyed listening to it. It is interesting to consider how the spectrum of the drugs debate has moved. Due to my professional background, I have been interested in drugs, both illicit and licit, all my life. When I was elected to the House in 1997, there was a hard attitude to the misuse of illicit drugs by young and old alike on the streets. So hard was it that the focus seemed to lie strongly on the criminal justice aspects—lock them up and hope that the drugs problem goes away, but clearly it was not about to go away.

I praise the Government for the attention that they have given to the problem and the money that they have put into all the wide-ranging services that we need to deal with it. I have observed the debate since 1997 and it has slid towards the treatment end of the spectrum, which I very much welcome. We have not heard the statement much this evening, but £1 spent on treatment saves about £3 on the criminal justice system, so that must be money well spent. I have been a great advocate of treatment and I have argued for more of it since being elected to the House, so I was pleased when the national treatment agency was set up over 18 months ago and I am looking forward to it beginning to deliver in the next few years. Its establishment is a welcome development.

The right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) made some interesting remarks and touched on a theme that has not been developed in the debate. He hinted as to the fact that there is a connection between the misuse of drugs and mental illness, but nobody else picked that point up. Sadly, I have to tell the Minister that it is not picked up strongly by the recently published updated drug strategy either.

The all-party drugs misuse group studied what is called dual diagnosis a few years ago, however, and that is what the right hon. Gentleman was referring to. About 40 to 50 per cent. of the people who are misusing drugs are also mentally ill, and the drug addiction cannot be treated without the mental illness being treated. One thing that we need is more and better-trained people who can recognise a dual or even a poly diagnosis when they see one and treat holistically people who are also misusing drugs, but have other serious problems. Some have benefits problems, some have housing problems and so on.

The right hon. Gentleman also referred to the differences between how the problem is being tackled in this country, the Netherlands and Sweden. We must also remind ourselves that in different countries there are different cultures. Culture and fashion, particularly the youth and dance culture—the mood in the dance clubs and the shifting from one fashionable drug to another—are incredibly important and differ from country to country.

One of my main concerns is the misuse of drugs in prisons—I am very concerned about what is going on in the Prison Service. More and more people are going to prison simply because they committed crimes to support a habit. I want to put on record a letter that I received on 6 September from one of my constituents, a father, who said:

"The reason I am writing this letter today is because my youngest son . . . who is 27 years of age has just overdosed on heroin. We buried him yesterday on 5th September."

My constituent wrote to me the next day, 6 September. He continued:

"He died on 29th August, he came out of prison 6 weeks ago. He was given no program to help him, he was not given any money to help him by social security."

Social security continually refused to pay even for the clothing grant of which he was in great need. Nothing was done to help him. My constituent continued:

"Nothing seems to be done when our children are released from prison. We need something in the north-east where our kids can get real help, and not just get fobbed off all the time."

He went on to talk about his second son aged 31, a heroin addict for 15 years. He was bringing him down here until recently to be treated in a private clinic with naltrexone implants, which, the father believed, were helping him. One night, however, the son got stoned out of his mind on heroin and left the house in his mother's cardigan, so was obviously easily recognisable. He committed a crime and ended up in prison, where he tried to commit suicide.

That father almost lost two sons, not one, at the ages of 27 and 31, and wants me to bring to the attention of the House serious deficiencies in the criminal justice system, particularly in prisons, which has already been referred to by my hon. Friend the Minister. If there is one point that I want to get over this evening it is that we must improve treatment availability in all our prisons, or at least put prisoners with serious drug problems in the right prison, where they will be looked after and treated. Hopefully, when they are released, they will have not just the through-care to which my hon. Friend the Minister referred but, more importantly, after-care. If they have not been taking drugs while in prison, their tolerance level changes.

[Dr. Brian Iddon]

If they come out of prison and take the same amount of heroin as they took before, they will overdose and probably die. A lot of young people do not understand the heroin tolerance problem.

I saw "Newsnight" on 2 December in which Mr. Hamer from Compass, an organisation which carries out CARAT—counselling, assessment, referral, advice and through-care—assessments in the Prison Service, admitted that an awful lot of assessments are carried out in prison, but are not matched by treatment programmes. Mike Trace, the deputy drugs tsar under Keith Hellawell, was also on "Newsnight" and was critical of the lack of monitoring of the spending of the £50 million allocated to the Prison Service for drug treatment. I raised in Health questions the problem of money not going where it is needed and, to be fair, the Department of Health believes that what was said on "Newsnight" was unfounded. Obviously, there is a dispute.

I know that other Members wish to contribute to our debate so I shall conclude. When we allocated money for cancer networks, people in the national health service complained that the money was not getting to cancer patients, so the Government have now agreed to audit it extremely carefully, as cancer treatment is one of our top priorities. My final plea to the Minister is, therefore, please can we set up audit trails? We have invested enormous sums in drug treatment and education, but we must ensure, for the benefit especially of younger people but also of older addicts, that the money hits the right targets and is used for what it was intended to be used for.

9.35 pm

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon), who has extensive knowledge of the subject. I, too, want to make the point that access to treatment is a key weapon in the war against drugs.

Everyone who has contributed to this debate agrees on one thing: drugs are an enormous menace facing our society and the epidemic sweeping through many parts of the country is extremely serious, and the Government's current response, though well intentioned, has not yet delivered the success that we seek. I urge the Government to think again about the bold idea presented by my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) today. They should not dismiss it because it has come from our party, as the current set of policies being pursued by the Government is not producing the fruit that we would want. I really believe that it would be right to set up a pilot to test my party's bold and radical proposal.

I am concerned about some of the statistics on which the Government are basing some of their decisions. The hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann)—I enjoyed his speech—was right to draw our attention to some of the statistics. The updated drugs strategy paper is a good and worthy document, and I agree with much of it, but on page 11 it makes the unlikely claim that DAT returns suggest that the waiting time for treatment is 2.8 weeks for priority cases and 8.3 weeks for non-priority cases. On which part of the country are those statistics based? The police and the drug action team in Plymouth tell me that if a heroin addict wakes up one day determined to kick the habit and goes to the Harbourside centre—an excellent charity in Plymouth that helps many people—for help, the response will be, "That is great, and we will do all that we can to help you, but there is a two-year waiting list for the treatment that you need." That is two years, not 8.3 or 2.8 weeks. I worry that Ministers are making decisions based on false information, and I urge them to check the waiting times for treatment of all kinds in all parts of the country. It is no use whatever telling a heroin addict who decides to kick the habit to come back in six months or two years. Think of all the misery and crime that will occur in that time.

I want to ask the Minister a specific question about Plymouth. Heroin has long been a nightmare for many parts of Plymouth—I have known that for many years—but the police tell me that crack cocaine is now taking hold of the streets in some of our deprived areas. They tell me that we ain't seen nothing yet, and that worries me. They do not think that the DTTO scheme is working very well, and they have started what they call the targeted referral scheme, saying to heroin addicts or crack cocaine users upstream, before they are arrested or prosecuted for an offence, "Look, we know you are stealing or shoplifting to fund your drugs habit—we are watching you, and we will get you—but at this early stage we can offer you treatment." That is not to say that they will not prosecute them, but they give them a chance to make an upstream decision to change their lives at a better time than when they are already in the dock, at which stage we can only offer them the option of facing cold turkey or going on a DTTO.

The Plymouth police have pursued the pilot scheme, which showed early promise, but there is no funding to develop it. Judge William Taylor went to Downing street on 12 November 2002—I hope that the Minister was aware of that—and asked for a specific sum to pursue that pilot scheme in Plymouth. He is a very experienced judge—the senior judge in Plymouth—and he believes that that could make a real difference in tackling the drug problem that our city faces.

The Government have not responded to that request for extra money, and if the Minister does nothing else in her winding-up speech, can she please explain what has happened to that request, and say whether the Government are willing to make that money available to help us tackle the problem of drugs in Plymouth?

9.40 pm

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): My right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) opened the debate with a plea to the Government to look at this matter constructively, and this has indeed been an extremely thoughtful and thought-provoking debate. The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) described it as a seminar, and I agree that, to some extent, we have looked at this issue in that spirit. Other Members spoke in some detail from their personal experiences. In his opening remarks, my right hon. Friend spoke of his fear that, if they do not understand the appalling gap between their rhetoric and the reality, the Government's current actions may mean that literally millions of pounds of taxpayers' money will be wasted. One had only to hear of the practical experience on the ground of the hon. Member for

Bassetlaw (John Mann) to realise the width of that gap, to which my right hon. Friend rightly drew attention. In addition to the hon. Member for Bassetlaw, other Members, including my hon. Friends the Members for Upminster (Angela Watkinson) and for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter), discussed that reality.

Ms Dari Taylor: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hawkins: No, I am sorry. The hon. Lady was able to intervene earlier a couple of times, but time is so short that, if I am to do justice to the speeches in this debate, I cannot take her intervention.

My right hon. Friend asked what the Government's contact with drug treatment means in practice for addicts on the streets. Does it mean that addicts are receiving something? It often means, as the hon. Member for Bassetlaw pointed out, that they get letters offering them jam tomorrow—sometimes many months into the future. In most cases, whatever is offered by the different treatment agencies does not take them away from drugs.

My right hon. Friend talked about the success of Ministry of Defence police DARE projects, but even in those cases referral can often involve a wait of six months before an addict sees a drug counsellor. As he said, that does not help in the reconstruction of addicts' lives. Of course, if those addicts continue to commit crime to feed their drug habit, they cause misery for the many law-abiding people whose homes are subject to the burglaries that my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster talked about. The misery that they cause through the crimes that they commit to fund their drug addiction is at the heart of what we are trying to address in this debate.

As my right hon. Friend said, what we need is intense and sometimes repeated residential or quasi-residential rehabilitation. However, we frankly admit that even that will not achieve 100 per cent. success; in many cases, addicts will need to go through such intensive rehabilitation more than once. We should target taxpayers' money on the youngest addicts in order to prevent extra people from joining the list of addicts.

I, along with my right hon. Friends the Members for West Dorset and for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith), have seen the success that has been achieved in Sweden. The hon. Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) always makes the same point about Sweden, but if I may I shall lay one canard to rest. He says that one effect of what happens in Sweden is an increase in drug deaths, but we were told firmly by all the experts whom we met in Sweden that the simple explanation is that they measure their statistics much more fully. *[Interruption.]* I see that the hon. Member for Bassetlaw is nodding in agreement. In Sweden, the death of anyone who has the remotest link with a drug is counted as a drug death. That is why the Swedish figures are higher—they are not evidence of a failure of Swedish policy. As my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster confirmed, Sweden is one of the success stories. I know that the Minister wants to take this matter seriously, and we need to learn the lessons of the success of the Swedish experience.

In an intervention on my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset, my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) pointed out that many dedicated GPs are trying to help with this problem. I had a great deal of sympathy with what the hon. Member for Bassetlaw said when he argued for the greater involvement of health professionals in drug action teams. It would help if there were a greater understanding of the health effects of drugs use by those who make the policy. My drug action team in Surrey involves health professionals a great deal, and I think that that could be repeated elsewhere with advantage.

In a well-advised intervention on my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset, the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) talked about the prevalence of drugs in prison. We must ensure that our prisons become drug free. As my right hon. Friend says, we should be able to ensure that at least those who are in custody are not receiving drugs. There has to be more coercion and much tighter supervision of prison visits.

It is essential that we stop spending British taxpayers' money on providing drugs to prisoners. The Minister may or may not realise it, but the Scottish Executive, to our amazement, have introduced a policy of spending taxpayers' money on providing drugs to inmates of Scottish prisons. I think that most people would be horrified to think that their taxes were being spent on providing drugs for prisoners, but it is happening in Scotland. If the Minister was not aware of that, I hope that he will look into it, because my colleagues in the Scottish Parliament have raised it.

In an intervention on my right hon. Friend, my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) talked about the difficulties of the drinking and drugs culture, which have been made worse by the Government's relaxation of policies against alcohol. He was quite right to raise that.

When the Minister responded to my right hon. Friend, he said that he had not previously taken his alternatives terribly seriously but that he would do so now. We welcome that approach. The hon. Gentleman said that he wanted the Government to spend a great deal more. However, he has a problem in that the Government's much trumpeted drugs tsar, Keith Hellawell, was unable to support what the Government were doing; he was unable to accept their abandonment of their own drugs target and said that there was a lot of spin to disguise failure. Given that the Government's drugs tsar, so lauded when he was first appointed, talked about a culture of failure and about setting, missing and abandoning targets, the Minister has a real problem, despite his sincerity.

As my right hon. Friend said to the Minister in an intervention, we need to pilot what we are suggesting. We are not suggesting that the Government should turn round the supertanker of Home Office policy instantly and abandon everything that it is doing. Instead, let us pilot what we are suggesting against the Government's proposals and see what works. We believe that what we have suggested, along the lines of what works in Sweden, would work here.

There is undoubtedly a concern about some of the drugs charities and the way in which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster said in an excellent speech, they appear to inform vulnerable schoolchildren about drugs rather than educating them away from drugs. I hope that the Minister will take the initiative of asking

[Mr. Hawkins]

the Charity Commission to look carefully at whether some of those organisations are entitled to charitable status. The kind of leaflets that my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster talked about appear to promote drugs or concentrate on the policy of "harm minimisation", which is really code for legalisation. Perhaps they should not be charities; they certainly should not receive taxpayers' money.

In an intervention on the Minister and in his speech, my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Devon pointed out that the reality is that of 38 people who were arrested and received drug treatment and testing orders in Plymouth, 28 have been arrested and have committed further drug-related crimes while under the drug treatment and testing order. That is not an example of the Government's policy working but of the failure of Government policy that my right hon. Friend described.

The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) spoke, as he has done repeatedly, about the views of DrugScope—a rather discredited charitable organisation—on cannabis. The Minister said that he always took notice of DrugScope. Perhaps, in the light of the leaflets described by my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster, he should not take so much notice of it.

The problem is undoubtedly extremely complex. The Minister was right to talk about tackling the routes of supply of drugs. However, we need intensive policing, a point on which the Government—at least in their intentions—and the Opposition agree.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) talked about a retreat from certainty. He will forgive me for saying that the Liberal Democrats are never certain about anything, particularly not on drugs. He also said, however, that the drugs trade is a major motor for gun crime, and I certainly agree with that.

This has been a high-quality debate and I hope that the Government will take seriously the ideas proposed by my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset and my colleagues.

9.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): This has been a fascinating debate. Many speeches from Members on both sides have been thoughtful and full of information. I was particularly impressed by the contributions that Members based on experiences of services in their constituencies, which showed the scale of the difficulty that faces our country in trying to deal with the problems caused by drug addiction.

At the start of the debate, the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) presented his case in quiet, measured tones, full of reason—

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): Not like this afternoon.

Ms Blears: Perhaps that was in marked contrast to what happened in the earlier debate.

It has been fascinating to hear ideas unfold. Sometimes the most sinister ideas can be presented in the most measured, reasonable tones. The Opposition concentrated—almost exclusively—on the power of abstinence. Although abstinence, like reduction, counselling and treatment, plays a huge role in combating the problems of addiction, addiction is not a simple matter capable of simple resolution. The Opposition motion offers us a simplistic solution to a complex problem that affects the lives of thousands of people up and down the country. Those who are addicted to drugs differ in their needs and problems and in how the system needs to deal with them. Treatment programmes will succeed in the long term only when they are tailored to the individual needs and problems of those involved.

For that reason, I am concerned by the surface simplicity and reasonableness with which the motion was presented. What lies beneath is an almost exclusive focus on abstinence that does not take into account the real need for maintenance, substitute prescribing and reduction programmes, and for ensuring that people can be treated in the community as well as in residential settings. A whole range of treatment must be brought to bear if we are to succeed in meeting the challenges that face us.

I must remind the House that it was not until the Government adopted their drugs strategy that we obtained the national treatment agency. For the first time, we are beginning to have national standards in drug treatment—the same kind of national standards that we have in our national service frameworks for mental health, coronary heart disease and cancer. For the first time, we have a proper pooled budget so that we may put resources at the front line where they will make a difference. That budget will increase massively over the years to come. This year, every health authority has had an increase of at least 30 per cent. For next year, the average will be 23 per cent., with the minimum being 15 per cent. The Government are putting in resources because we know that funding is necessary to make the system work.

We have the national treatment agency, national standards and a pooled budget; we had none of that under the previous Government.

Mr. Streeter: I had not realised that things were quite as rosy as the Minister says they are. Why is there a two-year waiting list to access drug treatment in Plymouth?

Ms Blears: We acknowledge that a great deal of work remains to be done because this field was completely underfunded for years. In the hon. Gentleman's area, the drug action team will receive an increase of 17 per cent. from the pooled budget, and that sort of increase requires resources.

We want to ensure that the right treatment is available in the right place at the right time. The problem is more complex than has been portrayed by many Opposition Members. Counselling is needed as well as the 12-step abstinence programmes provided by many community resources. We need maintenance and lifetime support programmes, as well as residential places. I do not dismiss the role of intensive residential support for people for whom it is suitable. There are 138 residential

services that provide about 3,000 beds, but the treatment must be suitable and meet the needs of the individual involved.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) agreed with the Government that a variety of policies were needed to meet the problems. He emphasised the need for education and prevention work among young people to stop them becoming the next generation of addicts.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) made an excellent contribution. I pay tribute to his work in his constituency, in calling an inquiry and getting local people to give evidence. As he knows, his primary care trust is taking the matter very seriously indeed and has made it the top priority in the health improvement programme. The local strategic partnership and the local council are also taking the problem seriously and there are increased facilities in the area. My hon. Friend acknowledged that all kinds of treatment are needed—counselling, prescribing, abstinence and personal help. Help in finding employment and housing is crucial to enable young people to rebuild their lives.

I agreed with the first point in the speech made by the hon. Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson): we need prevention and enforcement as well as treatment. However, I cannot agree that abstinence is the only way forward. For a rounded policy, we must have harm reduction programmes and maintenance prescribing. Does she think that we should not advise people on how to reduce drug-related deaths, that we should not offer counselling against overdose, or that we should not give people first-aid training so that they can help their friends and relatives to survive?

My hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) was a little too pessimistic when he said that nothing that had been done in the past 30 years had worked. He was right to point out that we need drugs education. The blueprint programme has been well evaluated and will consider what kind of education works. My hon. Friend, with his innovative view, was almost at the opposite extreme from the hon. Member for Upminster.

The hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) made some important points about his local community. I think that the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth), has agreed to look into the provision of both a detoxification unit in the local prison and immediate treatment for people on release from prison.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) has constantly pressed for more treatment and for new developments in the drugs field. I am grateful to him for raising the issue of dual diagnosis. Many people with drug problems also have mental health problems. For the first time, the Labour Government have made mental health a top clinical priority in our national health service.

My hon. Friend spoke of a tragic case in his constituency. He also made the important point that we should check exactly where the money goes. We could consider strengthening the role of the national treatment agency to tackle that problem.

The hon. Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter) asked for more resources. Under the Labour Government, he is receiving them; that would not have been the case under the previous Conservative Government.

The hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) said that we should learn lessons from elsewhere. Yes, we should, and the Government are beginning to learn those lessons. We are putting in the investment while making sure that the treatment on offer to people is appropriate and relevant.

In the last few minutes of the debate, I want to highlight a programme that deals with street crime in Lancashire. In Blackpool, the tower project does not merely provide immediate treatment for people who have been convicted of offences, but targets the most prolific offenders in the community and gives them a choice: they can take part in structured drug treatment, or continue to have police surveillance, with checks made on them and their lives made very difficult indeed. It has got 54 of its most prolific offenders into drug treatment in Blackpool, and the effect on the area's crime statistics is absolutely stunning. Burglary in dwellings is down by 46 per cent. and other burglaries are down by 24 per cent.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 143, Noes 375.

Division No. 47] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Curry, rh David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Hunter, Andrew
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui

Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Portillo, rh Michael
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Redwood, rh John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Hugh Robertson and Angela Watkinson

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, rh A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, rh David
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Hermon, Lady
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Keetch, Paul
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John

MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Pearson, Ian
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, rh Clare
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watts, David
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nick Ainger and
Mr. John Heppell

Question accordingly negatived.

Question put, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments):—*

The House divided: Ayes 368, Noes 142.

Division No. 48] **[10.13 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, rh A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*

Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Hermon, Lady
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Keetch, Paul
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Pearson, Ian
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr. John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watts, David
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Heppell and Mr. Nick Ainger

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*

Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Curry, rh David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Hunter, Andrew
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Portillo, rh Michael
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Redwood, rh John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Hugh Robertson and
Mr. Desmond Swayne

Question accordingly agreed to:

MR. SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House recognises that focusing on Class A drugs, educating young people about the dangers of all drugs, preventing drug misuse, combating the dealers, reducing availability and treating addicts are all essential in tackling drugs; and welcomes the Government's updated Drug Strategy and the 44 per cent. increase in planned expenditure on combating drugs, from £1.026 billion in the current financial year to nearly £1.5 billion in the year starting April 2005.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

NATIONAL LOTTERY

That the draft National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (Increase of Endowment) Order 2003, which was laid before this House on 11th December, be approved.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

Question agreed to.

COMMITTEES

Ordered,

TRANSPORT

That Helen Jackson be discharged from the Transport Committee and Ian Lucas be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. John McWilliam, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Transport Infrastructure (East Kent)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

10.26 pm

Dr. Stephen Ladyman (South Thanet): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to raise another matter in an Adjournment debate. I also thank my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Transport for being present to respond. I realise that he is trying to get into the parliamentary book of records for making the most responses to Adjournment debates, so he will not be too upset. He also knows how important this matter is to my constituency.

Before I speak about the needs for transport infrastructure improvements in east Kent, perhaps a little background is called for to explain exactly why we have those needs. Unless the House listens to all my speeches in great detail—I raise this issue in most of them—it will not be aware that Thanet has the third highest unemployment in England and among 288 travel-to-work areas throughout the country. Thanet's unemployment level is three times the Kent average and 60 per cent. of people in Thanet who are in work are working for less than the average income. Across east Kent, 40 wards are classed as high social deprivation wards using Government criteria. Thanet scores in the top 25 per cent. most deprived districts in England in all six deprivation categories given by the Government and we have the second highest deprivation index overall in the south-east.

To address that situation, wards in Thanet and parts of Dover have been given objective 2 and assisted area status, and projects throughout east Kent have secured single regeneration budget funding, but unless we address the underlying problem that causes economic decline in east Kent, all that we are doing with such additional sums is treating the symptoms and not the illness, which in my view is the poor transport infrastructure.

Our problem is that Thanet is seen by many investors as peripheral to south-east England, rather than, as I believe, central to the European Union. My plea to the Minister is that we should try to take the opportunity to construct a transport infrastructure in east Kent that will put it at the heart of the European Union and address firmly and in the long term the economic decline of the area. That is the vision. I believe that we have a unique opportunity to create a transport hub of road, rail, sea and air unlike anything else in the United Kingdom. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will try to realise that vision in the approaching months and grasp this important opportunity.

Let us consider roads. We have a beautiful, new Ramsgate harbour approach road. From the edge of Thanet towards London, there are some good dual carriageways along the Thanet way to the motorway network. However, the roads around the east Kent access project between Ramsgate and Thanet Way, and Ramsgate and the Sandwich bypass, remain single carriageways. That project must be finished to complete our road infrastructure.

As well as linking Ramsgate to the port of Dover, and to the motorway network and the M25, this project will solve another problem: the congestion around the Pfizer site at Sandwich. Pfizer is a pharmaceutical company, which constitutes the biggest United States investment in the United Kingdom. It is the biggest employer in Kent and the great congestion around its site is a genuine problem. Completing the east Kent access project will therefore not only deal with economic decline in the area but be a major benefit to local people.

We also need to complete our road infrastructure by dualling the A2 all the way into Dover.

Mr. Gwyn Prosser (Dover): I am pleased to be part of a joint campaign in east Kent that presses for better road and rail links. One of the campaign's key aims is dualling the A2. My hon. Friend knows that we have fought for that for more than 25 years. The port of Dover is expected to expand in the next weeks and months, and freight is expected to double in the next 10 years. Does my hon. Friend therefore agree that we are considering a burning issue and that we need to get on quickly with putting plans in place and regenerating east Kent?

Dr. Ladyman: I agree with my hon. Friend and I am grateful to him for making those points. Dualling the A2 is vital not only to the port of Dover but to the success of the economy in Thanet.

One of my main worries is the train service. If my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary asks what is wrong with the existing service, I shall reply, "Only two things—the operator and the track." The fastest journey time from Ramsgate to London is one hour 45 minutes. Most services take longer. Let us contrast that with the journey from London to Doncaster, which is 100 miles longer but can be completed 15 minutes quicker.

I worked for Pfizer before I became a Member of Parliament. When we showed people around the site, we used to joke that Pfizer located to Sandwich in 1952 because of the high-speed rail link to London. The same trains are unfortunately still running. The trains are old, the service is poor and Connex has defaulted on a raft of promises. It has been fined for late running, but not many people in Kent believe that there has been much improvement in its reliability. Its train modernisation programme has started but I have no confidence in its completion. I also have no confidence that the slam-door trains will be replaced in accordance with the Government's timetable.

Connex won its franchise by making promises that it could not keep, at a price that it could not afford. That allowed it to outbid companies that made realistic cost commitment projections. When it first began to renege on its promises, the length of its franchise was extended because that was necessary to make future investment viable. Despite that, the Strategic Rail Authority had to invest £58 million in it a few weeks ago to prop up the service.

A year or two ago, Connex said that it had no interest in running fast trains to London. When it became clear that it would be required to do that if it wanted its franchise renewed, it suddenly began to claim that it would try to run such trains. It then started blocking the efforts of other companies, such as NetRail, which was trying at timetable conferences to bid to run a fast train service to London.

Despite this catalogue of failure, Connex recently had the brass neck to announce that it expects to be the preferred bidder for the new franchise in 2006. I hope

that the Under-Secretary will scrutinise carefully any bid from Connex and examine it in the light of its performance in recent years.

A modern, fast train link is a prerequisite for regeneration in east Kent, especially in Thanet. It is also vital if we are to realise the potential of Manston airport and Ramsgate sea port. I do not believe that Connex will provide that. And unless the Government acknowledge the need for channel tunnel rail link domestic services to proceed to Ramsgate, no one else will be able to provide such a service either.

A fast train link using the channel tunnel rail link would bring potential inward investors to Thanet. They frequently cite the poor train service as a reason for not investing there. As I have said, the fast link is a prerequisite for the expansion of Manston airport and Port Ramsgate. It would extend the travel-to-work area, allowing key workers to commute to Thanet and the east Kent area generally, thereby making business expansion practicable. It would also expand the commuting area, enabling the unemployed of Thanet to travel out of Thanet more easily to find work elsewhere.

The main barrier to the provision of a fast train service is the Strategic Rail Authority, which is currently undertaking a review of the use of CTRL domestic services. I understand that a report has been presented to Ministers in the last few days, and that it may suggest that a fast train service should go via Ashford to Canterbury West and stop there—although we have, at Ramsgate, maintenance sheds that the trains are almost certain to use. If the trains did not proceed to Ramsgate it would be a disaster for us in Thanet and for Ramsgate, and it would be the epitome of ridiculousness to have empty trains running from Canterbury West to Ramsgate when they should be carrying passengers. Starting the fast train service at Ramsgate would improve the economic viability of CTRL domestic services, and would do a huge amount to regenerate the local economy.

Port Ramsgate, as the Minister knows, is a municipal port. It was taken back into council ownership when Sally decided to retrench to the Baltic some years ago. Since then it has developed a highly successful freight business, but it has no passenger service. One reason why it is difficult to attract a new passenger service is the fact that all the costs of starting such a service must be clawed back from the operator in one year, because the council is not allowed to borrow either to invest in the port's development or to spread the cost of starting a new service over several years.

I know that we intend, under the Local Government Bill, to allow local councils to borrow again if they can afford to repay the money, but that will not start for another year at least. We already allow municipal airports to borrow; I wonder why Ministers will not consider allowing municipal seaports to borrow, so that they can spread start-up costs over a number of years. That would allow investment to be made in facilities at the port of Ramsgate.

The Minister will know my view that continental and British seaports are not competing on a level playing field. I should like that to be reviewed. The Government have promised a review of municipal seaports for some time, but have not been able to start it yet. I should also like that review to begin as soon as possible.

Manston airport presents a huge opportunity. I know that the Minister is aware of that, because he recently opened on our behalf some major investments by the developer there. Manston already has a good freight business and a sound air-side maintenance business, but according to the local council's estimate it also has the potential to expand its capacity to 6 million passengers a year. That would make a valuable contribution to the south-east's air capacity, and could create 10,000 jobs including those in the freight and air-side maintenance businesses.

Here we have an opportunity provided by a potentially successful airport carrying passengers as well as freight, a potential successful seaport carrying passengers as well as freight, an advanced train service running rapidly into London and a decent road infrastructure—all located close to the busiest channel port in the country, Dover, and the channel tunnel rail link. It is a potential transport infrastructure hub, unique to the United Kingdom, and it could play a vital role in regenerating the local economy. It could solve our problems in the long term: the Government would no longer have to invest funds by means of, for instance, assisted area status to support us, and it would go a long way towards lowering the grossly awful levels of unemployment in Thanet.

I hope that the Minister will acknowledge what we are trying to achieve in Thanet, and ask his Department to work hard on building this strategy in the coming months.

10.39 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman) not only on securing this Adjournment debate but on the clear and well-considered way in which he has presented his points. My hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Prosser) has been his useful aide on this occasion. My hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet asked whether I listened to his speeches. I can assure him that I listen to them avidly, and that those that I do not happen to catch I read in *Hansard* the next morning. My hon. Friend has painted a powerful picture in the Chamber on many occasions of the levels of unemployment in his constituency and the need for inward investment there. I can assure him that those are the Government's priorities, and using transport to help regeneration is one of our central aims.

My hon. Friend has clearly explained the importance of Thanet and east Kent to both the national and regional economy. The Government certainly support that view. We also agree that the transport infrastructure is a vital component for assisting in the regeneration of this area. Before I respond to my hon. Friend's specific points, I should like briefly to outline what is already happening to improve transport. We have made it clear in the 10-year plan for transport that we are fully committed to improving the nation's transport infrastructure, especially through effective local transport schemes. We have introduced local transport plans to support this commitment. These five-year plans give local authorities such as Kent the freedom to deliver local transport schemes that meet the needs of their communities. We have already allocated more than £24 million for 2003–04 to Kent county

[Mr. David Jamieson]

council to increase investment in local transport schemes and maintenance. I am sure that my hon. Friend will have noticed that that is an increase of £4 million over the 2002–03 allocation of £20 million. It is also more than double the allocation for 2000–01.

I understand that Kent county council is spending more than £750,000 in Thanet in 2002–03. That includes spending on safety measures, rural schemes, the A254 Margate to Ramsgate cycle route, a safer-routes-to-school project at Drapers Mill primary school in Margate, and the introduction of the Birchington 20 mph zone. We also continue to support schemes that will aid regeneration in north Kent, such as the south Thames development route and Fastrack. In recent years, we have given provisional approval for the A256 east Kent access scheme, and the Leybourne and West Malling bypass. In total, the amount provisionally committed to major transport schemes in Kent amounts to just over £61 million.

The Fastrack guided bus system is an example of an innovative public transport scheme, and we have committed £14.5 million to it. Its first phase will link Dartford station with Greenhithe station and Gravesend, taking in Bluewater and the Darenth Park hospital on its route. The concept of guided buses is being taken forward by Medway council, which is already planning a rapid transit system designed to link up with Fastrack and aid regeneration in Medway. We have also given £500,000 for complementary highway works to improve access to the proposed Turner centre in Margate. The centre is a key community development and will enable further regeneration of the waterfront at Margate. The south coast multi-modal study has now reached its recommendations and been supported by the south-east England regional assembly. Its recommendations encourage the use of rail for accessing the existing ports of Folkestone, Dover and Ramsgate. They also encourage the use of those ports for the transportation of freight, especially bulky goods such as aggregates.

Let me deal with the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Dover, who will be aware that all road schemes are undertaken strictly on a priority basis. Currently, even at peak times, the levels of traffic congestion on the A2 do not justify the dualling that he mentioned. However, the Highways Agency is discussing with the port authority and other interested stakeholders how we can improve the flow of traffic by other interim measures, which I hope will bring my hon. Friend some relief.

The report notes that the channel tunnel rail link provides the opportunity to operate domestic services that can also serve Folkestone, Dover, Canterbury and east Kent. That would significantly enhance accessibility in the area. In addition, depending on the future role of Manston airport, it may warrant a new rail access.

The consultants' report also supports Connex's proposal to increase the number of trains between Dover and Ashford from two to four. It also advocates completing the east Kent access improvements, including provision of priority lanes, but it will be for the Secretary of State to take the decisions on the way forward.

I want to answer specifically some points that were raised by my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet. The concern that he expressed on greater borrowing powers for local authorities will be addressed by the Local Government Bill, which had its Second Reading last week and which will allow local authorities to gain greater freedoms with borrowing. That will aid Thanet with its development of the port of Ramsgate, but it will be up to the local authority to manage its financial business using that new freedom. It will be able to determine how much money it can afford to borrow, and it will, of course, manage the debt.

My hon. Friend has heard of that as the new prudential style of borrowing. Under the proposed legislation, the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State may also regulate how the new powers may be performed. Those are seen as safeguards for the authority. The powers can relate directly to ports, and where the port is commercially viable the authority will be able to borrow over the limit of current Government support for capital programmes. Where the port is not commercially viable, there will still be the avenue of grants.

My hon. Friend also raised municipal seaport regulations and support, setting out how other European ports appear to have greater backing from their Governments. A European Commission paper on public funding and state aid in ports is due shortly, and I understand that it aims to clarify the position in more detail. I look forward to it with interest. We continue to work to persuade the Commission and other member states of the need for a level playing field across Europe, which my hon. Friend realises is important to him and to the ports in his area.

The work on the proposed study of municipal ports has, I am afraid, been delayed for some time owing to the necessary temporary reallocation of staff caused by 11 September, but the aim is that it will be undertaken as soon as possible this year. I can reassure my hon. Friend that the review is important to the Government.

The potential of the port of Ramsgate has been greatly aided by the opening of the Ramsgate harbour approach road. The scheme, which takes freight lorries and port traffic from the town centre directly to the port, was completed in 2000 at a cost of £30 million. It has improved port access and removed a major impediment to the development of the port and the marina.

I am indebted to my hon. Friend for reminding me that I opened the new apron and taxiway at Manston airport on what I recall as an extremely hot day last year. I was made very much aware that the owners of Manston have indeed put considerable resources into developing the airport and the related business park.

I understand that there are also proposals for a new passenger terminal at the airport. My hon. Friend will be aware that we are consulting on the development of airports across the south-east of England; indeed, I am sure that that has not evaded his notice. We expect the consultation to continue into the summer, and the aviation White Paper is likely to follow in the autumn. I am sure that he will contribute to the consultation exercise, as will those others with an interest in Manston

airport, and I can assure him that we shall consider the case thoroughly, although he would be surprised if I made any particular comment on it tonight.

On rail services, I know that my hon. Friend met the Minister for Transport last week. The Strategic Rail Authority has been remitted by the Government to achieve train services that will create a strong intercontinental link to increase trade and tourism in Britain. Because the level of infrastructure required will impact heavily on Kent, a provision was made to allow domestic services in Kent to operate using the channel tunnel rail link. The difficulty is the way in which those services will link into the other railway lines already operating in Kent—the north Kent line and the east Kent line. The Strategic Rail Authority has undertaken an analysis of the options for providing services using the channel tunnel rail link and the way in which they can be delivered. That analysis included taking on board issues such as connecting to already existing tracks, the type of rolling stock required to operate on the different tracks, the difficulty of harmonising signalling and the cost to the train operators of services lost because of overcapacity. I hope my hon. Friend appreciates the complexities and difficulties that that has entailed.

My hon. Friend proposed that the maintenance and storage of the channel tunnel rail link domestic stock be carried out at Ramsgate. The franchise for the full Kent domestic services will run from 2007, and all prospective tenderers will look at the resources available to them to make the most competitive tender. The siting of a train manufacturer with maintenance facilities at Ramsgate would seem to be an attractive package. My hon. Friend has made representations tonight, and I am sure that he is promoting the facilities at Ramsgate to all the potential franchisees. Once the consultations on the options identified in the SRA report have been completed, it will be for Ministers to examine all aspects and effects that they may have on the areas concerned, particularly the wider benefits for regeneration, employment and liveability in the area—I know that those are important issues for my hon. Friend. I can assure him that any decision on the channel tunnel rail link consultation will take into consideration all the factors that I have outlined.

My hon. Friend also mentioned the current services to his constituency provided by Connex, presenting them in his usual quiet but robust way. The present deal allows Connex to provide a level of stability to its customers. The package incorporates continuing measures to improve performance and secures commitment to the removal of mark 1 slam-door trains. Connex has already ordered 500 new vehicles to fulfil its commitment to replace that ageing rolling stock. My hon. Friend has the look of someone saying "Watch this space." I am sure that he will do so, and will inform us if that commitment is not met in the expected time scale. The shortened franchise will enable the SRA to market a new integrated Kent franchise from 2007, making use of the new high-speed channel tunnel rail link. As is normally the case, the bidding process for that franchise will be an open competition.

I have already set out in general terms the support for the funding of local authority schemes through the local transport plan. Phase 1 of the east Kent access scheme has already received provisional approval, and funding has been set aside this year in readiness for the scheme achieving full approval. The next two phases have now been combined, and we are expecting a bid for that part of the scheme in this year's annual progress report.

I hope that in the time available to me I have been able to cover the points made by my hon. Friend. If there are matters that I have not covered, I am sure that he will point them out to me, and we can deal with them in correspondence.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend not only for the way in which he has presented his case tonight but for the way in which he has conducted himself for a number of years in presenting most forcefully in the House matters of interest to his constituents. I commend him strongly for all the good work that he has done.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at six minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 14 January 2003

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH

The Secretary of State was asked—

NHS Dentistry

1. **Mr. Simon Thomas** (Ceredigion): What recent discussions he has had with the National Assembly for Wales in relation to NHS dentistry. [90189]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. David Lammy): Officials from the Department of Health continue to have a regular dialogue with the National Assembly in relation to NHS dentistry.

Mr. Simon Thomas: I am grateful to know that the dialogue is still ongoing. Is the Minister aware that just 31 per cent. of the population in my constituency are registered with an NHS dentist? That is the lowest figure ever, since the NHS dentistry system came in. According to figures released last week, we also have the highest rates of lip and mouth cancer registered in Wales at European level. The Select Committee on Health report on NHS dentistry published in March 2001 identified the scale of charges for NHS dentists as the main obstacle to increased access to NHS dentistry. What is the Department doing to change that scale of charges to encourage more dentists to come into the NHS and to ensure that we pay them not just for the treatment that they provide but for the preventive care that they undertake?

Mr. Lammy: The hon. Gentleman rightly points out that the Welsh Assembly is responsible for dentistry in Wales. The Assembly has rightly set out its reform agenda under "Routes to Reform". Like us, it is also examining how local commissioning can be taken forward, and our "Options for Change" document is a vision for that local commissioning.

Huw Irranca-Davies (Ogmore): Without wishing to cast a slur on the whole dentistry profession, I wonder whether the Minister would agree with a colleague of mine, my dentist, who primarily treats NHS patients, that there is a problem with the motivation of many of those now coming into dentistry? We need to encourage more of those who have an ethical reason to be there, rather than simply a financial one.

Mr. Lammy: My hon. Friend makes a good point. It is key that dentists should be able to move away from the piecework and methods of payment that we have had in the past. My hon. Friend will know that we intend to put proposals before Parliament to change the structure to ensure local commissioning by primary care trusts. I believe that that will empower dentists to move in the direction that they and the British Dental Association want.

Specialist Stroke Units

2. **Mr. Michael Jack** (Fylde): If he will make a statement on the role of specialist stroke units at NHS acute hospitals. [90190]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith): As the national service framework for older people makes clear, all hospitals that care for people who have had a stroke should have specialist stroke services in place by April 2004. Monitoring of implementation of the national service framework shows that progress is being made with the introduction of those services.

Mr. Jack: I am grateful to the Minister for restating the national service framework target. The Royal College of Physicians estimates that, at present, only 27 per cent. of patients are being treated in specialist stroke units, which, in its judgment, is resulting in 6,000 unnecessary deaths a year. Is the Minister really telling the House that, within one year, 73 per cent. more patients will be treated in specialist stroke units in places such as Blackpool, which has no such specialist unit? What comfort can she give to people there that the money and resources will flow at a speed that will enable her target to be met in one year?

Jacqui Smith: The right hon. Gentleman is right: we do need to make more progress. That is why provision of stroke services is a key priority in the Department's priorities and planning framework issued last October. I am sure that he will be pleased to reflect that the third national sentinel audit showed an increase in the number of hospitals with specific stroke units, notwithstanding the fact that the Government's objectives go beyond stroke units to involve integrated stroke services covering preventive care, rehabilitation and long-term support for stroke patients. The right hon. Gentleman also makes the important point that this progress is dependent on investment. I do not think that it will be the last time that we say this today: I hope that he will explain to his constituents that the progress we have made and that we expect to make is dependent on the investment that this Government are putting in and that his party would take out.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): I am always grateful to you, Mr. Speaker, for the help that you gave me in 1998, when you rushed me into St. Thomas's hospital from Westminster when I had a stroke in the House. Is the Minister aware that the

diagnosis, treatment and prevention of strokes is cost-effective as well as humane? Is she also aware that magic potions are not what are needed to deal with strokes? It is mainly a matter of careful treatment, sensible eating, exercise and, if you have the stomach for it, a mild aspirin a day. It is, therefore, just sensible organisation that is required. Surely that can be delivered according to the time scale that the Minister is describing. We do not need high-tech to deliver this programme.

Jacqui Smith: My hon. Friend makes an important point, not least from his experience. Although stroke rehabilitation units are important, so is the increasing amount of preventive work in primary care. That is being taken forward through other initiatives; for example, it is linked to the Government's action on preventing heart disease. My hon. Friend referred to the importance of exercise and healthy eating. On Friday, my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health, the Member for Salford (Ms Blears), made an important announcement about the Government's five-a-day project to encourage healthier eating.

My hon. Friend is right that stroke services are about prevention and long-term rehabilitation. He is also right that the Government have made that a priority, and we are confident that the sort of improvements that we have announced are being and will be made.

Hospital Waiting Lists and Times

3. **Sir Sydney Chapman** (Chipping Barnet): If he will make a statement on progress on reducing waiting lists and times in the NHS. [90191]

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): Waiting lists and waiting times are falling. Waiting lists for primary care and hospitals have fallen, and waiting for in-patient and out-patient appointments has reduced. The biggest reduction in waiting times is that for cancer and heart treatment.

Sir Sydney Chapman: Will the Secretary of State confirm that, within five years of coming to power, the Labour Government failed to reduce waiting lists by the promised 100,000, which was only a reduction of less than 10 per cent? Waiting times are more important than waiting lists. The right hon. Gentleman set a benchmark of reducing waiting time to a maximum of six months by 2005. Does he accept that he failed to achieve the benchmark of a maximum waiting time of 15 months by March this year?

Mr. Milburn: With the greatest respect, I think that the hon. Gentleman is confused. We promised at the time of the general election that we would reduce waiting lists by 100,000 and we have achieved that. It might benefit hon. Members if I read out the figures. In March 1997, 283,000 people waited more than six months for a hospital operation. That figure is down to 230,000. In March 1997, almost 6,000 people waited more than 15 months for a hospital operation; the latest figures show that six people are waiting that length of time.

More than 70,000 people were waiting more than 26 weeks for an out-patient appointment when we came to office; that figure is down to 700. There is a long way to go but waiting times and waiting lists are moving in the right direction for one simple reason: our reforms of the national health service and the resources for which we voted and against which the hon. Gentleman voted.

John Mann (Bassetlaw): The NHS in my constituency is going from strength to strength according to every indicator except one: that for drug treatment services. Will my right hon. Friend examine the returns on waiting lists that the drug action team for Nottinghamshire provides for my constituency and the rest of the county, and work out why I know people on 12-month waiting lists when the team's results imply a maximum wait of 12 weeks? Will my right hon. Friend consider the specific cases, the details of which I can provide to him, and the way in which the waiting lists for drug treatment services are being fiddled?

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend raises an important issue. I appreciate that he takes a passionate interest in issues that involve drugs, such as drug-related crime and drugs treatment. I understand that he mentioned some of them in yesterday's debate. Progress has been made, but, as my hon. Friend knows, the performance of drug action teams varies throughout the country. Some are good and some are unfortunately less good.

When effort has been focused, especially on areas with high street crime, waiting times for treatment have changed remarkably. In some cases, people who obviously needed drug treatment were arrested, but told that they would have to wait many months before they received such treatment. Nowadays, people in high street-crime areas receive treatment almost instantaneously. If we can do it in some areas, we must do it in others. That requires a combination of national and local action.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): Is the Secretary of State aware of the increasing concern about fiddling waiting list figures? I refer not only to the National Audit Office findings of more cases of fiddling but the scandal at St. George's hospital, where it appears that some figures were fiddled. Will he assure us that he is confident that clinical priorities are not being distorted by his obsession with waiting times and waiting lists, and that we are treating the sickest thickest—I mean the sickest quickest? Will he also assure us that he has confidence in the figures on which he relies to demonstrate the claimed improvements in waiting times?

Mr. Milburn: Obviously the hon. Gentleman spent too long in front of the mirror this morning. He claims that the Government are obsessed with waiting times, but it is the public and patients who are rightly obsessed with them. As he knows fine well, by and large the biggest public concern about the national health service today is not the quality of treatment received once people get into the NHS, but how long they have to wait to get into it. We believe passionately that the right way forward is to get the reforms into the national health service—I know that the hon. Gentleman opposes all of them—and to get the resources in as well, so that we can

bring down waiting times. Of course, nowadays there is more independent scrutiny of the NHS than there has ever been.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): The reforms are certainly working for us in Doncaster. Of those waiting for treatment for less than six months, nationally the figure is 76 per cent., but in Doncaster it is 88 per cent., which is obviously good. Nationally, 76 per cent. of those waiting for GP referrals are seen within 13 weeks, but in Doncaster the figure is 86 per cent., so the reforms are working. Where there is a will, there is a way. Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating the doctors, nurses and management in Doncaster, who are doing an excellent job?

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend is quite right, and what he says is true not just in Doncaster. I join him in paying tribute to the Herculean effort on the part of staff and management in Doncaster, but although major problems still exist across the national health service—unsurprisingly so, after literally decades of underinvestment—it is very striking that, for the first time since records began, in-patient and out-patient waiting times are falling, and falling together. The same is true in primary care, and also according to virtually every indicator. What gives me particular pleasure—I know that my hon. Friend will feel the same, particularly since he comes from an area that suffers not just from deprivation but from a high incidence of coronary heart disease—is that the biggest falls in treatment have been in precisely those clinical priority areas of cancer and heart disease.

It is worth saying that when we came to office, heart patients were in some cases being asked to wait more than 18 months for hospital operations. By April of this year, we expect such waiting times to have been halved to a maximum of nine months. There is clearly a long way to go, but the only way to keep the waiting times moving in the right direction—downwards—is to keep on with the reforms, and, most importantly, to keep the resources going in. That is what the Government want to do, and what the Opposition oppose.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): What estimate has been made of the number of casualties that the NHS could deal with if there is war in the Gulf, and the number of staff who could be sent there without significantly affecting current levels of NHS activity and, thereby, waiting times?

Mr. Milburn: We obviously have not made estimates of the number of potential casualties, but as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence told this House just a week or so ago, we have put in place contingency plans. That is sensible, particularly in the first instance for the call up of reservists. This will affect many NHS hospitals throughout the country, but I expect that, on average, the impact will be limited to two or three members of staff being called up. Sometimes they will be doctors, sometimes they will be nurses, and sometimes they will be allied health professionals such as therapists. In addition, as the hon. Gentleman will be aware, last week a meeting was held in the Department of Health with six of the principal NHS and other hospitals that would be used to deal with casualties in the event of a conflict.

Dr. Fox: Last July, the armed forces said that they had only 195 GPs when 415 were needed, only 23 anaesthetists when 120 were needed, only 11 orthopaedic surgeons when 28 were needed, and only 18 general surgeons when 43 were needed. The whole House will undoubtedly agree that all our troops should have optimal treatment. If we are talking about a deployment of more than 20,000, how will the extra numbers be made up in those areas without having a very significant impact? Of course, that could cause great difficulty to the NHS.

Mr. Milburn: Perhaps uncharacteristically, the hon. Gentleman is being something of a merchant of doom and gloom. The reason why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence made that statement in the House—I very much support what he said—was precisely that the national health service has to plan for all contingencies. The House—and, I dare say, Opposition Front Benchers—would be the first to criticise the Government were we not to put in place suitable contingency plans. That is precisely what we have done, in the first instance with reservists. If it is necessary to supplement the statement that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence made to the House, we will take any further action that needs to be taken. However, I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman should have taken this tack. It is worth pointing out that the Government who cut the defence medical services in our armed forces were not this Labour Government, but the previous Conservative Government.

Foundation Hospitals

4. **Dr. Stephen Ladyman** (South Thanet): If he intends to ensure that foundation hospitals are treated equally with non-foundation hospitals when strategic health authorities are considering hospital re-organisation. [90192]

11. **Mr. Desmond Swayne** (New Forest, West): If he will make a statement on financial independence for foundation hospital trusts. [90199]

12. **Mr Dave Watts** (St. Helens, North): If he will make a statement on his Department's assessment of the likely effect that foundation hospitals will have on staff retention in non-foundation hospitals. [90200]

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): National health service foundation trusts will provide NHS services to NHS patients according to NHS principles and NHS standards. They will be owned and controlled locally, not nationally, by members of the public in the local community, and by local staff, patients and local primary care trusts. The freedom that they will have to improve services for NHS patients and

meet local needs will be balanced with safeguards to ensure that their primary duty to NHS patients is always met.

Dr. Ladyman: I understand what my right hon. Friend is trying to achieve with foundation hospitals, and I support him in that. However, when schools were given grant-maintained status, many started competing against other schools instead of co-operating with them. I need to be reassured that that will not happen with foundation hospitals. If a strategic health authority that includes two trusts decides to localise services in one to create a centre of excellence, will the other trust accept that, and will the two trusts co-operate and work together? Will my right hon. Friend give me that assurance?

Mr. Milburn: Yes, I think that I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. Foundation hospitals will be part of the NHS. They will operate under a statutory duty of partnership, and we will introduce legislation to ensure that they will have the freedoms necessary to empower front-line staff and managers to shape local services to meet the local community's needs. With the best will in the world, that cannot be done from Whitehall, but those freedoms need to be balanced by significant safeguards. Our intention is definitely not to reinvent the dog-eat-dog competition that prevailed under the previous internal market. That is why so much effort is being made across the NHS to ensure that NHS standards are good in all hospitals and not just in some. As far as questions of so-called reconfiguration or service change are concerned, any NHS foundation hospital that wants to propose a service change will have to go through precisely the same process of scrutiny as any other NHS hospital. That process will involve the oversight and scrutiny committee of the local authority. That democratically elected committee will provide a significant safeguard and ensure that it is the interests of the local community, and not the vested interests of any one organisation, that come first.

Mr. Swayne: I shall stick with Question 11, Mr. Speaker, which the Secretary of State has not begun even to address. He has merely lumped three questions together and answered them according to a query that he has imagined. Will the right hon. Gentleman say precisely how much the foundation hospitals will be able to borrow from the private sector?

Hon. Members: Keep taking the tablets.

Mr. Milburn: I do not want to incur any more expense for the NHS, but the hon. Gentleman is in scary creature mode today, as he often is. His specific question concerns how much NHS foundation trusts will be able to borrow. That will be determined by each individual trust, against a prudential code that the independent regulator will have the duty of monitoring. The borrowing will be based on one simple principle, with which most people—as individuals and members of organisations—are fully acquainted. That principle is that borrowing should be based on ability to repay. Neither the hon. Gentleman nor the Government would want NHS foundation hospitals to overstretch themselves in such a way that local services were lost to local communities.

Mr. Watts: My right hon. Friend will know that there is much concern among Labour Members about the proposed introduction of NHS foundation hospitals. Many of us believe that that could lead to a two-tier health service. Will my right hon. Friend give me the assurance that one-star and two-star hospitals will be raised in a very short time to the standards of foundation hospitals, and that they will be allowed to join the foundation scheme as soon as possible?

Mr. Milburn: I can give precisely that assurance. I want to make one thing absolutely clear. I know that my hon. Friend is not saying such things, but all the talk suggesting that what we envisage is a group of half a dozen or a dozen elite hospitals is entirely removed from the truth. In fact, we want as many NHS hospitals—as many NHS trusts—as possible to become NHS foundation trusts, as quickly as possible. But we must start somewhere, and, as my hon. Friend knows from his constituency, there are now different starting points in the NHS.

Some hospitals are performing very well, some are producing a middling performance and a few, sadly, are persistently underperforming. We need different approaches and different strategies to deal with the different starting points. Some hospitals can benefit from more freedom, many need more support, and a few need not less but more intervention. My hon. Friend has spoken to me about that many times in the context of his local hospital. There will, however, be no arbitrary cap on numbers.

I hope my hon. Friend is also comforted by the fact that 75 per cent. of NHS trusts that were given a zero rating in our first round of star ratings had improved by the following year. Twenty-five per cent. had become two-star trusts, and I expect that before long some will have become three-star trusts.

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): How can foundation hospitals be truly independent from Whitehall control, as the Secretary of State keeps claiming they will, when they will be subject to a star-rating system that is imposed on all hospitals by the Department of Health?

Mr. Milburn: For the simple reason that they will be owned and controlled locally, not nationally. They will be owned by members of the local community—not by me, not by any other Minister, and not by Whitehall.

What the hon. Gentleman's question reveals all too starkly is the fundamental difference of view on this. The Tories want foundation hospitals—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Every time the Secretary of State has got to his feet he has told me what the Tories want. I do not want to hear any more about that. I want to hear what the Secretary of State has to say for himself.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): There have been some mischievous suggestions that the governance proposals for foundation trusts are being included as a sweetener for people like me who have some reservations about the concept of such trusts. To prove that that is not so, will my right hon. Friend consider extending the concept of these governance proposals to other elements of the NHS?

Mr. Milburn: In time, we will. The guide that we published on 11 December makes that absolutely clear.

The proposals are certainly not a sweetener. The governance structure and the ownership structure of these organisations, and their independence, are intimately related.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Order. Face Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Milburn: I was not aware that the hon. Gentleman had taken over your role, Mr. Speaker. Heaven help us if he does. *[Interruption.]* Perhaps the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) would like to pass his pills to the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant). Perhaps then we will hear a bit of sense.

I was talking about the independence and the governance of foundation hospitals. We want to use our current model because whatever the great strengths of the NHS—and it has enormous strengths: its staff, its public service ethos and some of the advances it has achieved in public health—what cannot be done with the best will in the world is matching local services to local needs if these organisations are run from Whitehall. They must be run by members of the local community and local staff so that they can shape local services in accordance with communities' differing needs.

Alistair Burt (North-East Bedfordshire): I hope the Secretary of State agrees that if the House is to be reassured about foundation hospitals it is essential for us to have confidence in the views expressed by those who work in the NHS. Is he concerned about the climate described by the Institute of Healthcare Management? It says that

"Over half of the managers . . . from board level down to heads of departments, felt unable to raise concerns about the Service, or their own organisation, for fear of recrimination".

What does he intend to do about that climate, and who or what does he think those managers are afraid of?

Mr. Milburn: I think we should give more independence and greater freedom to NHS organisations that are capable of using it.

Consultant Contracts

5. **Mr. Huw Edwards** (Monmouth): If he will make a statement about the reform of consultant contracts. [90193]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): Following the ballot of British Medical Association members in October, we are carefully considering the options in relation to the best way forward and will make an announcement shortly.

Mr. Edwards: May I urge my right hon. Friend to resist and overcome the opposition of consultants to the reform of their contracts? Constituents who need an orthopaedic operation feel deeply frustrated when they find out that they could have it done in the next couple of weeks by the same surgeon at the same hospital. The situation is so intolerable at the Royal Gwent hospital where my constituents go that the Minister for Health and Social Services in the National Assembly for Wales, Jane Hutt, has set up an inquiry. Will my right hon. Friend do everything in his power to ensure that those consultants who are dedicated to working full time for the national health service are rewarded for that? We should not have a two-tier system.

Mr. Hutton: I agree strongly with hon. Friend. It is important to make it clear that no one has a veto on reform in the national health service. It is our job to find the best way to proceed with the reforms that we wanted to make. Our objective, however, is clear and it remains the same—to better reward NHS consultants who do the most for NHS patients. As I said, we will be making an announcement shortly about the way forward.

On my hon. Friend's specific point about private practice, he will remember from the agreement that we negotiated with the BMA last year that we proposed a way forward for dealing with the perceived conflict between NHS practice and private practice. The need for clarity around the relationship between private practice and NHS practice remains the same, and we will be saying something about this in the near future.

Sir Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): The hon. Member for Monmouth (Mr. Edwards) has raised an important point. While we have to give full credit to the overwhelming majority of consultants for their skill, dedication and commitment, is it not important that any contract should encourage a consultant to carry out as many operations as possible within the national health service in accordance with safety, hygiene and all other considerations that are important when using theatres? Will the Minister give me an assurance that that objective will lie behind any decision that the Government take?

Mr. Hutton: Yes.

Mr. John Baron (Billericay): Dr. Paul Miller, the new BMA consultant negotiator, has today called for a resumption of national contract talks, saying that the consultants

"are becoming increasingly frustrated at the slow pace of change . . . The Government is quick to claim credit for reductions in the longest patient waits but slower to acknowledge that the long waits have simply moved further down the system, with more patients waiting between six and 12 months for treatment."

How can the Government hope to gain the trust of the consultants when they are responsible for this sort of systemic distortion?

Mr. Hutton: I entirely reject the hon. Gentleman's latter point. It is no coincidence that waiting times are falling across the national health service, because we have set clear national standards for the first time. We have pursued those with vigour and energy, and patients have been the beneficiaries.

On the hon. Gentleman's first point, of course the doors of the Department of Health remain open to the BMA, and we look forward to the discussions to which he has referred.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): I have in front of me a letter from a consultant who says that he voted in favour of the reforms. He goes on to explain that as specialists in one of the smaller trusts, he and his colleagues are becoming increasingly frustrated with our region's attempt to rejuggle the management of some of the smaller trusts. As we need to build on the trust of good consultants such as my constituent, will my right hon. Friend look closely at what the north-west region is doing in terms of mergers of small specialist trusts, which are the jewels in the crown of the local service?

Mr. Hutton: Yes, I certainly agree with my hon. Friend; He is more than welcome to discuss any detailed concerns or issues with me.

NHS Dentistry

6. **Mr. Peter Pike** (Burnley): What discussions he has had with primary care trusts regarding improved access to NHS dental services. [90194]

8. **Colin Burgon** (Elmet): What steps he has taken to improve the availability of dental treatment on the NHS. [90196]

13. **Mr. John Grogan** (Selby): What plans he has to increase the provision of NHS dentistry. [90201]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. David Lammy): The Government are committed to providing NHS dentistry for all who need and seek it. In addition to the annual general dental services budget, more than £125 million has been made available to the NHS to improve local services over the past three years.

Despite the increase of nearly 2,000 dentists since 1997, we recognise that in some areas it can be difficult to find an NHS dentist. We therefore propose to legislate for far-reaching reform of NHS dental services.

Mr. Pike: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Is he aware that Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale primary care trust supported a bid, made under one of his Department's initiatives, for an improved NHS dental service in east Lancashire, but that the bid failed? Does he recognise that people in Burnley cannot get on to NHS dentists' lists? There is much poverty, as a result of which people cannot afford private treatment, and dental health in east Lancashire is poor. We want the Government to take action to solve those problems; people are paying for NHS dental services, but they are not able to get them.

Mr. Lammy: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Of course the Department recognises the issues relating to poor dental health in Burnley. That is why Burnley has benefited from a number of other pilots, including dental access centres. Burnley has also received a substantial increase in its primary care allocation, which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced shortly before Christmas. That, too, will improve dental access in my hon. Friend's constituency.

Colin Burgon: I am glad that the Minister has a strategy for improving access to NHS dental services, as the problem is also present in my constituency, even though it is a reasonably affluent one. Recently, a Garforth constituent gave me a letter that he had received from his dental practice, informing him that it was going private. Two things disturbed me about the letter. There was a strong implication, first, that unless my constituent signed up for a dental care plan, the practice could not guarantee treatment; and, secondly, that NHS dental care was of lower quality and that inferior materials and techniques were used. What is my hon. Friend's comment on that letter?

Mr. Lammy: I am very concerned to hear what my hon. Friend says. If he passes the letter to me, I shall ask Department officials to look into it.

NHS dentistry is overseen by a quality assurance system, as my hon. Friend would expect, and the dental reference service undertakes 55,000 random checks on dentists across the country.

Mr. Grogan: Many NHS dentists feel strongly about fluoridation. What is the Government's current policy, following the Medical Research Council report that built on work carried out by the university of York?

Mr. Lammy: My hon. Friend will understand that the subject is controversial, but the MRC supported the benefits of fluoridation in improving health inequalities, especially for children. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has asked the chief medical officer and the chief dental officer to look further into the issue.

Mr. Colin Breed (South-East Cornwall): Will the Minister give me his definition of access? Does it include, for instance, the five to six-hour journey by public transport to fulfil an appointment that is often experienced by my constituents in south-east Cornwall?

Mr. Lammy: The hon. Gentleman has, I know, been concerned about a case in his constituency that arose over Christmas. It is important that people ringing NHS Direct have access to a dentist within a reasonable distance. We must continue to strive to ensure that there is investment to improve dental access in the hon. Gentleman's area—as in others.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Is the Minister aware that in many rural areas—Sleaford

in Lincolnshire, for example—it is almost impossible for individuals to register for an NHS dentist? The primary care trusts say that they face great difficulties in attracting dentists to rural areas, and to Lincolnshire in particular. Will he, in concert with the working group, see what can be done to attract dentists to rural areas, and to Lincolnshire in particular?

Mr. Lammy: Of course I am concerned about dental access in Sleaford and I am tremendously concerned about why we arrived at this position in the first place. The then Administration introduced a contract in 1990, but there was a 7 per cent. cut in 1992. The Conservative party currently supports a 20 per cent. cut, which would make things worse for the people of Sleaford. We have 17 dental access centres in rural areas and investment is being made to improve access. That will benefit the right hon. and learned Gentleman's constituents.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): Is the Minister aware that a mother in Freshwater in the west of my constituency cannot access an NHS dental practice unless she travels to Southsea, which involves public transport by way of bus, train and ferry? Does he recall the Prime Minister making a promise at the Labour party conference in 1999 that everyone should have access to an NHS dentist within two years? Why has the Prime Minister broken that promise?

Mr. Lammy: The Prime Minister has not broken his promise. We remain committed to that investment. We will improve access by enacting legislation that will propose local commissioning for primary care trusts. Will the hon. Gentleman vote with us on that measure, or will he propose a 20 per cent. cut?

Chris McCafferty (Calder Valley): Will my hon. Friend look carefully at the need for extra funding for primary care trusts, such as the one in Calderdale, that cover large semi-rural areas and face specific problems? There are pockets of need where access to dental care is not available. Those areas do not qualify for extra funding under the current arrangements because they are pockets rather than larger areas of specific need. The Government could help such areas by carefully considering their special needs.

Mr. Lammy: My hon. Friend will know of the recent announcement on allocations; Calderdale will certainly have benefited from an increase. As I have explained, the legislation will enable her primary care trust to ensure better local commissioning and to provide better access for her constituents.

MRI Scans (Yeovil)

7. **Mr. David Laws** (Yeovil): What his estimate is of the waiting time for MRI scans in the Yeovil constituency. [90195]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): I am advised by Dorset and Somerset strategic health authority that both East Somerset NHS trust and Taunton and Somerset NHS trust are currently meeting the target for urgent referrals for MRI scans as set by the NHS cancer plan. Waiting times for non-urgent MRI scans have fallen significantly at East Somerset NHS trust, although waiting times for non-urgent MRI scans at Taunton and Somerset NHS trust have risen in recent months.

Mr. Laws: Is the Minister not aware that waiting times for MRI scans at Yeovil hospital are longer than they were in 1997, and that at Musgrove Park hospital they are now 38 weeks? Are not some of the longest waiting times in the NHS for diagnostic tests and for consultant-to-consultant referrals? Would it not be better for the Government to publish the information nationally so that we do not have a distortion in priorities across the NHS?

Ms Blears: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that waiting times at Yeovil hospital, which serves his constituents, have been coming down recently. It is also due to get a new scanner in May, which will make the process even faster. It may be able to help out with waiting lists at Musgrove Park hospital, which has problems with non-urgent MRI scan waiting times, although it has just appointed two new radiographers and extended the working day from 8 o'clock in the morning to 8 o'clock at night. In addition, people are working on Saturday mornings. The combination of extra investment and reform to working practices is beginning to make a difference on this very important issue.

Nicotine

9. **Paul Flynn** (Newport, West): What new proposals he has to reduce nicotine deaths. [90197]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): Some 120,000 people die every year from smoking. Forthcoming changes that will reduce deaths include banning tobacco advertising, starting with newspapers and billboards from 14 February, new stark warnings on cigarette packets and a major expansion of NHS smoking cessation services.

Paul Flynn: The Government are to be warmly congratulated on their work on this issue, but is it not amazing that over the past 20 years the number of male cancers in Sweden has been cut in half and that smoking among men has gone down from 36 per cent. to 17 per cent.? Last month, the Royal College of Physicians said that using smokeless tobacco is up to 1,000 times less hazardous than using smoking tobacco. Is it not right that the product that has achieved that remarkable health improvement should now be taken off the banned list and become available in some form in countries outside Sweden? Unfortunately, the Government have said that setting up a regulatory authority to consider all those matters is not planned at the moment. When is that likely to be done, enabling us to take a rational look at all forms of smoking?

Ms Blears: I am afraid that I do not agree with my hon. Friend that smokeless tobacco should be encouraged. All tobacco products are addictive, and it is much better to take our approach—helping people to give up smoking entirely, with Zyban and nicotine

replacement therapy—and to see how that works. I am afraid that we do not have a history of oral tobacco use, as people have in Sweden. The Swedish National Institute of Public Health does not support the use of Snus as a smoking cessation product because it is very concerned indeed that it could become a gateway to tobacco use, particularly for young people, at whom it is specifically marketed. Far from helping people to give up, it could increase the number, especially of young people, who use tobacco. It is a very interesting debate—I am sure that it will continue—but I am afraid that I do not agree with my hon. Friend on this issue.

Mrs. Marion Roe (Broxbourne): Will the Minister join me in congratulating South East Hertfordshire primary care trust, together with local GPs, pharmacists, practice nurses and the Hertfordshire stop smoking groups, on the excellent work that they are doing in my constituency to help my constituents to give up smoking? Although we still have three months to go, the primary care trust has already exceeded its 2002–03 Government target, with more than 200 people having given up smoking. Will the Minister please tell the House what action she is taking to put pressure on Ministers in other Departments to tackle the very serious problem of tobacco and cigarette smuggling, which has a serious impact on the issue that we are trying to address and which, of course, she particularly wishes to solve?

Ms Blears: I am delighted to join the hon. Lady in congratulating all the people in her local area on the magnificent results that they have achieved. Those results are replicated throughout the country. More than 200,000 people are now being helped to give up smoking, and we are aiming for an extra 800,000 over the next three years. We are putting in the money to ensure that that can happen, because it requires extra resources as well.

On cross-government action to reduce smuggling, we are in constant contact with Treasury Ministers to ensure that we bear down on the problem. We have a cross-government action plan to tackle not just smoking but all the damaging effects of tobacco on our community. We have a whole range of policies in the Treasury, the Department of Health and, particularly, the Department for Education and Skills, and we are doing a great deal of work to alert young people in schools to the dangers of tobacco and, indeed, of other drugs.

Dr. Howard Stoate (Dartford): I congratulate my hon. Friend on her work on tobacco, particularly in relation to tobacco advertising. The next huge timebomb that we face in health is obesity in children. Is she prepared to consider as part of a strategy limiting the advertising to young people of products high in fat, sugar and salt, which cause such huge damage to our young population?

Ms Blears: My hon. Friend highlights an extremely important issue, which is almost a timebomb waiting to hit us in years to come. He will know that the Government have a huge range of policies to improve people's diet and nutrition: the national school fruit scheme, the five-a-day projects and a range of plans to encourage people to have access to a healthier diet. He raises the important issue of advertising to young people. The Food Standards Agency is conducting a research project to examine the effects of advertising foods high in sugar and salt to young children. I shall read its report with great interest to see what action we can take to improve the diets of young people in this country.

GP Appointments

10. **Mr. John Bercow** (Buckingham): What estimate he has made of the number and proportion of missed appointments with general practitioners in each of the last five years. [90198]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): Information is not available for each of the last five years. Surveys conducted over the past two years by the Doctor Patient Partnership and the Institute of Healthcare Management, with funding from the Department of Health, have shown a reduction in the number of missed appointments of more than 8 per cent. during that period.

Mr. Bercow: I am grateful for that answer. Given that people who miss their general practitioner appointments without good reason cause unnecessary cost to public funds, waste doctors' time and selfishly inconvenience other patients, does the Minister agree that, although people should always be free to use their GP, they should certainly not be free to abuse their GP?

Mr. Hutton: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's latter point, and I also agree with his views on the Conservative party, which we have all enjoyed reading. He raises a serious point, so he is entitled to a serious answer. He is right that the waste of resources caused by people who do not bother to turn up for appointments is a huge drain on the NHS; we are trying to find the best way to make sure that we minimise the incidence of the problem. As he will be aware, a number of GP practices in Buckinghamshire are taking part in the work of the primary care collaborative, including some, I think, in his constituency. We have found that improving the appointments system that practices operate can have a beneficial effect on the number of missed appointments. I am glad to say that, so far, the introduction of better appointments systems through the primary care collaborative has seen the national average of missed appointments fall by 50 per cent. That is the right way to proceed.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): Everyone would agree that missing an appointment with a doctor or at a hospital requires good reasons. I urge my hon. Friend, however, to do further work to examine why people do not attend appointments. Too often, statistics are produced showing that X per cent. of people have not attended appointments, but we do not go on to ask why. We need to spread good practice in terms of having an efficient appointments system, but we must understand that people may not attend appointments for many

good reasons. They may be fearful of seeing their doctor, or they may have got better, which is also worth knowing. We need more research in this area.

Mr. Hutton: I agree with my hon. Friend. We are committed to working with the Doctor Patient Partnership to examine some of the issues that she raises. We know, for example, that the incidence of missed appointments tends to be higher in mental health trusts than in other NHS organisations, probably for obvious reasons. We certainly need to examine the background, including access, transport and convenience issues. I say to my hon. Friend what I said to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow): it is important that we work with the primary care sector, GPs and practice managers to improve the convenience and accessibility of the appointments system. If people are given a genuine choice not only over the time at which they are seen but where they are seen, all the evidence confirms that they are more likely to attend their appointment than if they are given little choice.

King Edward VII Hospital, Midhurst

14. **Mr. Andrew Tyrie** (Chichester): What representations he has received about the impending closure of King Edward VII Hospital, Midhurst. [90202]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, other Ministers and departmental officials have received a number of representations on the financial situation that has been developing at the privately run King Edward VII Hospital, particularly over the last few months. I am aware that the hon. Gentleman wrote to my right hon. Friend last week. Furthermore, the director of health and social care for the south of England met the hospital's chief executive and director of finance to explore what the NHS could do, and discussions continue with NHS officials.

Mr. Tyrie: Is the Minister aware that the hospital is not private but independent, with half its patients coming from the NHS? Will she urgently examine why 40 per cent. of NHS work has been withdrawn over the past few months, which is the immediate cause of the closure, and whether that work can be restored? Is she aware that the hospital's closure will create a dramatic increase in waiting times for orthopaedic and cardiac work in the area? Is not it absurd that people from the area are being sent abroad for treatment, especially for orthopaedic work, when they can be treated at less cost at the King Edward VII hospital?

Jacqui Smith: As the hon. Gentleman says, the hospital is not an NHS hospital, but the NHS in Surrey, Sussex and Hampshire has worked with it for a number of years and recognises its contribution to local NHS patient care, as well as to providing care for independent private patients. The NHS throughout the country, certainly in the areas that concern the hon. Gentleman, is planning for and funding increased capacity and activity. Its purpose is not to reduce it. It is in that context that detailed discussions are ongoing with both the hospital and the liquidators to maintain capacity, subject obviously to cost and quality considerations at the hospital.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): I am aware that discussions have been going on with Ministers behind the scenes. I acknowledge the hard work and approaches of my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) and the receptiveness of Ministers. We certainly hope that this outstanding not-for-profit hospital can survive its centenary year and continue as a centre of excellence, having looked after a majority of NHS patients over the past 50 years in cancer care, cardiac work and orthopaedics in particular.

As my hon. Friend says, is not it absurd that NHS patients are being sent abroad rather than up the road to a hospital that has state-of-the-art scanners, angioplasty equipment and its own intensive care unit? What assessment has the Minister made of the likely impact on waiting times for NHS patients served by hospitals in Guildford, Portsmouth, the Isle of Wight and the whole of Sussex that previously relied on the centre, especially if the worst comes to the worst?

Jacqui Smith: Serving the interests of NHS patients in that hospital and others in the area is, of course, the priority. That is why the NHS was willing to enter into partnership with private sector partners who were negotiating with the hospital and to undertake long-term contracts, given the necessary consideration of quality and price. That objective will continue to underlie the ongoing work with the liquidator. As I said, our priority remains to increase capacity and activity to ensure the very best services for NHS patients, wherever those are provided.

Complementary Medicines

15. **Mr. David Tredinnick** (Bosworth): What steps he is taking to improve GPs' understanding of acupuncture, aromatherapy, herbal medicine and homeopathy. [90203]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on being called to ask his question; it has relieved my hon. Friends of the guessing game of who will be on the happy receiving end of it.

In June 2000 we issued an information pack for primary care groups on the most commonly used therapies. We are currently co-funding with the King's Fund a project run by Westminster university to develop good practice in the clinical governance of complementary and alternative medicine, using a network of primary care trusts.

Mr. Tredinnick: I thank the Minister for that reply. Does she agree that with 20 per cent. of the population now using complementary therapies, the time has come to make doctors more aware and thereby ensure a better interface, which is what many doctors want? Does she accept that the problem is that the royal colleges and faculties are not issuing guidance or providing post-graduate courses for doctors, which goes against the

recommendations in the Lords report, in particular recommendation 6.85, which says that the royal colleges should address the issue of familiarisation by

"supporting appropriate Continuing Professional Development opportunities"

for doctors? Will she assure us that she will consider the issue to determine whether it is appropriate to issue guidance to the royal colleges?

Jacqui Smith: As the hon. Gentleman points out, many of the decisions are for the royal colleges to make, but the medical profession has recently added a mandatory requirement for complementary and alternative medicine familiarisation to the medical curriculum.

Alongside that, the network that I referred to earlier is important in helping to ensure that GPs and primary care trusts are confident about clinical governance issues concerning the use of complementary and alternative medicine. To support that process, Ministers recently agreed to provide additional funding to help to extend the network and to create an interactive website for participants, so that more people can understand what I know the hon. Gentleman strongly believes to be the benefits of such treatment.

Sizewell (Security Breach)

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before I call the urgent question, I point out to the House that this is a very narrow matter, and I do not intend to allow it to run for a great length of time.

12.30 pm

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate) *(Urgent Question)*: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the implications of yesterday's security breach at Sizewell nuclear power station.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Nigel Griffiths): At 6 o'clock yesterday morning, Greenpeace activists illegally entered Sizewell B nuclear site and carried out acts of protest. From the initial incursion at the perimeter fence, site security was at all times monitoring the intruders and their actions. At no time did they enter sensitive areas such as the control room or the reactor building, which remained secure throughout. To avoid unnecessary risk to both protestors and security staff, no action was taken to remove protesters from the roof of facilities. Suffolk constabulary were in attendance.

Security at nuclear power stations is designed according to the "defence in depth" principle. A perimeter fence alone cannot stop mass intrusion. Systems installed at the perimeter fence serve to delay and detect intruders, thereby enabling management to assess the threat posed by the intrusion and to activate appropriate contingency arrangements. I am satisfied that the response procedures at the site were adequate and were carried out according to plan.

Sensitive areas and systems within the site are given additional protection. The objective is to contain intruders while continuing to protect the sensitive areas and systems within the site. The security did protect the sensitive parts of the site; it was adequate and it worked properly. Despite their attempts, the intruders did not breach any of the internal security barriers.

Security precautions at sites have to distinguish between the type of irresponsible behaviour that we saw at Sizewell yesterday and real threats. I am satisfied that both the Sizewell site security and Suffolk constabulary acted appropriately in the circumstances. However, there will be a full report into the incident by both the DTI's Office for Civil Nuclear Security, which, as the House knows, regulates security at civil nuclear sites, and British Energy, which operates the reactor. That will not be published, as the House will appreciate that it is not Government policy to disclose details of security measures taken at civil nuclear sites. However, security is kept under regular review, and we shall use the reports to review the security arrangements.

Mr. Blunt: The House and the public will be slightly concerned by the Minister's account, which sits rather at variance with that given in *The Mirror* by the journalists involved in the incursion. I would be grateful if the Minister answered one or two further questions.

Is it the Minister's initial assessment that security was so lax that immediate action is required at other nuclear installations? Exactly which people and organisations were responsible for security, and should changes be considered? How long did it take for the incursion to be detected and for the assessment to be made that this was not a terrorist operation? What lessons were learned after the previous incursion last October, and what actions were taken?

What inquiry process do the Government intend to initiate in the wake of the report to which the Minister referred? When will the report's preliminary conclusions be acted on? Do the Government think that it would be appropriate to publish the conclusions of any further inquiry following the report, and if not, how can Parliament be satisfied that lessons have been learned and acted on?

Does the Minister believe that it is possible to defend all key economic installations on a permanent basis, or must we accept that our security must be intelligence-led? In the light of these events, do the Government propose to review the balance between those two requirements?

Finally, does the Minister think that *The Mirror* and Greenpeace have done a service or a disservice to the country by undertaking the raid? What would the position now be if armed policemen had responded with lethal force to the incursion?

Nigel Griffiths: The House will be well aware that we have a tradition of peaceful protest and civil disobedience in this country. That is a tradition that we are loth to change. Security arrangements were able to detect the incursion yesterday within minutes and react to it appropriately to ensure that the critical building and areas were not entered. The picture in *The Mirror*—I am glad that the newspaper has a new fan in the Conservative party—shows, as the hon. Gentleman will see if he studies it closely, that it was taken outside the control room, not inside the control room, which is strongly defended and protected.

Of course, any lessons that should be put in the public domain will be given to Members of the House and the public, as appropriate, but I know that the House will endorse the long-standing practice that sensitive security matters should not be put in the public domain. The House has Committees that can scrutinise them fully with the proper security and privacy necessary for that.

Of course, the response yesterday was appropriate and non-violent. It was taken to ensure that security staff were not put at risk by having to climb unnecessarily on to a roof from which protesters were willing to come down. Of course, there was no armed response to peaceful protesters. The facilities are designed to take attacks of considerable strength and hits from the air, the House will be pleased to know, and the appropriate response is available quickly on such sites in the event of a non-peaceful demonstration.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is the Minister aware that the treatment of the protesters that he described is in stark contrast to what happened when the Tory Government were in power during the pit strike of 1984–85? I can tell my hon. Friend that if any of those miners had dared to get into a nuclear power station, or even get anywhere near the fence, there would have been thousands of police jumping on them, the miners would have been put in jail, and the Tories would be calling for them to be sacked for life. I applaud the fact that the

[Mr. Dennis Skinner]

Minister is taking a more reasonable attitude, for I do not take kindly to the Tories whining about the incident—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I said that the subject was very narrow.

Mr. Skinner: And you do not want me attacking the Tories.

Nigel Griffiths: The Government are always grateful for the support that they receive from my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner). He makes a forceful point.

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): Clearly, there has been a serious breach of security, which has drawn attention to the potential vulnerability of our large power-generating plants, particularly our nuclear installations. Can the Minister tell us what assessment has been made, following 11 September, of the risks of damage and catastrophe within the plants, and the potential for catastrophic consequences for civil society? Had those protesters been disciples of bin Laden, what assessment has the Minister made of the consequences that might have flowed from that incursion? Does he accept that the incident highlights the vulnerability of our large generating plants and our nuclear industry, and makes the prospect of a new generation of nuclear plants absurd?

Nigel Griffiths: I disagree with the hon. Gentleman's last point, but I can tell him that there has been a major review of the security of such facilities in the light of the events that occurred the September before last. Steps have indeed been taken to ensure that the threat from terrorism and violent protest can be countered. As the House knows, the breach was not a violent threat, but a peaceful protest. While I do not endorse it in any way, I think that there are great differences in that respect. I hope that the House will be reassured by the fact that a major review of security at such plants was initiated very shortly after the events of 11 September.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): Given that the Government's long-awaited energy review will be published in the next few weeks, may I ask whether it will consider the issue of nuclear terrorists? With regard to the Minister's remarks about the ability of nuclear installations to withstand attacks from the air, is it not the case that British nuclear stations are not built to the same specification as American ones, which are constructed to withstand such attacks?

Nigel Griffiths: I understand from discussions that the Department has had this morning that the plant would withstand an attack or hit from the air. In respect of the other matter, no, I do not believe that it is part of the review, because safety has always been a paramount issue on the Labour Benches and for this Government in terms of nuclear facilities. Although it is an important factor, the energy review is more wide ranging. We do not take security for granted, but it must be built into the heart of any process involving nuclear reactors.

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): Just before Christmas, a number of foreign anti-nuclear protestors broke into Devonport dockyard and were able to access a nuclear submarine. Although no damage was done, the breach was a massive publicity coup for anti-nuclear protestors. In the review of security, will the Minister and others take into account not only issues of public health or damage in wrongful access to such sensitive facilities, but the sort of propaganda that anti-nuclear protestors in this country can get if security is too low and lax and they can gain such access?

Nigel Griffiths: Yes. I think that lessons should be learned about the message that goes out from incidents such as that of yesterday.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Having visited Sizewell on several occasions, but more relevantly, having attended day 157 of the Sizewell committee inquiry in the Aldborough festival hall, does the matter not justify the thought that the late Sir Richard Layfield, the lawyers involved, Lord Silsoe and the engineers gave precisely to the questions of eventualities in relation to security? Has not the response been a very sensible one? Should not some tribute be paid to those who gave a great deal of thought to precisely these possibilities at the planning stage during that long, extended Sizewell inquiry?

Nigel Griffiths: Indeed, we do owe a debt to people who gave a great deal of time and effort to thoughts of security. The track record has been very good in this country and it is right that we can today discuss the issue, examine the questions and re-evaluate and re-endorse the advice that was given.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): Will the Minister tell the House whether the financial chaos in British Energy has led to any reduction in the number of security staff or procedures or any of the security measures needed at Sizewell? Will he investigate that and assure the House on a future date that sufficient resources are available for security at the site?

Nigel Griffiths: The answer to the first question is no. On the second question, the issue may obviously be taken into account by the security review.

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Following speculation that the plane that did not reach its target on 11 September was targeted on the Three Mile Island nuclear facility, the French have guarded their nuclear stations with rockets that can shoot down aircraft. We know that in this country since then jets have been scrambled as a result of a false alarm. As it is the opinion of the French think tank W.I.S.E. that the containments would not withstand the sort of attacks that occurred on 11 September, can my hon. Friend the Minister give us an assurance that sufficient protection is given to our nuclear power stations, because W.I.S.E. also said that the result of such an attack would be contamination a hundred times greater than occurred at Chernobyl? Is it right that the cost of this security is put at the door of nuclear energy, a form of power generation that is already the most expensive of all forms of power generation?

Nigel Griffiths: I attended the Cabinet Committee meeting that considered this very issue—that the best possible security, both appropriate and effective for British sites, is being attended to.

Points of Order

12.45 pm

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

We recently deployed to the Gulf the largest number of troops since the last Gulf war, yet many of us feel that in the answers we are receiving from the Government when we ask questions about one of the most onerous decisions any Member of Parliament will take—going to war—the Government are being evasive. At yesterday's press conference many relevant questions were asked that were not fully answered.

What can you do, Mr. Speaker, to protect democracy in the House and the right of Back Benchers to know whether or not our Government have taken a decision to go to war?

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

In the last debate my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said that he would bring this issue back to the House before any troops were sent, and that before any war was declared there would be a vote in the House. I remember him saying it, and I wonder whether you, Mr. Speaker, can remember him saying it and will ask him to come and do it.

Mr. Speaker: I noted the comment that the Foreign Secretary made, and I certainly will hold him to that comment.

Mr. John Taylor (Solihull): Really?

Mr. Speaker: Yes, I will.

I understand the concerns of hon. Members. Tomorrow we have Prime Minister's Question Time, and these are matters that can be put before the Prime Minister, who is accountable. There is also a debate on defence next week, when hon. Members like the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) can apply to speak. These are opportunities that can be taken. There is nothing to stop hon. Members applying for an Adjournment debate, when they can raise their concerns and a Minister has to come before the House and be accountable.

What I am saying to the hon. Lady and other hon. Members is that I understand their concerns and that there are many ways in which Ministers can be brought before the House.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On matters of peace and war, is it really sufficient to say that there can be Adjournment debates, either half an hour at the end of business in the Chamber or in Westminster Hall? Surely the importance of this issue supersedes Adjournment debates. Although there is a debate next week, it would be much more authoritative if the motion were amendable.

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove) *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let me answer.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) is inviting me to express an opinion. I am not entitled to express an opinion; the rules of the House are quite clear on this matter. The hon. Gentleman can approach Ministers, put pressure on various Ministers and express the concern that he expresses here in the Chamber.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): On another point of order, which I think is related, Mr. Speaker.

The House understands the restrictions that are put on you. They are traditional and quite clear. However, there is a very important point about what happened yesterday, in that a very serious statement was made, but not to the House of Commons. I think it is a matter not only for you, Mr. Speaker, but for all of us, that perhaps my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and other Ministers should be reminded that in matters of very serious content it is preferable that such statements should be made here, where Ministers can be questioned.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Lady is quite right—anything new should be brought before the House. Did the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell) wish to make a point of order?

Mr. Stunell: Yes, Mr. Speaker, thank you. I wanted to reinforce the point made by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) and ask you, Mr. Speaker, to use your good offices to ensure that the House has an opportunity to vote for or against action before it is taken and not simply for it to be a mater for an Adjournment debate—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is for the Government to decide the shape of motions put before the House, not the Speaker. However, I put it to the hon. Gentleman that he is one of the usual channels, and has perhaps better input than I do in the matter that he has raised.

BILL PRESENTED

Railways And Transport Safety

Mr. Secretary Darling, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Secretary Prescott, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Straw, Mr. Secretary Blunkett, Mr. Secretary Murphy, Mr. Secretary Hain, Mr. Secretary Smith, Mrs. Secretary Liddell, Mr. John Spellar and Mr. David Jamieson presented a Bill to make provision about railways, including tramways; to make provision about transport safety; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed. Explanatory notes to be printed. [Bill 40].

Litter and Fouling of Land by Dogs

12.50 pm

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make further provision relating to litter and the fouling of land by dogs and to allow a local authority to retain the revenue from fixed penalty notices for such offences issued in its area for the purposes of enforcement

Aficionados of ten-minute Bills may feel a sense of déjà vu today, as they will remember that I introduced the same Bill in Nov 2001 in the previous Session of Parliament. Unfortunately, it met the fate of most such Bills. Those who take a special interest in seriously late Adjournment debates may remember a debate that I initiated at 5 o'clock in the morning in May 1999, when I first put forward the essential idea behind the Bill that I have introduced today—how we can enforce our litter and dog fouling laws, giving councils the means to do so by making the polluter pay.

Although 1999 may seem a long time ago, a good idea is worth pursuing. If at first we do not succeed, it is worth the long march when the prize is a road to march on that is free of litter and where we do not have to watch our step, if I can put it that way. However, it is now clear that we are close to success. I will not repeat all the arguments today, save to emphasise that litter, including dog fouling, is pollution. It is the most common and widespread form of pollution, perhaps so common that people often do not think of it as pollution. The cause is very simple—people drop it or permit their dogs to drop it through laziness, thoughtlessness, carelessness or plain loutishness. Visually, it spoils both the natural and the built environment. Litter is also a health risk; dog faeces even more so.

Litter pollution has a simple solution. It does not take an earth summit, an EU directive, complex technology, a climate change levy or even congestion charging to tackle it—just do not drop it. That is already recognised in law, as it is illegal to drop litter and dog dirt, but the statute book itself is littered with legislation that either is not used or is ineffectual. The Environmental Protection Act 1990 placed statutory duties on councils and introduced fixed penalty fines, which were doubled to £50 last year by the Government. The Dogs (Fouling of Land) Act 1996 put dog fouling on the same basis as litter. Yet as we know only too well, our streets and open spaces are nowhere near clean because the law is simply not being enforced. There are only a few hundred prosecutions a year in magistrates courts. Fewer than 3,000 fixed penalty notices for litter and fewer than 2,000 for dog fouling are handed out annually in the whole country. In my county of Suffolk, for instance, there seems to be only five or six convictions a year, and in my own district of Waveney I can find no recent record of prosecution or fixed penalties for litter, with just one recorded fixed penalty for dog fouling since the Act came into force.

Instead, the culture in this country is that people drop litter, we wade around in it, pay enormous amounts of money—£450 million a year—in taxes to clear it up, then moan that councils do not get it all cleared up properly. By any standard, that is a waste of money and human effort. We must make the polluter—the litter lout—pay, but councils must have the means to enforce that. About 50 councils out of 450 employ any litter wardens at all, and they only employ two or three people each. Most councils have only one or two dog wardens—it looks like some kind of "Dad's Army" is trying to tackle the 1,000 tonnes of dog faeces dropped daily by Britain's 5.4 million dog-owning households.

As the law stands, all revenue from fixed penalty fines has to be returned to central Government. That sum currently amounts to just £70,000 a year, which is a measure of how little enforcement is going on. The essential measure in my Bill requiring councils to keep fines would incentivise them, as it would require them to enforce the law of the land and give them the means to do so. I put that idea to the Prime Minister at Prime Minister's questions last March, and he gave his support to the principle. Since then, the proposal has been piloted in 13 local authorities under public service agreements. My office conducted a survey to find out what has happened. There have been some real successes, particularly in Newcastle, where the number of fixed penalty notices increased from none in 2001 to 309 to the beginning of December 2002. Similarly, in Wigan the number has increased from none to 221.

These are still early days, but it is clear that where the local authority has the will, the system works. Newcastle publishes the names of people issued with fixed penalty notices in the local newspaper, which adds to the effectiveness of the new system. So why not change the law and roll out the new approach to litter across the whole country? I was delighted to see clause 116 tucked in at the end of the Local Government Bill, which was given a Second Reading in the House last Tuesday, as it includes the essence of my Bill. Presumably, we can look forward to the provision becoming law. However, there are two reasons why my Bill should still be reintroduced. Clause 116 of the Local Government Bill leaves the retention of fixed penalty fines to councils' discretion—it does not require them to do so. As the explanatory notes to the Bill make clear, the revenue from fines does not have to be spent exclusively on enforcement of litter and dog-fouling laws. They state that

"the new regulation making power will be sufficiently wide to give an authority complete freedom as to how it spends its receipts".

I want to make two key points. First, I mentioned my survey of pilot authorities, and cited the successes. But there is another side to the story. Some pilot councils had done nothing, and some had made only a feeble attempt, even though they had volunteered for the scheme and had signed up to public service agreements. There is a lesson to be learned—unless councils are required to operate in the new way, we will not make the progress that we should in bearing down on litter louts and dog foulers. We have had enough postcode lotteries with NHS prescriptions and the like—we do not want postcode litter enforcement.

Secondly, the new revenue stream must be spent on enforcement, because it works. The money from the fines should certainly not be spent on services unrelated to litter, but even in the services that deal with it we must focus sharply on enforcement of the laws and not dodge the issue. We have had anti-litter campaigns for years—they do not work. As someone who was a teacher for 25 years, I can say that when it comes to litter, education does not work. Some of the most littered places I have seen are school playgrounds. Sadly,

although many young people are concerned about holes in the ozone layer and saving whales, they drop litter like confetti.

Then there is the old "no bin" excuse—"I had to drop it because there was no bin." But there is always one's own pocket or a bag. There are more bins in this country than ever before, but litter is still on the streets. I do not want money from fines to be spent on education campaigns and bins—I want it to be spent on enforcement, otherwise we will not change the culture that I described of dropping litter, then paying to have it cleared up. What will change the culture more than anything else, as with other crime, is people knowing that they are likely to get caught. The more litter wardens we have, the greater that chance.

The public want this measure. We all know from our doorstep work and our surgeries that people are concerned about such issues. When I introduced my previous Bill, Meridian Television carried out a telephone poll and received its biggest response ever, with 97 per cent. in favour of the proposal. It fits in with the Government's agenda, set out in the Queen's Speech, of tackling antisocial behaviour and improving the quality of everyday life in local communities. I hope that my Bill can play its part in that agenda and encourage the Government further to develop in Committee the essential provision in their Local Government Bill. I can tell the House that the Minister for Rural Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Alun Michael), has already offered me a meeting—outcomes will be important.

The prize is great—cleaner streets, parks and open spaces, and a cleaner countryside—and making the polluter pay costs the Government and the taxpayer nothing.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Bob Blizzard, Andy Burnham, Michael Fabricant, Mr. Doug Henderson, Mr. David Lepper, Siobhain McDonagh, Mr. Alan Meale, Lawrie Quinn, Jonathan Shaw and Mr. Neil Turner.

Litter And Fouling Of Land By Dogs

Mr. Bob Blizzard accordingly presented a Bill to make further provision relating to litter and the fouling of land by dogs and to allow a local authority to retain the revenue from fixed penalty notices for such offences issued in its area for the purposes of enforcement: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 4 April, and to be printed [Bill 41].

Opposition Day

Education (Northern Ireland)

Mr. Speaker: I inform the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of Prime Minister.

1.1 pm

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): I beg to move,

That this House urges the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to honour the clearly expressed preference of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland to retain a selection procedure for transfer to post-primary schools, thus limiting the damage flowing from the administrative vandalism of the former Education Minister in the Northern Ireland Assembly; congratulates governors, principals, staff and pupils in Northern Ireland schools on achieving higher qualification levels at post-primary level than their counterparts in England and Wales; calls on the Government to maintain the levels of excellence achieved at so many schools while striving to enhance the performance and status of schools with a lesser level of achievement; regrets that too many able students from local grammar and secondary schools cannot obtain university places in Northern Ireland; calls for a change in household income thresholds to encourage higher uptake of discretionary awards; and urges the Government to honour its pledges to ensure a fair allocation of resources to education in Northern Ireland, including adequate research funding for Queen's University, Belfast and the University of Ulster.

The future well-being of our education system is critical to Northern Ireland's long-term success. We must have a well educated and well trained work force if we are to commend and promote Northern Ireland nationally and internationally as an ideal location for investment and job creation. That is why we believe that it is essential that these issues should be debated in full on the Floor of the House this afternoon.

One of the key issues that the Minister responsible for education in Northern Ireland has inherited is the future structure of post-primary education. Unless this matter is handled very carefully, there is a real danger of doing irreparable harm to our education system and of undermining the good standards presently being achieved by pupils in Northern Ireland. Standards in Northern Ireland's schools—controlled, maintained, voluntary and integrated—are already high compared with other areas of the United Kingdom. According to the Northern Ireland annual abstract of statistics 2001—the most recent set of figures available—pupils in Northern Ireland continue to perform better than their counterparts in England at the higher qualification levels, with 57 per cent. of year 12 pupils achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A to C, compared with 49 per cent. in England and Wales, and with 93 per cent. of final-year pupils gaining two or more A-levels, compared with 81 per cent. in England and 92 per cent. in Wales. Indeed, it is interesting to note that only 4 per cent. of pupils in Northern Ireland achieved no GCSEs, compared with 6 per cent. in England and 8 per cent. in Wales.

This issue has its genesis in the Burns report on post-primary education. One unfortunate legacy of that report is that the statement by the then Northern Ireland Education Minister that the present transfer test would be abolished by 2004 was made without any attempt to spell out alternative selection transfer procedures. We were therefore utterly amazed that one of the first acts of the present Minister with responsibility for education

[Mr. Roy Beggs]

was to reiterate and support that statement of educational vandalism and malice. According to the Burns consultation report on post-primary education, only 30 per cent. of the 200,551 respondents to the household survey believed that academic selection should be ended, while 64 per cent. stated that academic selection should be retained in some form. A further 7 per cent. were undecided.

There is evidence that these trends run across the sectoral divide, and many Roman Catholic parents support academic selection. Indeed, one of the strongest advocates of academic selection is Monsignor Faul, a distinguished former head of a large Roman Catholic grammar school and a leading spokesman on community issues. Bearing these figures in mind, does the Minister still think it wise to press on with implementing proposals to abolish the 11-plus without a suitable and acceptable alternative transfer procedure being put in place? Would it not serve the educational needs of school children in Northern Ireland much better if we were to keep the current transfer system in place until such time as a final replacement system is found and agreed to? Any results from focus groups—which, at best, will be no more representative than a widespread survey of households into the future of post-primary education selection—cannot be allowed to overrule the democratic wishes of the people in an attempt to subvert democracy.

Representatives of the Ulster Unionist party met the Minister on 7 January and put forward the sensible recommendation that she should appoint an education advisory panel which could make recommendations to her on how a new transfer procedure could be put in place. At the meeting, the hope was expressed that she would act to create a new body that could be transparent, open, independent and capable of ending the chaos and uncertainty in education that has arisen out of the decision by the former Minister to abolish the 11-plus examination. There is concern as to whether the Department for Education and Skills could develop an alternative system in a truly impartial manner. An independent body could bridge the gap caused by the suspension of the devolved institutions. I ask the Minister to show her commitment to the future of post-primary education by adopting the suggestion for an education advisory panel.

We accept that there are problems with the present 11-plus transfer procedure. Indeed, we support its replacement, but only when a suitably worked out alternative has been put forward. We have our own alternative proposals based on informed parental choice and the use of pupil profiles, with the requirement for objective assessment. We want genuine choice, greater diversity and a greater emphasis on vocational and skills-based education. Diversity in the provision of post-primary education is to be encouraged, as long as it provides families with real choices and maintains high standards of education and opportunity. We must ensure that any change enables all our young people equally to maximise their individual potential, whatever their various personal abilities. Equality and diversity are central to our education system. I ask the Minister to look at the question of equality legislation in schools.

Mr. Stephen McCabe (Birmingham, Hall Green): I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman's background means that he takes a serious interest in education. How would his ideas on equality and access deal with the problem that only 8 per cent. of children from disadvantaged backgrounds in Northern Ireland are able to gain access to grammar schools? What are his proposals for tackling that obvious inequality in the current structure?

Mr. Beggs: We need a clear definition of disadvantage. I am a member of a family of 12 children; I have six sisters and five brothers. My father worked in the shipyard and in the textile industry for a time. He also worked hard on a small farm to provide for his children. Was I disadvantaged? The education system in Northern Ireland afforded an opportunity to every member of my family and to many others who did not start off with a silver spoon. We were able to make our way and benefit from the excellent education in Northern Ireland.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Let me press my hon. Friend on what is meant by access. In my constituency, children are disadvantaged by their inability to access secondary education without undue expense for their parents. It is not simply a matter of grammar school children being disadvantaged; they get their fares paid if they live outwith the area.

Mr. Beggs: I believe that every child in Northern Ireland has the opportunity to benefit, irrespective of family circumstances. We must perhaps do more to encourage the parents of children in households where there is no history of third-tier education. I try to do that in my constituency by encouraging the university of Ulster, which is the local university, to contact primary and secondary schools in East Antrim when there is no clear sign over time that children have moved through them and taken advantage of the excellent opportunities that further and higher education affords in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): The hon. Gentleman has not answered the previous question. The figures that an Ulster Unionist councillor gave me for his ward in north Belfast show that only 6 per cent. of children made it to grammar school. What does the hon. Gentleman propose for the other 94 per cent.?

Mr. Beggs: As I said, we must encourage parents more. Many youngsters do not even enter the selection procedure. In parts of north Belfast, children traditionally grew up to believe that the greatest achievement for them and their families was gaining an apprenticeship with Short Brothers, the aircraft factory, with Mackie's foundry or in the shipyard. They had no higher expectation. However, many able pupils who stayed at school until they were 14 or left at 16 without qualifications have subsequently taken advantage of workers education courses and night classes to improve their skills and qualifications. They have continued

through our university system as mature students. The process will take time, but we must focus on the group that has benefited least.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): Is it not the case that 25 per cent. of the adult population of Northern Ireland are at the lowest literacy level? Does not the hon. Gentleman perceive a relationship between the selective system that has operated historically and the exceptionally poor achievement in literacy?

Mr. Beggs: A few years ago, we were worried about the low achievement of a significant proportion of our school-age population. I am happy that that has been tackled and that steady improvement has occurred in the past three or four years. We hope that that will continue.

It is vital that an academic option be available to pupils for whom that path is appropriate in order to maintain and improve standards. It is equally important to develop a strong technological and vocational curriculum, which should have parity of esteem with the traditional academic path. If our schools are oversubscribed, they must be permitted to select pupils on ability. Every school should be helped to achieve academic, vocational and technological excellence.

We ask the Minister to be careful not to destroy the existing strengths of all our schools when making the changes that we agree are necessary to the detailed transfer arrangements. I should like her to assure us about that. We are happy to meet her and discuss the matter at any time.

We must congratulate school governors, principals, staff and pupils of Northern Ireland schools on maintaining high standards of educational achievement, especially given the external difficulties that they have faced in the past 30 or so years. I am referring not only to grammar schools. Many secondary schools provide excellent support services to pupils and assist them to achieve their full potential.

Any changes to our post-primary selection transfer system must acknowledge and protect the vital role of primary school teachers. We must continually try to raise the esteem in which teachers are held in our community and ensure that any new administrative burdens are kept to a minimum. An obvious improvement could be achieved by the Government's making a conscious effort to listen to teachers' voices as expressed through respected organisations such as the Ulster Teachers Union.

The union took the time and trouble to conduct a survey on stress. It also undertook a health and safety risk assessment for teachers. However, the Government ignored the results and the Department of Education decided to waste a great deal of taxpayers' money on launching its own surveys, only to discover what everyone else already knew. In the light of such incidents, is it any wonder that teachers suffer from low morale?

We must develop a stronger working relationship between universities and further education colleges and primary and post-primary schools, especially in communities where low numbers of young people go on to the third level of education. I do not apologise for emphasising that again. The reasons for educational failure among pupils, especially young males, must be tackled.

Approximately one third of people in Northern Ireland who gain university degrees have studied outside Northern Ireland, mainly in Great Britain. In some cases this reflects free choice, but the worrying aspect is the extent to which many of those leavers—of whom there are some 4,500 annually—have left Northern Ireland because there are simply not enough local university places to accommodate them.

In 1997, the Dearing report concluded that, compared with Scotland, Northern Ireland had a shortfall of about 12,000 places. The devolved Executive in Northern Ireland were able to bring about an increase in places of some 5,500. Clearly, much remains to be done. It is important for our economy that we encourage local undergraduates to study and to work in Northern Ireland. Some of those additional places in the pipeline related to the Springvale campus of the university of Ulster and to the Belfast institute. It seems that the future of that project is now in some doubt. I ask the Minister to provide further information on the review of Springvale. In particular, if it is concluded that Springvale is not now a viable concern, we will want to know whether those places will be reallocated to other parts of the higher education sector in Northern Ireland.

Even before the conclusion of the 2000 review of student support by the then Minister with responsibility for further and higher education, training and employment, the Ulster Unionist party had called for a return to means-tested grants. We therefore welcome the introduction of a maximum bursary of £1,500 in the 2002 academic year, which will be increased to a maximum of £2,000 next year. We support the principle of wider social access to further education and, indeed, to higher education, so we think that the level of these grants, and the extent to which they are tapered off according to income, should be kept under review. Much more should be done to encourage the uptake of discretionary awards by further education students.

The Ulster Unionist party has long recognised the need for an injection of additional resources into higher education. As this cannot all come ultimately from the taxpayer, it may be that the most equitable method is some variation on the model of deferred or graduate contributions. In other words, to the extent that students will, on average, gain a private monetary benefit from their course of study—the available evidence strongly confirms this—it is not unreasonable that after they have graduated they should, as they are able to, make some contribution to cover part of the cost of their university training.

We call on the Government to honour their pledge to ensure a fair allocation of resources to education in Northern Ireland. We welcome in principle the planned introduction of the common funding formula, but we realise that this is enabling legislation. We await the fine detail and hope that the consultation process will be open, transparent and inclusive.

There are certain issues relating to the common funding formula that need to be given particular consideration, the first of which is teachers' salaries. We consider that further detailed consideration needs to be given to determining a factor in the formula that will

[Mr. Beggs]

reflect the natural progression of teachers towards the top of the salary scale, but which will still leave schools with the freedom to take staffing decisions within their delegated budgets. We also consider that more guidance should be available to school governors to assist them in determining appropriate individual salary ranges for principals and vice-principals, and the salary levels within these ranges.

Secondly, we accept that there is a need to tackle the problem of underachievement in a minority of Northern Ireland's schools. We consider that further research is required to justify present funding levels before any additional allocations are considered. There is a need to address the educational and skills requirements of specific groups of disadvantaged young people, such as those in care, school-age mothers, those from traveller and other ethnic minority backgrounds, and the disabled. Furthermore, we do not believe that targeting additional funding on the basis of free school meals is suitable or appropriate. Allocations should be founded on objective measurements that are based on key stage results.

Our third concern about the common funding formula is its impact on schools. We are aware of the funding problems facing primary schools, but we have also been alerted to a number of financial pressures in the secondary sector. It is clearly essential that we look again, in some detail, at the balance of funding between the primary and secondary sectors in Northern Ireland. It is also clear that the current underfunding of the primary sector cannot be allowed to continue.

Finally, we feel that there is a need to refine the way in which money is allocated for the upkeep of buildings under the formula. The formula must reflect the fact that it is much more expensive to maintain old buildings than purpose-built, newer ones.

I want to commend what has been achieved so far in the funding of higher education. Teaching and research assessments indicate that, in many cases, standards are in line with national and international aspirations. That said, as Universities UK has highlighted so effectively, universities in Northern Ireland, like their counterparts in Great Britain, have suffered from long-term underfunding and there is a limit to the extent to which they can be expected to continue to deliver quantitative and qualitative improvements without greater input of funds.

While I welcome the recent announcement of £10 million extra annually over the next three years for core university research funding, a good case can be made for the need for a further £20 million per annum, to close the gap that has opened up in comparison with Great Britain. Such research is intrinsically desirable, but it would almost certainly also deliver considerable economic spin-offs. It is worth remembering that the total level of research and development spending in Northern Ireland is low by United Kingdom regional standards, and very low compared with most of the rest of the European Union and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. We welcome the current innovation strategy and await the results of the consultation process with interest.

On the Northern Ireland spending block, the "Barnett read-across" has implied that Northern Ireland's universities have been unable fully to match some of the very worthy initiatives being taken by English, Scottish and Welsh colleges in terms of widening social access. That said, we already have a larger proportion of students coming from low-income backgrounds. One further point of concern is that the pay of university lecturers and staff has fallen behind the private sector. This is a UK-wide problem that the Government have to address.

I end where I started out. Investment in our education system means investment in all of our futures.

Mr. McCabe: I must confess that I am slightly astonished to discover that the hon. Gentleman has opened a debate on the future of education in Northern Ireland on behalf of the Ulster Unionist party without making even a passing reference to the integrated education movement. Before he finishes his speech, would he care to tell the House how he thinks that that movement relates to the wider argument that he has made today?

Mr. Beggs: I am very glad that the hon. Gentleman has raised that issue, but I am conscious of the breadth of opportunity to speak that this short debate offers, and of the number of hon. Members who wish to contribute. However, responsibilities are shared in my party, and I assure the hon. Gentleman that the matter will be dealt with by my right hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) when he winds up the debate. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will not be disappointed by what he has to say.

If ever there were a place where people needed to look to the future with a greater sense of hope, it is Northern Ireland. I trust that the Minister of State has listened carefully to my remarks, and I hope that she will act on them.

I commend the motion to the House.

1.30 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Jane Kennedy): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"congratulates governors, principals, teachers and other school staff on the contribution they make to educating young people in Northern Ireland; welcomes the high qualifications achieved by many pupils but acknowledges that there are also large numbers of young people, particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds, leaving school with low qualifications; urges the Secretary of State to continue to take forward the review of post-primary education with the objective of putting in place new post-primary arrangements that will maintain those high standards of achievement and build a modern and fair education system that enables all children in Northern Ireland to achieve their full potential; and further welcomes the additional higher education places and the Secretary of State's decision to increase Government funding for research and knowledge transfer at Queen's University Belfast and the University of Ulster.".

I congratulate the hon. Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs), and his colleagues in the Ulster Unionist party on giving the House the opportunity to debate the 11-plus, post-primary and transfer arrangements in Northern Ireland, and the wider questions of education and lifelong learning for which I now have responsibility.

The motion neatly encapsulates the conundrum that I face when it

"calls on the Government to maintain the levels of excellence achieved at so many schools while striving to enhance the performance and status of schools with a lesser level of achievement".

That is very much one of aims of the post-primary review, which we will debate in detail today. Sadly, the Government consider the rest of the motion flawed, and that is the reason for the amendment. However, I am grateful for the opportunity that this debate gives me, as Minister with responsibility for these matters, to place on record my appreciation of the efforts and achievements of principals, teachers, governors, other school staff and pupils in Northern Ireland.

The Liberal Democrat party tabled an amendment that was not selected but which paid tribute to the integrated schools movement in Northern Ireland. I should like to associate myself with that tribute.

As the hon. Member for East Antrim said, over the past 30 years schools in Northern Ireland have operated in the most arduous of circumstances. Governors and staff have worked tirelessly to make schools safe and secure places where children can learn.

The recent deplorable events in north Belfast at Holy Cross, Wheatfield and Currie primary schools demonstrate the ongoing pressures that schools have to face. However, I have no doubt that, across Northern Ireland, schools will continue to display the resilience and fortitude that have sustained them through the most difficult of times.

Northern Ireland's schools have long had a well deserved reputation for high achievement. They have produced more pupils with qualifications at the top end of the achievement scale than England or Wales. Northern Ireland grammar and secondary schools are to be congratulated on those achievements, but there is no room for complacency. As the hon. Member for East Antrim said, alongside the high achievers, Northern Ireland has also historically had more pupils leaving school with low qualifications than elsewhere. Various programmes, such as the raising school standards initiative and the school improvement programme, have been successful in reducing the proportion of school leavers with no GCSEs, but the problem of low qualifications persists.

There is strong social differentiation in educational achievement in the Province. Pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds do significantly less well than other pupils. The most disadvantaged pupils are only one third as likely to achieve a grade A in the 11-plus and only around half as likely to achieve five or more high-grade GCSEs as the least disadvantaged pupils. This matter has been debated for many years in Northern Ireland, and it is appropriate for me to set out its recent history. When we also consider the results of the 1996 international adult literacy survey, which showed that almost a quarter of the Northern Ireland work force are at the lowest level of literacy, it is clear that although the Northern Ireland school system does very well for many pupils, it does much less well for many others.

I agree with the hon. Member for East Antrim that a number of hon. Members want to contribute to the debate. I shall therefore limit the number of interventions that I accept.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Will the Minister give the House the figures that show how pupils in England and Wales are doing worse at the lower end even than pupils in Northern Ireland?

Jane Kennedy: I could provide those figures, but I have chosen not to go into too much detail in my speech. We can discuss statistics, but there is broad consensus among the political parties, members of the educational establishment and the general public in Northern Ireland that the poor performance of the education system for the most disadvantaged pupils is unsatisfactory. That is largely the reason why we are discussing the subject today, and I should like to go into detail about these matters.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): Does my hon. Friend agree that, despite the acknowledged inequalities in Northern Ireland, more children from working-class backgrounds there go to university than is the case with pupils studying at comprehensive schools in England?

Jane Kennedy: Yes. As I said, the high level of success achieved by Northern Ireland pupils is remarkable. They deserve congratulation and encouragement, and any review that is set in train should not damage their success. I take my hon. Friend's point: the figures show that 4.5 per cent. of pupils in Northern Ireland achieve no GCSEs, compared with 5.5 per cent. in England. However, it is important to take account of the number of pupils who achieve more than one pass at that level.

I do not want to get bogged down in statistics. Although they can enhance our debate, we are discussing questions of principle. I do not argue with the clear and demonstrable achievement of the grammar school system in Northern Ireland, to which the figures provide testimony. I want to explain today why the 11-plus is deemed to have been failing in Northern Ireland, and why there is such a broad consensus about the need for change.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): Is not the strongest principle of all that we should not risk replacing a system that works well with one that works less well? The statistics show that fewer children in Northern Ireland emerge from school with no GCSE passes. They also show that pupils in England do slightly better in the next band above that, with 89 per cent. leaving school with five or more GCSEs at grades A to G, compared with 86 per cent. in Northern Ireland. However, the Minister must know that that is vastly outweighed by the fact that 57 per cent. of pupils in Northern Ireland achieve five or more A to C grades, compared with 50 per cent. in England. The Northern Ireland system is achieving better than the system in England. She must take that fact very seriously as she considers replacing the Northern Ireland system with something that does not work as well.

Jane Kennedy: Clearly, I take that very seriously. That is why we are approaching the issue with great care and

[Jane Kennedy]

engaging in detailed discussions with all those who have an interest and a stake in developing a new method of transferring children from primary schools to secondary schools. The wide disparity that exists in Northern Ireland and the concern about the low achievement of significant numbers of children was one of the key findings of research into the effects of the selective system there commissioned in 1998 by one of my predecessors, my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington).

A report by Professor Tony Gallagher of Queen's university and Professor Alan Smith of the university of Ulster, published in September 2000, emphasised the adverse impact of the transfer tests on the primary curriculum and the undue pressure placed on children, teachers and parents. It said that many children entered secondary schools with a sense of failure.

Further research by Professor Gardner of Queen's university found that the transfer tests had the potential to misclassify pupils by up to three grades above or below their given grades. Following the publication of that research my immediate predecessor, the hon. Member for Mid-Ulster (Mr. McGuinness), established a post-primary review body chaired by Mr. Gerry Burns—and mentioned by the hon. Member for East Antrim—to consult widely and produce recommendations for post-primary arrangements. The Northern Ireland Assembly's education committee conducted its own review of post-primary arrangements, and made an important contribution to the debate. Its report concluded that change was both necessary and appropriate, and was subsequently endorsed by the Assembly.

The Burns report was published in October 2001 for consultation. Its proposals have implications for every child in Northern Ireland, along with his or her parents, and for every primary and post-primary school. It generated huge interest, and sparked a healthy and continuing public debate.

Mr. Connarty: Did the Burns review body look at results in Scotland? Rather than comparing, say, Kent with Northern Ireland, would it not be better to consider a comparable system across the water that has shown much higher levels of achievement because it has a universal comprehensive system—unlike England, which is a hotch-potch of grammar schools, comprehensives and mixed messages?

Jane Kennedy: My immediate predecessor was looking at other systems. I cannot definitely say, hand on heart, that we looked at the Scottish system in detail, but I know that many different systems were compared, and I would be surprised if that were not the case.

Reflecting the importance of the issue, the consultation on the Burns report was the widest ever undertaken on an education matter. There were five strands. Twenty-eight ministerial meetings were held with the education sector, business, the Churches, the main political parties, and voluntary and community organisations. Moreover, more than 1,300 written submissions were received from a range of stakeholders, 40 per cent. of schools completed detailed response booklets, 200,000 people completed and returned household response forms, and the views of young people were obtained through focus groups and independent research.

Those responses were published last October and published in a report by the Department of Education. They demonstrated a clear demand for change. While there was little support for the review body's model in its entirety, individual recommendations attracted support. For example, there was consensus about the guiding principles, abolition of the transfer tests, and the development of a pupil profile.

I found the recent threat by the Irish National Teachers Organisation to refuse to co-operate in the development of the pupil profile extremely disappointing and unhelpful at this stage of the review. The majority view is that pupil profiles would be useful to teachers, pupils and parents and would formalise the good practice that already exists in many Northern Ireland schools, and I hope that the INTO will reconsider its position.

David Burnside (South Antrim): Confusion has arisen over the Burns report survey every time the Minister has come here to answer questions on the subject. Will she confirm, clearly and precisely, that although most of those surveyed opposed the existing 11-plus procedure, a majority did not favour the ending of a form of academic selection between primary and secondary school?

Jane Kennedy: Yes. Now I will make progress while I am winning.

There was consensus on the need for more co-operation and collaboration among schools, and a common curriculum for those aged up to 14. Many respondents also thought 14 a more appropriate age than 11 for pupils and their parents to consider and make choices about the curricular options or pathways best suited to the interests, needs and abilities of those pupils. There was also agreement on the need for young people to have broader curricular choice and more flexibility to change the nature and direction of their learning. Support was expressed for a range of approaches enabling post-primary arrangements to reflect the differing needs and circumstances of local areas.

Following publication of the report on responses to the consultation, the hon. Member for Mid-Ulster announced the abolition of the transfer tests and said that the last tests would be held in 2004. When I assumed responsibility for education, I considered the responses carefully. I was satisfied that there was a clear demand for a change in the current arrangements, and support from, among others, the political parties for abolition of the transfer tests. They have disadvantaged too many children, and that cannot be allowed to continue. I therefore announced, on 31 October, my intention to take forward the post-primary review and work towards the abolition of the tests as soon as practicable. I should make it clear, however—reinforcing the point made by the hon. Member for South Antrim (David Burnside)—that no decisions have been made about academic selection or the shape of new arrangements.

It is important for the review to progress in a way that has the confidence and support not just of parents but of the education sector and the wider community. I want to

build on the emerging consensus from consultation as we proceed with the review. I believe it is the responsibility of everyone involved in education to work together to develop new arrangements. As part of the process, my officials and I have held a series of meetings to discuss the responses to consultation, explore the full range of suggestions for new arrangements—including arrangements involving academic selection—and consider the next steps in the review. I have already met representatives of the Ulster Unionist party, the Democratic Unionist party and the Alliance party, and further meetings have been arranged with other political parties. My officials have met representatives of the education sector, and will meet parents tomorrow.

I have found those meetings very useful. When they have been completed, I intend to consider carefully the views that have been expressed—along with the responses to all strands of the consultation—before deciding on the next stages of the post-primary review.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): Can the Minister give us an idea of when she might be able to share her conclusions? If she intends to proceed with these changes, she should bear it in mind that the clock is ticking.

Jane Kennedy: There are a few more meetings to be held before I can begin to pull together all the strands of the thinking that is currently taking place. I hesitate to give a definitive timetable, but this should take only a few weeks. I am well aware that a deadline is looming. Schools want certainty: they want to know what to begin to plan for. I know of the pressure that is on us, and it is right for us to work under pressure. One of my reasons for saying that I would try to meet the deadline if that was practicable was my feeling that it was necessary to maintain pressure on my Department to resolve the issue.

The hon. Member for East Antrim mentioned issues relating to higher education and student support. Northern Ireland is fortunate in having so many young people, and indeed mature adults, with access to higher education. It is also fortunate in having a superb range of higher education provision in its universities, teacher training institutions and further education institutes. Northern Ireland has around 40,000 undergraduates in the university system at present, of whom more than 28,000 attend the local institutions. In addition, as the hon. Gentleman said, almost 15,000 undergraduate students study part-time in Northern Ireland. In total, that represents a rise of 33 per cent. over the past five years.

The Government and, indeed, the Executive, have pursued policies that continue to encourage the movement of students within the United Kingdom while, at the same time, steadily increasing the number of places in local institutions. As the hon. Gentleman said, from 1999 to 2005, it is planned to have an additional 5,500 full-time undergraduate places in Northern Ireland. He is right that there is more to do, but that was the programme that was in place; it was the objective of the Executive, and we are continuing to work towards meeting that objective. There is no cap on part-time students; the system caters for as many as wish to undertake their studies in that way.

The expansion in full-time places has included additional places at St. Mary's and Stranmillis for diversified courses, the pilots of foundation degrees in further education institutions and, of course, expansion at the two main universities. The figures show clearly the expansion of local places and the growth of overall participation. The proportion of young people who leave Northern Ireland for their higher education has reduced, from 31 per cent. in 1996 to 27 per cent. in 2001.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I appreciate that money has been found for research for Queen's university and the university of Ulster. However, is the Minister aware that Stranmillis university college and St. Mary's university college received no money for research and that, under the new regulations, they are required to have research facilities or they will be marked down in the next review? Has she been given any account of that and can she give us any guidance and hope?

Jane Kennedy: I was not aware of that issue, but now that the hon. Gentleman has brought it to my attention, I will look into it and write to him, if he will permit me so to do.

A significant proportion of young people seeking undergraduate education clearly wish to undertake it outside Northern Ireland. They are attracted for a variety of reasons including, no doubt, the desire to experience life elsewhere, as in my wonderful home town of Liverpool. Those who wish to undertake their higher education in the rest of the United Kingdom should have the opportunity to do so. The Government are, at the same time, conscious of the need to expand local provision, and have responded positively to that need. We will keep the issue under consideration.

Student support was an area of much interest to the Executive. A major review of student support was carried out in 2000–01 and resulted in a number of changes to the prevailing arrangements. Grants were reintroduced in 2002 for full-time undergraduate students from lower-income families. The threshold for the payment of a private fee contribution to higher education was raised to £20,000 in 2001, and has since been raised further in line with inflation. Child care grants were introduced in higher education and a number of further education bursaries were introduced in 2001 for full-time students over 19 on vocational courses, to supplement the existing discretionary awards. The threshold for such bursaries was set in line with the higher education scheme.

The changes have begun to affect the system. Some 11,000 students have so far availed themselves of the reintroduction of grants in higher education, and around half of all students do not have to pay the fee contribution either in full or in part. Some 300 students have taken up child care grants, and in further education, more than 400 students have so far taken up the new bursaries. The question of thresholds is important. The Executive set the further education and higher education bursary thresholds at the same level. It will take time to judge whether that is the appropriate level.

Student support arrangements, including bursary levels and income thresholds, are kept under continuous review. I shall consider them again in the light of any

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proposals that may be contained in the higher education White Paper that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills will shortly publish. In addition, I shall be considering how we might make entitlements to the rather complex student support system easier for students to understand.

Last month, the Government announced the budget for the three years from 2003–04. The Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley, South (Mr. Pearson), gave the details. It provides an additional £239 million for education by 2005–06, an increase of 16.6 per cent. In addition to maintaining existing service levels, the budget delivers £52 million across the period for real-terms increases in schools' core budgets to improve schools' capacity to achieve further improvements in pupil performance. A further £530 million will be available for a major programme of investment to improve the education estate.

I am pleased that the budget includes an increase of £10 million a year for funding for research and knowledge transfer in the universities, to which the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) alluded. The increases will allow Queen's university, Belfast and the university of Ulster to sustain and build on their performance in the 2001 research assessment exercise.

In addition, there is to be an increase in higher education capital funding of £5 million for next year, rising to £10 million a year for the following two years as part of the reinvestment and reform initiative. Combined with the injection of £25 million from 2003 to 2007 under the second phase of the support programme for university research, those additions represent the most significant investment in higher education for the past decade. They will allow Northern Ireland to play its full part in the Government's science strategy, "Investing in Innovation". Including the proposals for the strategic investment programme, it represents an overall increase by 2005-06 of just over 27 per cent. in student support and 31 per cent. in higher education. I am delighted that we have been able to make these very significant increases in the capacity of our universities, through the excellence of their teaching, the breadth and quality of their research and their expanding regional mission to contribute to society and the economy in Northern Ireland.

The hon. Member for East Antrim made three points. He asked me about Springvale, which I should like to deal with briefly. As he knows, the current plans are for 4,500 full and part-time students to enrol at Springvale. He will be aware of the difficulties that we are facing with the project. However, I remain committed to it. I want to see it taken forward, if not in its original form then in a revised form that offers the best and most appropriate provision for the people of north and west Belfast. Given the pressing needs of this part of Belfast, I am not prepared to walk away from the current difficulties.

David Burnside *rose—*

Jane Kennedy: I hesitate to give way, given the time, but I will as long as the intervention is very short.

David Burnside: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. She is making the mistake of talking about Springvale benefiting north and west Belfast. That is a political decision. If we want an additional campus within the university of Ulster, it should benefit Greater Belfast and the whole educational outreach area of Northern Ireland. To sell something academically for political reasons is a mistake; to sell an additional campus as benefiting all the people of Northern Ireland but based in north and west Belfast is very different. Does the Minister agree?

Jane Kennedy: Yes, I agree with the hon. Gentleman. He makes his point forcefully and I hope that he will have the chance to reinforce it. That is my initial response on Springvale.

The hon. Member for East Antrim talked about the common funding formula. I will not delay the House on that today; I hear the hon. Gentleman's points and there will be an opportunity to discuss it further in the debate on the order, which will take place soon.

The hon. Gentleman talked about morale among teachers, and I accept his point. However, we have set up an independent inquiry into teachers' pay and conditions, being careful to ensure that the unions agreed. The employing authorities and unions have received an interim report on principals' and vice-principals' salaries and differentials. We will discuss all that through the negotiating machinery in the immediate future. The full report is scheduled to be received in the spring. I appreciate that teachers are not merely concerned about pay and remuneration, but about many other issues that affect morale in the difficult environment in which they work in Northern Ireland. We are listening and responding to the representations that teachers have made and are making.

In conclusion, there has been—

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Jane Kennedy: The hon. Gentleman will get a chance to make a speech later in the debate, but I will briefly give way.

Mr. Carmichael: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way as I realise that she is coming to her peroration. I thank her for her general support for the Liberal Democrat amendment and I listened carefully to her remarks to ascertain whether there would be anything other than that general message of support. She will be aware that there is mounting interest in the possibility of opening more integrated schools in Northern Ireland, especially the Maine integrated school in Randalstown. As I have heard nothing about that possibility, can she tell us when we might hear something about it?

Jane Kennedy: Very, very imminently but not today. We remain extremely interested in the development of that sector. Everyone working to develop such schools deserves our support and encouragement.

There has been extensive and inclusive consultation on the Burns report, which provides a firm basis on which to take forward the post-primary review. I do not

accept the description of the current situation as "chaotic". I am determined to build on the emerging consensus to achieve the objective of putting in place new post-primary arrangements that will build a modern and fair education system that enables all children in Northern Ireland to achieve their full potential and that will maintain the current high standards of achievement.

We have a major success story in Northern Ireland with regard to higher education in all its forms, whether one looks at investment, participation or performance. Higher education is a tremendous asset, especially for supporting economic development and attracting inward investment. All those who work in the sector deserve our congratulations and encouragement and I am sure that the House will join me in confirming that later in the vote.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. May I say to the House that, in a limited debate, of which an hour has already been taken up, it would be appreciated if all further contributions, whether from Front or Back-Bench Members, could be moderated with that in mind?

2.2 pm

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): I take note of your admonition, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Indeed, it is my intention to be brief.

I congratulate the hon. Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs) and his right hon. and hon. Friends on choosing to debate this vital matter this afternoon. Although my congratulations and my pleasure in discussing the topic are entirely sincere, equally sincere is my sense of regret that such matters should be decided here in Westminster and that we have brought to an end debate in the Assembly.

I hope that that suspension will not be for too long, but I warned the Government that once institutions are suspended it takes a long time to get them going again. I fear that the current period of suspension will last much longer than the Government calculated and while it continues we must do the best possible job, but I cannot disguise from the House our regrets about the present situation or the fact that these matters cannot be discussed by the representatives of people in Northern Ireland who could take the time that is required to go through them in detail. Some of the confused statistical discussion that we have already heard this afternoon has demonstrated how damaging and dangerous it is to deal superficially and rapidly with such important matters. I greatly regret that it has not been possible for the Assembly and the Executive to continue to play their role in making important decisions about the future of education in Northern Ireland.

Before I talk about schools, I should like to say something nice and, I hope, encouraging to the Minister about higher education. I was delighted and heartened by the commitment that she gave from the Dispatch Box that she will not allow the Springvale development—the university of Ulster campus on the Springfield road site—to be dropped, as there was real fear of that. The Minister and I have discussed the matter privately and I am glad that it will not happen.

I agree very much with the point made by the hon. Member for East Antrim: such a campus will be an asset for the whole of Northern Ireland and especially for the greater Belfast area—for obvious reasons—and we look forward to it. However, may I point out to the hon. Gentleman that there are two especially strong reasons for locating a campus in that area? First, it is close to the most deprived communities in Northern Ireland. More than anything else, people in such communities need ready and easy access to education locally, if we are to solve the problems of deprivation. Secondly, as the hon. Lady knows, the campus will be within walking distance of both the Falls road and Shankhill road areas, which are not merely deprived but also subject to paramilitarism and extremism of all kinds. Those communities suffer from a sense—even a complex—of being neglected hitherto by the establishment and by people who have an easier life than them. It is important to reverse those feelings and to provide for people from both communities so that they can work together and share in making a success of an institution that is located, literally, between both of them. It will enable people to form the normal social and personal relationships across the community divide that have been so lacking in that part of Belfast. The Opposition set great store by the coming to fruition of that project and we support the strong commitment to it that the Minister has made so clear this afternoon.

Anyone coming to Northern Ireland afresh, as I did when the Leader of the Opposition asked me to take on my present role, is immensely and immediately struck by the extremely high standard of and commitment to education. As an Englishman, I can perhaps say that we are a bit philistine in this part of the United Kingdom. That problem does not exist so much in what is sometimes known as the Celtic fringe. It certainly does not exist in Northern Ireland, in the island of Ireland, in Scotland or in Wales, where people value education even if they have not had the chance to benefit very much from it. People set great store by their children being able to have access to education. Teachers and university professors have the status that they deserve.

The achievements in Northern Ireland have been striking. The hon. Member for East Antrim mentioned some of the figures—57 per cent. of pupils in Northern Ireland achieved five or more GCSE at grades A to C in 2000-01, whereas the corresponding figure in England was only 50 per cent. A further statistic from the same period struck me forcefully: 93 per cent. of Northern Ireland pupils achieved two or more A-levels whereas the figure in England was only 82 per cent.

Those are statistically significant differences. Those results were achieved despite the apparent disadvantage faced in Northern Ireland due to the troubles and the difficulties in access to schools caused by the sectarian divide. As the Minister pointed out, some schools were targeted by paramilitaries. Those results were achieved despite the fact that prosperity in terms of per capita income is lower in Northern Ireland than in England. Normally, there is a positive relationship between per-capita income and educational performance.

Mr. Connarty *rose—*

Mr. Davies: I give way to the hon. Gentleman but, like the Minister, I shall not give way frequently this afternoon.

Mr. Connarty: The hon. Gentleman repeated a statistic that I hear again and again—that 93 per cent. of pupils gained two A-levels—but it relates to the 93 per cent. of pupils who enter the final year and actually sit A-levels. Can he tell us the number of pupils who enter the S1—secondary 1—in Northern Ireland and who then achieve two A-levels before they leave high school education?

Mr. Davies: When I am a Minister, I shall be delighted to take the initiative in publishing such figures. However, for the moment—I hope that it does not last long—the Conservatives are not in government so the hon. Gentleman should ask his Front-Bench colleagues to publish the statistics.

I emphasise that the figures I quoted are aggregate figures, so they do not reflect the performance of one sector—the grammar schools. They reflect the average position, taking account of the performance of other secondary schools. Therefore, it is not true that the better outcomes of the grammar schools in Northern Ireland are discounted by the less good performance of other secondary schools. The aggregate position takes account of both types of school.

The Minister's treatment of the statistics was somewhat confusing. One point struck me, and it would have been an egregious piece of special pleading if it were not confusion. She prayed in aid in her argument against selection the fact that adult literacy rates in Northern Ireland are lower than they are in other parts of the United Kingdom. Adult literacy rates reflect the education that was delivered 20, 30 or even 50, 60 or 70 years ago and they are an extraordinarily poor guide to the current performance of the school system. If one is taking important strategic decisions on that basis, God help education in Northern Ireland or whatever else they may affect.

I am not the only one to have been struck by the fine performance of schools in Northern Ireland. Many visitors notice that, and the people of Northern Ireland are extremely proud of their system. They relate the performance of their schools to the existence of selection. There can be no doubt about that. That is why the responses to the Burns report showed that, although people were not satisfied with the test currently used, there was overwhelming support for selection itself. Of those who returned the household response form—more than 200,000 people and far more than ever take part in any opinion poll—64 per cent., or nearly two thirds, opposed the ending of selection. Some 62 per cent. of teachers who returned the survey opposed the ending of selection. Those are very eloquent figures.

The previous Minister of Education in Stormont used his last hours of power before the institutions were suspended to try to establish a fait accompli by abolishing the test. It is extraordinary that the Minister of State has simply endorsed that decision. She has not listened to other views and not taken the opportunity afforded by the Ulster Unionist party in this debate to tell us with what she intends to replace the current system. The current position is that the test will be abolished in 2004, but we do not know what will replace it. That is a thoroughly irresponsible approach to administration and a particularly irresponsible approach to schools, because of the long-term consequences of any decision that is taken. How can one abolish anything at all without knowing what will replace it?

The Minister has acknowledged that the existing system of education in Northern Ireland is working very satisfactorily, and that makes her approach even more irresponsible. Surely the right professional approach to the problem would be to leave the present system in place until and unless she is persuaded that a better solution exists. She should then come before the House and argue for that better solution. To destroy a system or to create a gap without knowing how she will replace what has been destroyed or how she will fill that gap is extremely frivolous.

Jane Kennedy: I am sorry, but the hon. Gentleman has provoked me to intervene on his diatribe and on his heaping of coals on my head. Surely he accepts that I inherited the decision when I took up my post. If I had reversed it, I would have created even more chaos. I considered carefully the reasons and details for the decision, and my work is now entirely focused, with the Education Department in Northern Ireland, on coming up with an alternative. As I have made clear, we will seek to find an alternative but the current system will continue until we do so.

Mr. Davies: With respect to the Minister, I cannot accept that excuse. She took over her new functions almost within hours of Mr. McGuinness having signed the decree to abolish the test. No structural consequences had flown from his decision and it would have been the easiest thing in the world to have reversed it. She could have said that the Government were not going to allow an outgoing Minister to take a decision in his last few hours in office without their being clear as to what would be put in its place. They could have decided to allow the present system to continue while they restored confidence and discussed whether to maintain selection and whether it should be conducted under the 11-plus or some other test. When they had come up with a better system, they could have introduced the changes.

Mr. Chaytor: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davies: I will not give way at this stage for the reason that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, have already given. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will have a chance to make his point in the debate.

The fact is that the Minister took a decision. She may have decided that it was easier to do nothing than to do something, but it was a decision, if only by default, and it was quite unnecessary. By default, she endorsed the destructive decision taken by Martin McGuinness just before he left office. The decision raises anxieties, particularly because a Labour Government are behaving in this way. We know that it is in their nature to try to do things by stealth. The nastier the thing that they are trying to do, the more likely they are to want to

use the weapons of stealth. We must seriously ask whether the Government are ideologically committed to destroying good schools in Northern Ireland, but do not have the courage—they never have the courage of their convictions—to say that they will abolish selection and will force excellent schools to cease to have any further role in selecting their pupils. The Government do not have the courage to say that they are destroying the character, ethos and individuality of those schools, and they will not tell the public in Northern Ireland or in Britain as a whole.

The Government are acting indirectly by saying that the decision was taken before the suspension of Stormont. They say, "We can't do anything about it. It will take us months to look at the matter. We are awfully sorry but there is no alternative in place to the system that we are going to abolish." I am not suggesting that the Minister is making plans along those lines, but to abolish the existing test without being clear as to how it will be replaced raises justifiable suspicions. There are only two possibilities in such circumstances. The first is that the Government do not have an agenda and have abolished something without knowing how they will replace it. When I made that suggestion, the Minister leapt to her feet in indignation. I accept that it was not a particularly flattering suggestion and, as I have said, I do not accept her explanation.

The alternative is that the Government have an agenda, but they will not tell the House or the people of Northern Ireland what is in their mind. The Minister might not know what the agenda is, but perhaps she will receive orders one day from Alastair Campbell, who wants to create what he has described as "bog-standard comprehensives" in Northern Ireland. She may be acting in entirely good faith and be sitting here with her brief without having yet received her orders from Alastair Campbell. She may have been told to soft-soap the House of Commons to try to keep us all as happy as possible in the meantime. I have no idea whether that is true. However, if one is abolishing something and is not clear with the House about how one will replace it, we can come to one of only two conclusions. The first is that the Government do not know and do not have an agenda. In that case—this is probably the more likely explanation—they are being irresponsible. The second is that there is an agenda, and we will not be told what it is today. That would be a far more reprehensible course of action by the Government.

I am glad that we have had an opportunity to air these issues, and that my remarks have smoked out some response.

Lady Hermon (North Down): I am delighted at the hon. Gentleman's generosity in giving way. Will he comment on the suggestion made by my hon. Friend the Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs) that we should establish an education advisory panel? Does the hon. Gentleman support that proposal?

Mr. Davies: The hon. Lady will have heard my earlier remarks if she was in the Chamber at the time. I expressed reticence about deciding such matters of detail in the House. It is unfortunate that the Government have placed us in this position by abolishing Stormont. Before we make detailed decisions about how we replace the present test, there should be much more detailed, thorough and professional discussion than we have had in this debate or are likely to be able to have. In the meantime, we should keep the existing system and lift the threat to it. We should do what I have already suggested the Government should have done and leave well alone. It is a fine and performing system and we should not replace it until and unless we have persuaded ourselves that there is a better solution. So my answer to the hon. Lady's question is that I am not committed, nor are the Conservative Opposition, to a particular form of selection test in Northern Ireland. We are committed to supporting good, thriving schools and to the principle of choice—that is fine—and we are against any act of educational vandalism. If a technically better mechanism to achieve selection than the present one can be found, we are open to being persuaded to consider it.

However, the mechanisms are not in place for the House to take an intelligent decision, given the very limited time now available to discuss Northern Ireland business. Meanwhile, when in doubt, we should not destroy what we have got, and I hope that the Government will think again about what was obviously an extraordinarily rapid—if it was not worse—decision simply to endorse Martin McGuinness's final present to the people of Northern Ireland.

2.20 pm

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): I welcome this debate and congratulate the Ulster Unionist party on initiating it. I hope that it will help to make the Minister—I see that she is now leaving the Chamber—and the Government realise that they should be cautious about what is happening in Northern Ireland. I want to urge caution on two levels.

First and foremost, it is still quite dreadful that not a single person in Northern Ireland was able to vote for the party that will now take the decisions about the future of the education system. The reality is that there is a huge democratic deficit in Northern Ireland. It is very sad indeed that the Assembly is not taking such decisions and I hope, like everyone, that it will soon be working again.

Given that the education system has done so much for so many years, such changes should not be rushed through by dealing with them in this Chamber, when they could easily be delayed, allowing more discussion and debate, so that the decisions could be left to the Northern Ireland Assembly. I hope that those in the Assembly want to get back to work as soon as possible and that such issues would be on the horizon for them. So caution really does need to be shown.

I want to declare an interest: I am absolutely convinced that I would not be a Member of Parliament if I had not had the opportunity to have a grammar school education in Northern Ireland at an extremely good school, Belfast Royal Academy. It is still an extremely good school, and it takes children from all parts of Belfast and all sorts of backgrounds. The hon. Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs) talked about his farming background, but my background was probably more deprived. I grew up on a much smaller farm. I have absolutely no doubt that, without the opportunity offered by that school, I would not have been able to go on to college and university and become a Member of Parliament.

[Kate Hoey]

I have another interest to declare. I often visit schools in Northern Ireland, so I know that the standards of all schools—grammar and secondary schools—are so much better than anything that we have in England. So I urge caution because it seems absolutely amazing that we should want to destroy something that is working. I accept that too few people in some areas of Northern Ireland are able to go on to the right sort of education, but that happens in my constituency and deprived areas of England. The idea is that, somehow, what is really good and works should be destroyed to give, in theory, more children from deprived areas a better education, but we have shown that that just does not work in many other parts of the United Kingdom.

As recently as November, the Prime Minister himself condemned the "enormous damage" done by the pursuit of the comprehensive ideal and said that he is determined to provide choice and diversity in education. He said that it is time to lay to rest the controversy over the future of the comprehensive system and that

"It has all too often carried with it the notion that children should be treated as of the same ability."

Given that not one person in Northern Ireland had the opportunity to vote for a Labour Government, I cannot understand how we can try to push the current proposals through. The Burns report is clear: there is unhappiness with the 11-plus. That is taken for granted. My sister and I both passed the 11-plus. I went along feeling absolutely wonderful and looking forward to taking that test. Apparently I told my mother and father that I was looking forward to meeting lots of children. I lived in the country, but went elsewhere to take the test and it was nice to meet other children. My sister was much brighter than me, but she was absolutely terrified by the test. She hated it and worried about it. Children are different, and there is no doubt that the test needs to be adapted. We need profiles and different ways of doing things, but I do not accept that a majority of people in Northern Ireland favour ending academic selection. It is nonsensical to try to change what has proved to be very good indeed.

I also want to give the Minister some sense of caution about the Education and Libraries Bill. Again, the provisions in that Bill may be pushed through by an Order in Council—I am not quite up to date on when that may happen—and it will give the Minister strong, dictatorial powers. The Minister will have the power to remove all the governors of any grammar school—quite unacceptable—and make all sorts of changes to alter the system by stealth. I urge the Minister that that measure should not be pushed through the House, and I will certainly not support it. I do not understand why any Labour Member should support any measure on Northern Ireland when we do not even allow people in Northern Ireland to join the party that is governing them.

Lots of Members wish to speak, but I want to say that the standards of education in Northern Ireland are unquestionably high. That does not mean that we cannot do better or that we should not give greater encouragement to those children from some parts of Northern Ireland who do not even sit the exam. They do not take that opportunity for all sorts of reasons, which are similar to those in some of the worst parts of my constituency, where the assumption is that parents and children cannot become properly involved in education. Such problems should be considered, but I want to urge caution.

I recently visited one of the best girls schools in Northern Ireland, Strathaern school. The hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) knows it well. Some of the children at that school have come from the most deprived parts of Belfast. The young girl whom I presented with the overall achievement award was from a very poor part of Belfast. In my constituency, such children would have great difficulty getting the sort of education that they would receive at Strathaern school, because no school in the immediate area offers that kind of opportunity.

Another important thing, which has not been mentioned at all in today's debate, is that private education hardly exists in Northern Ireland because no middle class parent needs to buy private education. The changes will affect the work being done by schools such as Belfast Royal Academy and the Methodist college—I could name many others—if they are no longer able to select pupils.

Mr. Connarty: My hon. Friend knows that I hold her in very high respect—we share many similar views—but she sadly appears to be guilty of trying to portray the future of Northern Ireland without selection as being like the position in her constituency, Vauxhall. Does she accept that, in fact, it would be more comparable to parts of Scotland, where the comprehensive education system allows parents to work hand in glove with the local education authority to improve the results? That vision may be denied to the people of Northern Ireland to protect the privileged system that she herself came through.

Kate Hoey: I have great respect for my hon. Friend, and he also supports my view that people in Northern Ireland should be allowed to join the Labour party. The statistics about Scotland, however, are not necessarily as good as he made out earlier. The comparison would not be between like and like, although I do not want to go into the detail of that now.

The other thing that is different about Scotland is that there is still a large amount of private education there. People who go to Northern Ireland, perhaps to take a job in the BBC or in the civil service—the kind of people who would pay for private education here—are helped to move when they realise that they will not have to pay to get their children into a good school, as there are so many of them. If we opt for a straightforward, one-size-fits-all comprehensive system in Northern Ireland, we will have private schools as a result, and we will lose the fantastic mix in the very best schools in Northern Ireland, in which young people from very poor backgrounds—the kind of background from which I came—can mix with the children of people running Northern Ireland industry. That mix still exists, and it is a huge advantage to young people.

I therefore urge the Minister to be cautious. There is absolutely no reason to go ahead with what Martin McGuinness did in his last few hours, outrageous and vindictive as it was. Instead, we should use the

opportunity of the current lull before the Assembly is reconstituted to bring people together to talk about a solution that will build on our best provision, not destroy it.

2.31 pm

Mr. Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley): I welcome this debate, and I commend my hon. Friend the Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs) for his opening speech, which set out in detail and with great clarity the issues that confront us in terms of the future of education in Northern Ireland. I want to speak about my experience both as a parent and as a constituency MP, having spent a considerable amount of time visiting and getting to know the teachers, boards of governors and parents associated with the various post-primary schools in my constituency.

First, speaking as a parent, may I say that my eldest daughter underwent the 11-plus transfer test last year? As it happens, she did very well. She got an A grade and was accepted into Wallace high school, which is one of the grammar schools in my constituency: a very successful school named after one of my illustrious predecessors, Sir Richard Wallace, who was the Member of Parliament for Lisburn. Wallace is one of a number of post-primary schools in my constituency enjoying considerable success. The Friends school, which comes from a Quaker background, is an equally successful grammar school. Secondary schools such as Laurelhill community college, Forthill school, Lisnagarvey high school and Dunmurry high school are all proving successful and improving the standards of educational attainment in the greater Lisburn area and the Lagan Valley constituency.

My eldest daughter, however, like my youngest daughter, who sat the 11-plus last November, undoubtedly felt the stress and the pressure of the 11-plus examination, and it was the focus of concern and discussion in our family home for months. We felt the pressures on our children—we await the results of the test for my younger daughter, and I hope that she will be successful—and, as a parent, I see the need for the reform of the transfer procedure and of the 11-plus examination. I agree with many in the field of education who believe that two examinations are not the best or fairest way of determining a child's academic ability at the age of 11. I strongly disagree, however, with the recommendation in the Burns report on post-primary education for an ending of academic selection. Having looked at the practicalities, in my constituency in particular, I do not see how the proposal for a collegiate system can work in practice and be fairer than the academic selection that exists at present, even though I support reform of the method but not of the principle of academic selection.

I have received a large number of letters and telephone calls and have had many conversations with parents in my constituency who are very concerned about the proposals in the Burns report and the impact that they will have on their ability to have a proper choice to send their children to the school that they desire. The Burns report is very much based on the concept of parental choice, but the consequences of its proposals will, in many cases, limit the choice of parents. To give a simple example, I live in the village of Moira, which is on the outskirts of my constituency and about 10 miles from the city of Lisburn. It is also right on the boundary of the Craigavon area, which operates an entirely different education system known as the Dickson plan, under which transfer takes place at the age of 14 and a system of junior high schools and senior high schools or colleges exists. That system has been quite successful in many respects. Lurgan college and Portadown college, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) will know, have a record of successful educational achievement for their pupils. Lurgan college is particularly well placed in terms of its results, although I do not want to single out schools in the constituency of another Member too much—I am simply repeating what I read in the newspapers.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Do you believe them?

Mr. Donaldson: Not always.

Under the system that would exist if the Burns proposals for post-primary education were adopted, however, parents living in Moira would be at a real disadvantage. A constituent from Moira wrote to me:

"The new system is supposed to introduce parental choice. I should be able to list my school of choice, which would be a school suitable to the academic ability of my child. I have an extremely bright child. His reading ability is of the standard expected of children three years older. Under the new system he will have no chance of gaining a place at"—

what is currently known as—

"a grammar school because he lives in a rural area, even though he currently attends a school next door to a grammar school."

Under the Burns proposals, that child will be at a significant disadvantage in terms of gaining a place at such a school because of his place of residence. Many of my constituents are therefore afraid that we are moving to selection by postcode.

Another constituent wrote to me:

"We should find some way to retain an academic sector at the same time putting a great deal more emphasis and funding into a technical and vocational sector. This would give us the best of both worlds—excellence for all. Selection ultimately by postcode offers no real parental choice and should be vigorously opposed."

That is from a constituent living in Lisburn who is in closer proximity to the post-primary schools in my constituency than those who live in rural areas.

The collegiate system also has other consequences. In terms of fairness, section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1988 places on Departments an obligation to treat people fairly and equally. The consequences of implementing the collegiate system, however, can be arbitrary. Let me quote two examples in which people in my constituency will be placed at a distinct disadvantage, and, in my opinion, will be discriminated against. A constituent living in Dunmurry has written to me to make the point that since Dunmurry will be in the west Belfast collegiate area, the parents of Protestant boys attending primary schools will no longer have any choice to send their child to what is now a controlled grammar school, because there is no controlled grammar school for boys within the west Belfast

[Mr. Donaldson]

collegiate area. The only controlled grammar school within the west Belfast collegiate is Hunter House, which is a girls' school.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Does my hon. Friend accept that the chances of Hunter House getting anyone from west Belfast are nil and that it will be cut off from the natural hinterland?

Mr. Donaldson: I accept that. Indeed, the principal of Hunter House college made precisely that point to me when I met her recently.

Protestant families living in Dunmurry are discriminated against and severely restricted in their choice of school. However, Roman Catholic parents from Lisburn wrote to me explaining that Roman Catholic families from that town who wish to send their children to what is a maintained grammar school have no choice within the collegiate area covered by Lisburn, Banbridge and Crumlin. In fact, when the previous Roman Catholic maintained grammar school in Lisburn was closed in the 1960s, the Education Department gave a written undertaking that the parents of Roman Catholic children in the area would be given preferential places at Rathmore grammar school, the replacement for the new school. However, Rathmore is now in the west Belfast collegiate, so Roman Catholic parents living in Lisburn will no longer have that choice. Those are the hidden but real consequences of the collegiate system and the manner in which it discriminates against parents and parental choice.

Lady Hermon: May I reinforce the point that my hon. Friend expresses clearly? The Government will be aware that parents are entitled to have their children educated in accordance with their philosophical and religious convictions, as set out in the Human Rights Act 1998, and that, when not suspended, the Assembly will have to abide by those obligations.

Mr. Donaldson: Indeed. My hon. Friend makes an important point. We must consider not just the equality obligations in section 75, but the implications under the Human Rights Act. That has not been fully thought through in the proposals in the Burns report.

There is much that one could say on the issue. However, I shall deal briefly with two key aspects of the proposals in the Burns report. The first is the admissions criteria. There is little doubt that the criteria set down by Burns will lead to the creation of area comprehensives. Without any form of selection, schools will have an all-ability intake. By making distance from school the determining criterion, schools will increasingly draw their pupils from the immediate area, so introducing an element of social injustice. Parental choice for those who live in rural areas, such as those in my constituency, will be substantially curtailed.

Friends school, for example, draws its pupils from a wide catchment area. Of the pupils in years 8 and 9, 60 per cent. come from the Lisburn area postcodes of BT27 and BT28. A further 20 per cent. come from Hillsborough and Dromore, with the postcodes of BT26 and BT25. But a significant proportion of year 8 and 9 pupils come from areas such as Moira, Aghalee, Maghaberry, Ballinderry and Glenavy. They will all be disadvantaged under the proposals because of the distance/proximity criteria. The Minister and the Department need to consider that.

Mr. Connarty: The hon. Gentleman makes a point about the catchment area of a particular grammar school. Does he give any consideration to the people who live beside that school and who are denied access to it because they cannot pass the academic qualifications in the 11-plus? They have to watch people receiving the higher education that they are denied.

Mr. Donaldson: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's concern, but Friends school and Wallace school are within a few hundred yards of each other. Within half a mile of them and on either side are two excellent secondary schools, Forthill and Laurelhill, so I fail to understand his point. People who live within a mile radius have at least four excellent post-primary schools from which to choose, whereas my constituents in Moira, Glenavy and Ballinderry have none of those choices and will be discriminated against under the system.

The second key aspect that worries me is the transfer test and the issue of selection. The end of a selective system will inevitably mean the end of grammar and secondary schools as currently defined. However, Burns envisages that schools will offer specialist provision and that parents will decide on the most appropriate school for their child on the basis of the information contained in the pupil profiles and in consultation with primary school principals. The report appears to be offering the best of all worlds: the end of selection and the continuance of schools with a specialist academic provision, with guidance from the pupil profile and, ultimately, free parental choice. Surely, however, the former grammar schools will not be able to offer a specialist academic curriculum and meet the needs of individual pupils in an intake that, without selection, will inevitably cover the full range of ability. So it is misleading to assert that parental preference will be given priority when particular schools will be oversubscribed.

I hope that the Minister and the Department take on board the real concerns expressed in the debate and understand that the proposals in Burns are not the way forward. There has to be another way that commands a much broader consensus within Northern Ireland.

2.46 pm

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): I am reluctant to contribute to the debate, because Northern Ireland is not a part of the United Kingdom that I visit frequently and I would not want to be sufficiently presumptuous to comment in detail on its schools. However, I feel strongly about secondary school admission policies and want to make a few remarks that may inform the future debate in Northern Ireland.

The hon. Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs) made a balanced and broad presentation, and most of us would agree with much of what he said. However, when he tries to defend selection at the age of 11 by academic

ability and at the same time says that he wants parity of esteem between the academic and the vocational, he is treading on difficult ground. It is intrinsic in any system that selects by academic ability that the academic will always be seen as superior to the vocational when it provides a superior level of per capita investment and superior life chances to those young people.

Lady Hermon: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Chaytor: I hope the hon. Lady will accept that, as I only have a few minutes in which to speak because many of my colleagues want to contribute, I do not want to give way.

It is significant that the Government will next week publish their White Paper on the development of 14 to 19 education. We anticipate a great leap forward in the establishment of parity between the academic and the vocational which I fear many people in Northern Ireland have not yet appreciated. I note the concerns of the hon. Member for East Antrim and the consensus that the Burns report reflected on the need to do away with the existing testing regime. The debate should now focus on what is the best alternative.

The hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) spoke of upholding devolution and his regret at the suspension of the Assembly. Almost in the same breath, however, he criticised the Minister for merely upholding the decision taken by the Minister of the Northern Ireland Assembly. He cannot have it both ways. In addition, he should not criticise the Minister for supporting the response to the consultation on the Burns report, which clearly called for an end to the existing selection test, by saying that she should not have taken that decision. It is important that we take a consistent approach to these matters.

Mr. Quentin Davies: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Chaytor: If I had something by way of reciprocation, I would give way.

It is important that those now grappling with this issue in Northern Ireland realise that the matter has been exhaustively debated on the mainland for 40 years. The overwhelming conclusion in most parts of the United Kingdom system is that a comprehensive admissions policy serves to raise standards and build social cohesion. Even the most passionate advocate from the Ulster Unionist party cannot with conviction claim Northern Ireland as a model society for the rest of Europe in terms of social cohesion. We have to examine very carefully the nature of the secondary school system that we create and its consequences for society.

Those who argue the importance of academic selection at age 11 have to be convinced of certain factors. First, they must be convinced that it is possible accurately to identify a child's ability at 11, the age of transfer from primary to secondary school. That age is arbitrary; in a different system we could have transfer at 13 or at nine. They must be convinced also that the young person's ability will not increase, change or develop in their teenage years, and that there is a means of identifying that ability. Clearly, the consensus in Northern Ireland is that the current means, the 11-plus, is insufficiently accurate.

We should appreciate that as standards of education rise across the board, and as more primary school children attain high levels of performance, the challenge of discriminating between those who are above a given threshold at age 11 and those who are below that threshold becomes even more difficult. As levels of achievement rise, discrimination between the twenty-fifth percentile point and the twenty-sixth percentile point becomes almost impossible. The defenders of selection have to be convinced that a test, an interview or a pupil profile can accurately distinguish between those who will subsequently be given advantages and those who will be denied them.

Many hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) and other colleagues, will say that the opportunities that I received were entirely due to my passing the 11-plus and my subsequent achievements at grammar school. However, we have to ask how many people are denied the opportunities that I had because they do not go to grammar school, having failed the 11-plus, and are subsequently labelled failures. Many of them feel that sense of failure throughout their lives. We cannot consider the advantages of those who succeed at 11 without considering the consequences for those who fail at 11.

Once we have made that decision and are confident that we can identify ability and that we have an accurate testing system, we have to pick up the social consequences for the 75 per cent. who are not selected. In her opening speech, the Minister of State gave statistics for attainment in Northern Ireland. She said that the GCSE rate in Northern Ireland is slightly higher than on the mainland, but she pointed out that there is a huge amount of under-achievement. We accept that that is a factor not only for Northern Ireland but for the United Kingdom as a whole.

Comparing Northern Ireland with England on the assumption that the education system in England is 100 per cent. comprehensive is a fallacy. Although the system in most of England is, in theory, comprehensive, a significant minority is selective, and in the majority that is comprehensive, many subtle layers of selection operate. We must make sure that we compare like with like. We must be clear about the consequences of selection at 11 for those who are not selected.

We are talking about standards for the population as a whole, not for an arbitrarily selected minority, and we are also talking about social exclusion. I ask Ulster Unionist Members to remember that this issue is not a new one for the mainland; people have grappled with it for 40 years. There is now a consensus in most parts of the mainland, although not yet in Kent, Buckinghamshire or Lincolnshire—I accept that. If we believe in parity between the academic and the vocational, in equality of opportunity for all young people and in a society that minimises social exclusion, a comprehensive admissions policy is the way forward.

2.56 pm

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): We are all agreed that Northern Ireland achieves impressive results for a proportion of the young people who go through the education system.

Mr. Quentin Davies: Including you.

Lembit Öpik: Including me. I am ever so grateful to have had the opportunity to go to the Royal Belfast Academical Institution. It is certainly the best school in Northern Ireland and probably the best in the world. I took the 11-plus, and I wish to talk about that and then move on to integrated education.

As I listen to the debate, it seems to me that we are concerned about the abolition of the 11-plus because we fear that it may materially alter the excellent schools that many right hon. and hon. Members had the privilege to attend. Let us bear it in mind, however, that Gerry Burns was very clear about the 11-plus process in his report. He said:

"We have been left in no doubt that the Eleven-Plus Transfer Tests are socially divisive, damage self-esteem, place unreasonable pressures on pupils, primary teachers and parents, disrupt teaching and learning at an important stage in the primary curriculum and reinforce inequality of opportunity."

He clearly feels that the test is a divisive tool.

Thinking about trauma, I can remember doing the 11-plus. The first time I mucked it up, but by an act of fate some naughty people had stolen a few papers and I had the chance to re-sit it. Obviously, I then passed it and got into the institution. However, I remember the enormous stress that I felt, and I am one of those people who prefers examinations to continuous review.

We need to recognise that the issue is not really whether the 11-plus is the correct system of selection; it is how we maintain what is best in the Northern Ireland education system while ensuring that those who are not selected are protected from harm and given an opportunity to shine academically and make more of their education.

On the question of whether the majority of people in Northern Ireland are for or against selection, the answer is not as clear as it may at first seem. Paragraph 4.26 of the Department of Education's report on responses to consultation on the Burns report indicates that only 30 per cent. support the ending of academic selection. However, let us remember that only 16 per cent. of the population responded, and the response rate from better-off areas was almost three times greater than that from less-well-off areas. More than 50 per cent. of the responses were from the parents of grammar school pupils. It is hardly surprising that people who benefited from the system want to retain it.

I accept that a large body of people and organisations support the idea of a selection system, but once again the figures are very telling. Responses from the education sector show that 60 per cent. of primary schools and 93 per cent. of secondary schools believe that academic selection should be abolished, but not surprisingly only 10 per cent. of grammar schools hold that view.

There are many examples of organisations with a vested interest in maintaining the status quo or changing it. It is not surprising that individuals who have benefited from the system or perceive a benefit to their work would prefer the status quo, whereas those who feel that it is harming the children in their care or has harmed their personal opportunities would be in favour of a change. For that reason, we need to look at the issue more strategically and ask how we can best find a consensus solution that is satisfactory to the great schools that Northern Ireland has and does not compromise their performance, at the same time as widening access for other groups.

The Alliance party has proposed some interesting ideas. It suggests that although the age of 11 is the natural time in light of emotional, physical and mental development for students to progress from the single classroom atmosphere of primary education to a system of multiple specialist subject teachers, it is not an appropriate stage of development to distinguish between students on the basis of academic ability. The Alliance party proposes that children should progress together in post-primary schools that provide a general middle school curriculum for the first three years—say, to the age of 14.

At the end of that period, children would be in a much better position to understand their strengths and areas for development and, crucially, what their personal aspirations were, whether vocational or more academic. At the age of 14 it is more likely that they can make informed decisions about the rest of their education. It is surely not beyond the wit of politicians in the Chamber, consulting closely with the vested interest groups in Northern Ireland and led by the Northern Ireland politicians, to find a solution bringing all that together in a way that works.

I move to the second issue that I want to cover. Although I shall be interested to hear the Minister's response to those thoughts and suggestions with regard to selection, the most striking feature of the motion and the Government amendment is the absence of any written recognition of integrated education. That is one of the most significant social developments in the past 20 years in Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education describes its role as

"the bringing together in one school of pupils, staff and governors, in roughly equal numbers, from both Protestant and Catholic traditions. It is about cultivating the individual's self-respect and therefore respect for other people and other cultures. Integrated education means bringing children up to live as adults in a pluralist society, recognising what they hold in common as well as what separates them, and accepting both."

I hope that the amendment tabled by me and my fellow Liberal Democrats adequately reflects what is missing from the motion and the other amendment.

The first integrated school was Lagan college, established in 1981 by All Children Together, a campaigning parent group. There are now 47 integrated schools in Northern Ireland, 18 second level colleges and 29 integrated primaries. There are also eight new integrated education projects across Northern Ireland. The expected announcement of the opening of Maine integrated primary school in Randalstown, and the transformation of Springfarm primary school in Antrim and Glengormley primary school in September will bring the number of integrated schools to 50. Surely the Minister would agree that that is glowing testimony to the fact that things are changing and that parents believe that that is a good way forward. Can he assure the House that the recent rapid increase in interest in integrated education will be fully supported financially and in other ways by the Government and the Department of Education in Northern Ireland?

More than 15,000 pupils now study in integrated schools in the Province. That represents just over 5 per cent. of the total school-going population. I am greatly

encouraged by the fact that there are so many and that the number is growing. Will the Government ensure that the obvious and continuing demand for places at integrated schools in Northern Ireland is facilitated? According to the Northern Ireland Audit Commission, there are 45,000 unfilled places in Northern Ireland schools. The only sector with no unfilled places, and the one that the population seems keen to use, is the integrated sector. There is, therefore, pressure on the Government to act more quickly.

I remind the Minister that in the Good Friday agreement, the Government stated that they would facilitate the development of integrated education. It is disappointing that one of the few changes made to the Government's "Building on Progress" document was the removal of support for growth in integrated education from the Department of Education's public service agreement. That was a telling change and it concerns me. Can the Minister explain why it took place and assure the House that support for the growth of integrated education will be pursued, and that there has not been a move away from the integrated education project?

If anyone doubts the benefits of integrated education, I advise them to visit an integrated school. I went to Hazelwood integrated primary school in Newtownabbey last September. After speaking with the principal, Jill Houston, I met many pupils. We discussed what made Hazelwood special. They replied that anyone could go to school there. When we asked whether it mattered where they came from, how clever they were or what colour hair they had, the children said no. Clearly, there is much more to integrated education than simply bringing together people from different religious traditions. One little boy had been turned down by other primary schools in the area because he had a hearing difficulty. I pay tribute to the fact that integrated education is about showing that all of us should be regarded as equal. By encouraging their children to go to those schools and to learn together, parents are actively contributing to the peace and reconciliation process in Northern Ireland.

I hope that the Minister will focus on those two substantive points—selection and integrated education. I have set out the assurances that I seek on integrated education. May I impress on him the need for a clear timetable for the changes in selection procedures, as I requested from his colleague in my intervention? It is right for the schools to be nervous about the vacuum left by a stated change in policy and the absence of any detail. Perhaps even today, the Minister can say when we may expect those details to come out for consultation.

I remind all hon. Members once again of the importance of recognising that educational reform goes hand in hand with the kind of cultural reforms that I consider so important. It is a shame that the Minister and the Opposition spokesman took a full hour between them in a debate that properly belongs to the Ulster Unionists. I hope that by curtailing my remarks, I have enabled others from those parties to speak.

3.7 pm

Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): I hope that I shall not take too long. The debate is welcome, as it is a debate about real politics called by the Ulster Unionists. It is an opportunity to discuss an issue that has been central to the politics of this country for many years—selection by academic ability at the age of 11 and its impact on educational achievement as a whole.

I remember the 11-plus. The key thing about it was that one passed or failed. The word "fail" dominated the lives of so many people who were then passed on to a secondary system. Their self-expectations were thereby reduced. I come from a city, Sheffield, which shares with Northern Ireland the justification which, I understand, was part of what the Burns committee took on board in its deliberations on the matter—the research done by the Programme for International Student Assessment. This concentrated not on the achievements of the educational system in Northern Ireland, which I recognise is very high, in terms of the percentage of pupils getting high grades at A-level and so on, but on the differential between the best and the worst achievers. That differential reveals some of the worst symptoms of academic selection at 11.

Sheffield is a widely disparate city in terms of educational achievement. I was greatly relieved that the 11-plus had finished by the time my children went to school there. In Sheffield, the pressure was on from day one to live in the right place. As people said that the only schools to go to were those with sixth forms in the south-west of the city. They were the schools that enabled students to get into the top universities and that was the only place to live. That residential discrepancy has, in a sense, dominated Sheffield and ensured that the educational and social achievement differences between those living in the Hallam constituency and those in the Central and Brightside constituencies are some of the greatest in any city in the country.

This debate on selection is important and gives Labour Members the chance to demonstrate how the issue has played a part in determining our priorities. As Northern Ireland is a key part of the United Kingdom, we are a Government who are intent on driving forward equality of opportunity there. If we are going to achieve that, which I think is the thrust of the point made by those who tabled the motion, it is essential first to say that the test will be abolished. Continuity is an important point. Different things cannot be done simultaneously, so I completely endorse the idea that the first action of the Minister in wanting to change to system should be to say that the academic selection test at 11 will be abolished. It is then necessary to move forward, as I believe the Government are, in establishing further ways in which the factors that affect educational discrimination can most usefully be dealt with.

More will be needed than the abolition of the academic test at 11, including greater emphasis on integrated education and schools. From what I know of the integrated schools, they are playing a major part. I welcome what the Minister of State said about the expansion that is being proposed in further and higher education in Northern Ireland. The opportunity of part-time and full-time places for students and part-time places for mature students will also be essential in raising expectations and opening up possibilities for dealing with disparities between the top and bottom ends. Abolition of the test is only a first step. I hope that this Government, while the current system remains in place, and also the devolved Administration, which I hope will be re-established before too long, will be able

[Helen Jackson]

to work on those further steps and encourage the child care provision, integrated schools and extra student support that will be necessary in taking them.

I want to mention one other aspect of education in Northern Ireland of which I had some experience when I worked with the Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland as their Parliamentary Private Secretary. I was given a brief of keeping closely in touch with educational work, especially for adults and among women in Northern Ireland. On a number of occasions, I visited the award givings of the Belfast Women's Training Services organisation in Northern Ireland. Hundreds of certificates were distributed and the courses were full year on year. I was struck by how young women from the working-class areas of Belfast on both sides of the sectarian divide were so eloquent about the fact that it was only after they had left school that they were starting to realise their own educational potential, as well as their potential for taking a useful and active role in the community. I pay tribute to a lot of the work that has been done by that organisation among mature students in the working-class areas of Belfast, as well as by the Workers Educational Association and other adult education movements, which I got to know well.

Such organisations have lessons for many of us in the rest of the United Kingdom, especially in respect of inner city areas where such disparities of educational achievement exist, but the better way forward is to establish an educational system that does not end up with huge disparities for mature students. It is in that context that I think that the Government were correct—the Minister made a strong case built on the Burns report and the work of the devolved Assembly—that it was right to say at the start was that there would be no academic selection at 11, which can be divisive, and that they would abolish it as soon as was practicable, and work hard to establish how best to ensure that the transfer from primary to secondary education results in a society in Northern Ireland that is as little divided educationally as possible.

Of course, all of us in the House hope that a society will come about in Northern Ireland that is also as little divided as possible in any other way. This debate plays its small part in that wider political role as well.

3.16 pm

David Burnside (South Antrim): I was not in the Assembly when my party and the others chose their election portfolios. Ministries are always a difficult matter. The old hands, such as the now Lord Kilclooney—an old hand and one of the few Unionists who were in government in the old Stormont Parliament—always go for finance first, as that has the purse strings. That may be right or wrong, but I would have argued for education as the top priority with farming second on the list. That is my personal preference, but I was not there at the time.

The Executive cannot be reformed in the foreseeable future because of the former Education Minister's continuation with an operational terrorist criminal organisation, but if and when it does come back with some sort of structure, I hope that my party and the Democratic Unionist party, which is represented on the Benches to my left, will try to get together next time around and take education as our priority. It is the one priority that we should take. It is the major challenge and has the most importance for the future prosperity of the people of Northern Ireland.

The administrative vandalism to which the motion refers was an act of vicious vindictiveness. It was the act of a man who is not interested in the long-term future of Northern Ireland. I hope that he never again has an opportunity to hold that portfolio, but what happened happened, and what happens under the law we must accept. The Minister, who is not now in the House, will have to make a decision in the near future about the uncertainty that is now in the minds of all parents. Parents who have a child at school in year 6 do not know what is going to happen. They do not know about the selection procedure or about how their children will proceed into secondary education. Children do not know whether they will go to grammar or secondary school, or whether there will be a new form of selection procedure.

That uncertainty must be ended. I hope that it will end by reflecting the views of the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland, Protestant and Catholic, and the greatest possible number across the teaching establishment, as well as the political establishment, including all the political parties in Northern Ireland. The Minister's decision does not have majority support from either the Protestant or the Catholic community in Northern Ireland.

I went to the Antrim grammar school prize giving last year, and was extremely proud. I saw increasing academic standards—a proud school, good staff and pupils who want to be part of that school. Just after I was elected, I went to Ballyclare high school and had a briefing there, and then to the senior civil servant in the North Eastern education and library board to ask for a rating of the schools in the constituency. He said, "When we bring in visitors from outside Northern Ireland, we take them to Ballyclare high to show them an excellent school, a state school performing well." As has been said, we do not have private schools. I say to the Government: do not destroy this excellence.

Defending grammar schools does not mean that we will lower standards for our secondary sector. I heard the expression of some views that should have died with the Labour party in the 1960s—a lot of old fashioned socialist clap-trap, the sort of language that made it sound as if going to a grammar school somehow means that a social stigma attaches to the secondary school that might be only a couple of hundred yards away. When I attended one of the best institutions in Northern Ireland, the Coleraine Academical institution, I did not find such a stigma with the secondary school next door. I do not find it in my constituency now. I do not find a social stigma attaching to the very fine pupils who go to secondary school.

Let us not try to re-fight an old class battle of the 1960s. Comprehensive education failed in this country and was a disaster economically. A few academics involved in the Burns report share the left-wing parentage of the failed academia of the 1960s. Let us not make that mistake. We have a good, strong system with high academic standards that is highly respected by the community. Do not destroy it.

After making the strong point that we need a form of academic selection, let me turn to some related subjects. Whether it is Dickson or the American high school system, let us get the academic selection put in place so that parents and children, especially in year 6 but going back to years 5 and 4, have that uncertainty removed and we know what the transfer procedure will be from next year.

Two points on funding concern me. In this wide debate, I want to try to represent the concern within the primary sector. For historic reasons, going right back to the Education Acts of the 1940s, primary education in Northern Ireland has been the poor relation in funding terms of secondary education. On the mainland, in England and Wales, the amount in pounds per head spent on the secondary sector and on the primary sector is pretty even—within single percentage figures. In Northern Ireland the primary sector is very much the poor relation. As we all know, the overall budget is the problem on funding, but it is also the overall budget plus the allocation. I wish to make a plea on behalf of the primary school sector, which feels that it is often the poor relation of the secondary sector.

I move on to the problem of research. Years ago, I used to advise the Industrial Development Board, which is now Invest Northern Ireland. When it brings Japanese, Korean and American business men into Northern Ireland, our standard of education, our secondary education and our highly trained workforce feature right up high in the slides and presentations. That gives us a competitive edge in inward investment when there is so much competition in the United Kingdom between the regions. Let us not destroy that. Let us try to be conservative. If it is good, do not wreck it. Keep it there, because it is a selling point for Northern Ireland.

There is a point about research that I raised with the Secretary of State for Education last November. The underspend per head of population in Northern Ireland for the two universities, the university of Ulster and Queen's, is very low compared with that in England, Wales and Scotland. The matter needs to be considered by the Government. We need research linked into our universities, because that is how to get industry in and how to get good, modern, high-tech companies to come into Northern Ireland, where we have had considerable success in recent years.

In conclusion, I repeat to the Government: do not wreck it. We do not need an elected dictatorship in Northern Ireland telling us that it will destroy our grammar school system. We have a fine grammar school system, a fine secondary system and a fine primary system. There is a great deal of room for improvement and we want to take part in that. If the Government follow the action of the former Minister of Education, they will impose a comprehensive form of education in Northern Ireland that is not supported by the vast majority of the people, Protestant and Catholic, and that will destroy the grammar school system. I say to them: do not do it.

3.25 pm

Mr. Eric Joyce (Falkirk, West): I have only a few minutes, so I shall be swift.

My constituency is in Scotland, so it might seem that I would not have much to say about education in Northern Ireland. However, I spent a short while running a small but fairly diverse education service in Northern Ireland, and I did a couple of higher degrees while I was at it, so I got to know the Northern Ireland education system fairly well.

Some strong points have been made from both sides during the debate. The main points that I can raise in the time available relate to selection and the method of transfer between primary and secondary education, and the whole business of grammar schools and how to correlate them with grammar schools in England. We have none in Scotland.

My hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty) received short shrift from the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) when he mentioned pass rates. The pass rate referred to was 93 per cent. in Northern Ireland obtaining two A-levels at A to E, which is not the case. The point that my hon. Friend was trying to make was simply that that is the proportion of people who sit A-levels.

Mr. Brady: Perhaps I can help the hon. Gentleman with the correct figures. As a proportion of the 18-year-old population, the appropriate figures are, for those obtaining two or more A-levels in 1999 to 2000: in England 30 per cent.; in Wales 27 per cent.; and in Northern Ireland 37.7 per cent. Again, the Northern Ireland system is delivering better results.

Mr. Joyce: I understand what the hon. Gentleman says, but the point made earlier confused overall attainment with the degree of selectivity. One could have a pass rate of 100 per cent., but it would not tell us anything about the people who did not sit the exam. That is different from the way in which we express GCSE figures, which gross up the whole cohort.

Mr. Brady: Perhaps I did not express myself clearly. This is even more compelling evidence. The figures I gave a moment ago are as a percentage of the total 18-year-old population, so there is a very significant improvement in performance in Northern Ireland compared with England.

Mr. Joyce: I would not necessarily disagree with the hon. Gentleman. I simply wanted to amplify the valid point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, East for which he got fairly short shrift.

In Northern Ireland, the figures are slightly higher and have certainly improved because there is greater selectivity. In England, by contrast, there is a modest level of grammar school education. Another difference is that English grammar schools, particularly in Sutton in Surrey, for example, operate in a very different ecology. Surprisingly, the local secondaries perform at a level not far below that of the grammar schools. The latter, however, tend to perform better academically in England—I understand that this does not happen in Northern Ireland—because GNVQ and vocational figures are included in secondary school results. There is therefore a school ecology, as it were, in which everyone is getting comparable results. However, the grammar school system that has evolved in certain English counties has produced a more diverse education than exists in Northern Ireland where, I believe, a fairly conservative, old-fashioned structure has been preserved. By contrast, some of the best grammar school practice in England is forward looking and progressive.

[Mr. Joyce]

I accept what one or two Opposition Members, including the hon. Member for South Antrim (David Burnside), said about the comprehensive system in the 1970s. There is quite a lot of room, to say the least, for more diversity and choice based on aptitude testing. There is an important distinction to be made between raw and crude academic testing and sound, valid academic testing at the age of 11 that involves complex and sophisticated tests based on specific aptitudes. The latter gives parents a choice about the kind of school their children may attend, including, perhaps, sports or art-oriented schools. That philosophy is increasingly predominant in English education and should be naturally predominant in Northern Ireland too, even though it would have different origins.

Many Opposition Members nodded their agreement with the valid point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey). If we strip grammar schools out of the system and do not replace them with anything, people will simply opt for the private sector. Nationally, about 7 per cent. of kids are in private schools, but in Edinburgh the figure is about 20 per cent., which shows what happens when a fairly affluent group of people in a well-off city comes up against a non-differentiated system that does not provide choice. Grammar schools, or what they should evolve into, provide that choice.

I am pushed for time, so I shall cut my comments short. Opposition Members, including those who are diametrically opposite, bemoaned the potential loss of academic excellence if grammar schools disappear. That argument misses the point that grammar schools in England are evolving in a diverse ecology and have maintained academic excellence alongside schools that have managed to develop new specialisms. That is the dominant philosophy in education in England, and ought to be in Ireland too.

3.32 pm

Mr. Nigel Dodds (Belfast, North): I welcome our debate on the future of education in Northern Ireland, and am glad of the opportunity to take part in it. I shall keep my remarks brief and deal with several general matters.

First, I join the Minister who, in her opening remarks, mentioned recent events in my constituency at the Holy Cross girls primary school, Wheatfield primary school and Currie primary school. Members will be aware that, whatever our arguments on the future of our education system, the first priority is the safety and well-being of all our children, as well as staff and parents going to school. It is right that the House should put on record its outrage at events not just at Holy Cross, but also at Wheatfield school and Currie school, as well other schools across north Belfast that have suffered terribly in recent years. Some schools rightly feel that their plight has been overlooked in favour of others that have received more media attention. I therefore welcome the Minister's remarks. I wish that Sinn Fein, in its comments on those events, would declare its responsibility, rather than trying to avoid it and placing the blame for the attacks, particularly at Currie and Wheatfield, on the loyalist community, as that is deeply resented.

The main thrust of my remarks concerns academic selection and Martin McGuiness's last-minute, last-gasp decision, which reminded me of the last-gasp decisions made by the outgoing President Clinton, when he rushed to pardon a host of dubious characters. There was a last-minute rush by the outgoing Education Minister to push through his decision to abolish the 11-plus at the very last moment, in breach of his commitment to Assembly Members that no such decision would be taken without its first coming back to the Assembly for consideration and decision. Those who argue that pursuing that course and simply adopting the former Minister's decision is simply advancing what was already agreed by the last devolved Administration are wrong. In fact, no such decision was made by that Administration—a decision was made by one Minister, which points to a flaw in the devolved system.

Speaking as an ex-Minister in the devolved Administration, I have some experience of this, and sometimes I have to say that it has worked to my advantage. The reality is, however, that Ministers are unaccountable and, in this case, the Minister of State has adopted a decision that did not have the backing of the Northern Ireland Assembly. The decision was in breach of the undertaking given by Martin McGuinness to the Assembly.

I have to agree with the remarks made by the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey). She attended a very good school, the Belfast royal academy, which I had the pleasure of visiting the other day and meeting the headmaster. He would be delighted with the comments that a pupil of that school has made today in the House, because he would entirely agree with what she said about academic selection.

There is no reason for the Minister to have adopted this decision, and no reason for there to be a rush to abolish the 11-plus, particularly when we recall that no decision has been taken on its replacement. The sensible thing to do would be to take our time, look at what should replace the 11-plus—if it is to be abolished—and then make the decision, so that parents, staff, pupils and everybody else in the education system would know exactly where they were. It would have been easy simply to say, "Look, this last-minute decision by the former Education Minister is not going to stand. We are going to maintain the status quo." There would then have been no upset whatsoever. The decision by the Minister in this House has plunged the education system into chaos because people are uncertain about what is happening.

Lembit Öpik: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dodds: I would love to give way, but my time is very limited.

The decision should have been taken to maintain the status quo. I am reminded of the rush to abolish the hereditary peers in the House of Lords. Without knowing what the final outcome of the House of Lords reform will be, the Government have proceeded with the first stage. In Northern Ireland, they have rushed to abolish the 11-plus with no idea at all—or certainly not one that they have shared with the people of Northern Ireland—of what its replacement is to be. I have often

heard it said, particularly by Ministers, that we cannot advance the argument for the abolition or replacement of something without having a viable alternative. Northern Ireland politicians are lectured all the time on the need to put forward an alternative. In this case the Government are saying, "Let's abolish the 11-plus system, but don't ask us what the alternative is. We will come up with that as we go along." That is not a satisfactory, logical or sensible way to proceed.

The Government have not adopted this approach in relation to other matters emanating from the devolved Administration. For example, I had some responsibility for Housing Executive rent increases—a settled policy—but the new direct rule Minister has decided to increase Housing Executive rents by inflation plus 1 per cent., in breach of the previous settled policy of the devolved Administration that they should increase only by the rate of inflation each year. The idea that the Government are simply following on from the previous decision of the devolved Administration needs to be focused on. It is wrong to argue that that is happening. The Assembly did not have the opportunity to debate this matter following the decision announced by Martin McGuinness, and the Minister should reflect carefully on the comments of Northern Ireland Members today. He should recognise what they have been saying: you don't fix something that ain't broke. Northern Ireland has the finest education system anywhere in the United Kingdom, and that should be preserved and enhanced, not destroyed.

3.38 pm

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): May I begin by thanking all the right hon. and hon. Members who have taken part in this debate? I am quite satisfied that our party took the right decision in bringing this matter before the House; this debate vindicates that decision completely. I echo the comments made by the hon. Member for Belfast, North (Mr. Dodds) at the outset of his speech, when he referred to the recent outrages at Holy Cross, Wheatfield and Currie schools, coming as they do after the disturbances that we have had over the last year in the cockpit of north Belfast, which has seen some of the worst violence of the last 30 years. Riven as it is by sectarian divisions, it is also the area of Belfast that has been most affected by the disappearance of the engineering industry that had given the area much of its culture, and the consequent disappearance of what had been the normal career path for most people who lived there. This has contributed to the violence and to the recent disturbances. Improving the quality of the schools in north and west Belfast is crucial to improving matters generally. Work in the schools that we have mentioned is therefore important.

There is a sense of déjà vu about the debate. We have held many discussions in Northern Ireland about the Burns report and the shape of post-primary education over the years. It is understandable that Labour Members spoke in the context of their experience and the arguments in which they had been involved in England in the past 20 to 40 years. They may not appreciate that there are differences in Northern Ireland, and that it is wrong simply to compare the position in Northern Ireland with that in England. That struck me especially when I listened to the contribution of the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor). In socio-economic terms, society is much more egalitarian in Northern Ireland than in England. We have political divisions and quite acute religious and sectarian divisions, but our society is much more socio-economically egalitarian.

The greater equality is due to the current education system. Some hon. Members supported comprehensive education in England 30 or 40 years ago because they perceived it as a method of curing social divisions and a means of social engineering. It would produce the opposite result in Northern Ireland, where the more egalitarian society that they want already exists. The introduction of comprehensive schools would drive existing schools out of the state system. They would go private in ways that would reinforce and worsen the sectarian divisions. We must bear that in mind. Following the so-called comprehensive route and imitating events in England of 40 years ago would be a social disaster in Northern Ireland. My hon. Friend the Member for South Antrim (David Burnside) referred to the economic consequences, which would be equally significant.

The hon. Member for Bury, North and the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Helen Jackson) constantly referred to selection at 11. We are not considering that. A large part of Northern Ireland, especially my constituency, where the Dickson plan operates, uses a much more mixed approach. The age of 14 is as important—if not more so—as others. The Dickson plan works well, especially for those in the academic stream. Until recently, it did not work so well for those in the non-academic sector. That is one of the great weaknesses of the education system in Northern Ireland.

The Ulster Unionist party has repeatedly introduced proposals to try to enhance secondary and technical education. We appreciate that that is the challenge, and that we need to level up, not down. We must retain the excellence, but tackle the weaknesses. One method is to examine parity of funding and status with a view to attracting finance. The differences in the financial structures of grammar and secondary schools should be considered and changed. That is a matter not simply of funding but of schools' ability to deal with their position. We want such matters to be examined. Parity of esteem is not an idle phrase.

I also agree with the hon. Member for Belfast, North—I must tackle that bad habit—in his criticism of the Minister's approach. It is essential to understand that the decision of the former Minister of Education in the last few minutes of devolution would not have been made without the prospect of suspension. The Northern Ireland Executive would never have made such a decision and the Assembly would not have approved it. The Minister of Education knew that his proposals on the Burns report were not going anywhere as far as the Assembly and Executive were concerned. That is the reason for the delay. If I had more time, I would explain the structures that we adopted for decision making in the Executive. They would have ensured that the decision could not be effected. Suspension led to the decision. In our motion, we use the term "administrative vandalism", and those words were deliberately chosen.

[Mr. David Trimble]

The Minister should not regard the decision as democratically legitimate, because it is not.

Mr. Quentin Davies *rose—*

Mr. Trimble: I am sorry—I would like to pursue this matter further, but we are short of time and I must give the Minister the opportunity to reply. Because this important decision is not democratically legitimate—indeed, I wonder even about its legality—and because it was taken without something else being put in its place, I very much doubt whether it would have survived a judicial review.

Before I leave the points made by the Minister, I want to refer to a matter that I touched on in replying to the hon. Member for Bury, North. One thing that we did in respect of student finance of which I am particularly proud was to introduce grants for further education. I was greatly disappointed to hear from the Minister that, so far, only 400 of them have been taken up. That is partly because of a certain reluctance within the education system to market them and to bring them to people's attention. We took a very deliberate decision to treat people in further education in the same way as those in higher education. We appreciate the importance of the skills developed in further education both in social terms, and to those who are pursuing that particular course in life. We cannot improve that sector and parity of esteem in the way we would like unless similar support is provided.

I do not want to spend too much time on the selection issue, which has been dealt with comprehensively. I agree with the Minister's observations on the comments made in yesterday's press by the northern secretary of the Irish National Teachers Organisation. He has adopted a must unhelpful approach, and I was amused to learn that, in making those comments, he began by attacking political opportunism, only to proceed to engage in a bit of such opportunism himself. He should keep out of politics and leave the political decisions to those with a mandate, rather than attempting through the threat of union action to determine the decisions that Governments take. To do so is wholly wrong, and we do not want that bad form of trade unionism to recur.

The hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) mentioned the integrated sector, and as he knew before today, I intended to raise that issue myself. It is perhaps not always appreciated here in England that integrated education is in fact a great lost opportunity in Northern Ireland. That lost opportunity occurred not 40 years ago but 80 years ago, when the first Unionist Government proposed the introduction of a single compulsory integrated education system in Northern Ireland. It was Lord Craigavon who tried to introduce that system, in 1924, but unfortunately he was unable to do so because of the combined opposition of all the Churches. Had he been successful, the history of the past 80 years would have been quite different.

Integrated education is not a new idea, therefore, and I was a bit disappointed that the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire referred purely to the integrated education movement. I know that it includes a lot of well-meaning people, but they comprise just one particular movement, and there is more to integrated education than them. Some of the difficulties that people have with the integrated education movement concern issues such as accountability and creating yet another education sector. We already have too many such sectors: in addition to the controlled and maintained and the Irish medium sectors, we would then have the integrated sector. We need to look at these administrative structures more closely, and to encourage more of the integration that happens naturally. Many of the schools that are not in the integrated education movement are in fact integrated. The hon. Member for Montgomeryshire will know from personal experience that major grammar schools in Northern Ireland that are thought of as Protestant schools have significant Catholic enrolment, and would qualify as integrated. I do not want to speak only about grammar schools in Belfast. In the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for North Down (Lady Hermon), the Catholic St. Columbanus secondary school at Ballyholme near Bangor has a Protestant enrolment of nearly 50 per cent. The school's ethos and quality mean that people go there as a matter of choice. There exists a significant integrated sector that is not recognised in the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire. We need to be more comprehensive in regard to such matters.

I was disappointed that no member of the Social Democratic and Labour party contributed to the debate. I recognise that that means that the party does not have to say something on the question of education. There may be reasons for that, and I hope that the House will forgive me for indulging myself by saying that someone once remarked that the distinction between the SDLP and Sinn Fein was that SDLP was composed of people who passed the 11-plus.

It is puzzling that the SDLP should have adopted a somewhat hostile approach to academic selection, given that opinion poll evidence shows that it is the most middle-class party in Northern Ireland, in terms of electoral support. Its members may find it difficult to come here and adopt a position that is contrary to the interests of most of the party's voters. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that there is a substantial number of Catholic grammar schools. I do not want to do a head count, but they may outnumber the grammar schools that are considered Protestant. Those schools have a view, as do the people who represent them.

The proposition is simple: if it ain't broke, don't fix it. Certain sectors in education in Northern Ireland need to be improved, especially on the secondary side. Also, certain geographical areas have massive social problems that need to be addressed. Education is an important component, but not the only one. We need to look at a variety of social issues.

I was pleased that the north Belfast community project began to look at those matters, and it is a great disappointment that we have been interrupted in our follow-through to that project. It was an example of an approach—integrated in a different sense—that needs

to be adopted in respect of areas where huge social problems are tied to lack of attainment in schools. The problem is one for society and not just for schools, and that is where our focus must be.

The Government are responsible for education in Northern Ireland. They could do a tremendous amount of damage, or they could help reinforce some of the good things that we were trying to do. I hope that they choose wisely.

3.52 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Ian Pearson): I am grateful to the hon. Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs) for initiating this afternoon's useful and interesting debate on education in Northern Ireland. I am grateful too for the lively and informed contributions from hon. Members, and I am pleased to use the short time available to reply to the debate.

As today's Opposition day debate was chosen by the Ulster Unionists, I hope that my hon. Friends the Members for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor) for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Helen Jackson) and for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty) will forgive me if I concentrate my remarks on the speeches made by members of the Conservative, Ulster Unionist and Democratic Unionist parties. However, I thank my hon. Friends for their contributions: it is clear that they have longstanding expertise in education, and specific local knowledge of the situation in Northern Ireland.

The quality and passion of our discussions underline the importance that we all attach to the education of our young people. They illustrate why education is a key priority of this Government.

The education system in Northern Ireland has many strengths, and these have been referred to today. We have a highly qualified and professional teaching force, governors who make a substantial voluntary commitment to the management of our education institutions, strong schools and further education institutes, and a wide range of higher education provision in our universities, which have a world-class reputation in a number of areas.

Many young people in Northern Ireland schools and further education institutes achieve top-grade qualifications and a high proportion go on to higher education. We must continue to build on these strengths, and the investment being made in education by this Government is clear evidence of our determination to do so.

We have heard much today about the challenges facing education in Northern Ireland. I entirely agree with the hon. Member for East Antrim—who made a thoughtful and wide-ranging speech—about the importance of education to Northern Ireland's economy, and the need to proceed carefully with the post-primary review. That is exactly what my hon. Friend the Minister of State will do. The hon. Gentleman also made important points about parity of esteem via the vocational route, and made comments about Springvale and the common funding formula which were addressed by my hon. Friend.

I have not much time, but I want to say something about the university funding system, which was mentioned by a number of Members. We entirely accept that many people cross the water to attend university here although they would much prefer to be educated in Northern Ireland, and we are dealing with that.

As the hon. Member for East Antrim knows, when—as the Minister responsible for finance in Northern Ireland—I saw the draft budget and observed that there was no money to fund education, research and the research assessment exercise, I was surprised, to say the least. I was pleased to be able to provide the necessary money—£10 million a year for the next three years—and also to announce, as part of the reinvestment and reform initiative, £25 million for capital projects that will ensure that Northern Ireland's universities have a world-class structure to accompany their expertise.

The gravamen of the hon. Gentleman's speech, and indeed the debate in general, concerned the former Education Minister's decision to announce the abolition of transfer tests. The right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) said that neither the Executive nor the Assembly would have made that decision, and I take his word for it. I also understand why the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) urged caution. I must tell them that we did not want devolution to be suspended, but it happened, and I do not think it would have been appropriate for an incoming home rule—*[Interruption]*—direct rule Minister's first action to be the announcement of the reversal of a decision made by the former Education Minister.

This is of course an important issue that needs to be addressed, and is indeed being carefully considered, but I must tell Opposition Members that consultation on the Burns proposals showed clear support for abolition of the transfer tests. I must add, notwithstanding the comments of the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik), that the household form responses showed a clear preference for maintaining academic selection.

We need to discuss the way forward with the political parties. My hon. Friend the Minister of State has already had a round of meetings with education sector interests, parent representatives and the political parties, and is continuing to engage in such meetings. We hope to be able to make an announcement about the next stage of the review shortly. Again, we would all prefer local politicians to drive this forward rather than a direct rule Minister taking the decision. However, I reiterate that no decisions have yet been taken about the new post-primary education arrangements—they will be taken in the future.

In the short time available to me, I should like to talk about the other major issue raised—

Mr. Beggs *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Question put accordingly, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 144, Noes 377.

Division No. 49] [4:00 pm

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Curry, rh David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, rh William
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Trend, Michael
Trimble, rh David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Cheryl Gillan and Mr. Mark Hoban

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, rh A. J.
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, rh David
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Byers, rh Stephen
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, hon. Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*

Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morris, rh Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Pearson, Ian
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Pugh, Dr. John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quinn, Lawrie
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watts, David
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Charlotte Atkins and
Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House congratulates governors, principals, teachers and other school staff on the contribution they make to educating young people in Northern Ireland; welcomes the high qualifications achieved by many pupils but acknowledges that there are also large numbers of young people, particularly from

disadvantaged backgrounds, leaving school with low qualifications; urges the Secretary of State to continue to take forward the review of post-primary education with the objective of putting in place new post-primary arrangements that will maintain those high standards of achievement and build a modern and fair education system that enables all children in Northern Ireland to achieve their full potential; and further welcomes the additional higher education places and the Secretary of State's decision to increase Government funding for research and knowledge transfer at Queen's University Belfast and the University of Ulster.

2012 Olympics Bid

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

4.16 pm

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): This debate is indeed well timed, and I am grateful to the House for this opportunity to set out the arguments for and, indeed, against London bidding for the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics and to hear the arguments of right hon. and hon. Members from both sides of the House and with constituencies across the country.

The debate is well timed because the Government have undertaken to take a decision on whether to support a London bid by the end of this month. Only the British Olympic Association can make a bid on behalf of a British city to the International Olympic Committee. The association must indicate its intentions to the IOC by July this year at the latest, and it can bid only if it can show that all costs will be underwritten and that it has full Government support.

To give the association sufficient time to prepare for July, we feel that a Government decision by the end of January is necessary. Just mounting a bid is a two-and-a-half year marathon. By January next year, applicant cities must reply to the IOC's questionnaire. That reply is then examined by the IOC, and it will announce its shortlist in June 2004.

The final assessment will be completed by May 2005, after visits by the IOC evaluation commission. The final vote will take place in July 2005. To have any chance of success, a British bid would have to be wholeheartedly supported by the Government. If the Government decide to back the bid, we will back it to the hilt, and we will expect similar commitment from the other stakeholders.

I am very grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) for convening sessions of the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport today and tomorrow to take evidence and hear views on the prospects for a London Olympics. Today's debate and the Select Committee hearings will help to inform the deliberations of the committee, chaired by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, that will consider the Government's position on the Olympics, for this decision has to be taken by the whole Government, not by one Department.

We must take the decision with our eyes very clearly open and it must be tested against four clear criteria, the first of which is affordability. Can London and, indeed, the nation afford the investment needed? The second criterion is deliverability. Can the necessary infrastructure be defined, designed and built in time and to standard? The third criterion is the legacy. Will the games infrastructure leave behind a sporting legacy and a regeneration legacy that are worth the very considerable cost? The last criterion is winnability: however good and however credible a London bid can be, the question is whether it has a good enough chance of winning and is worth the expenditure of the many millions of pounds which mounting a bid would cost.

Any decision to bid must therefore be based on a thorough analysis of all the costs and all the benefits. I must therefore take into account all the risks, which is

why I have set in train a full assessment of the costs and benefits: an analysis of the fit between potential Olympic development and the wider regeneration proposals for east London; an examination of transport options; consideration of legacy issues; and discussions with the private sector about the level of its contribution. I have also commissioned an assessment of winnability, and tomorrow I will publish some survey research on public opinion in relation to an Olympic bid.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): Why is it assumed that the only successful bid that could be mounted would be by London? A very successful Commonwealth games was organised in Manchester. People in the north-west feel that they have been betrayed, given that, after organising such a successful games, there is no prospect of an Olympic bid by Manchester being organised and supported.

Tessa Jowell: The hon. Gentleman's point will be received with some sympathy across the Chamber. The British Olympic Association, however, has made it clear—in discussion, I presume, with the International Olympic Committee—that London is the only credible UK city for a bid. As he will know, both Manchester and Birmingham have bid unsuccessfully in the past 15 years.

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): As someone who had grave reservations about the development of Wembley as an international football stadium when better opportunities existed around the country, I take a completely different view of the Olympic games. I do not believe that any other part of Britain can bid successfully for the Olympic games, which would bring great benefit to our young people and to sport in general. Those of us who represent northern constituencies recognise that if Britain is to make a bid, London must be the city.

Tessa Jowell: I thank my hon. Friend for that helpful intervention. In assessing whether to bid, we have drawn on the lessons to be learned from the management of big projects in the past in which the Government have been involved, such as Wembley stadium, which have led the Government to commit more money than was originally intended.

Mr. David Watts (St. Helens, North): Will my right hon. Friend also consider the impact that a successful bid would have on other regions? Would they lose resources that would have gone to them if the bid were not made?

Tessa Jowell: That is an important question. Clearly, any bid, if one is to be made, will be made for a London Olympics. As the Sydney Olympics showed, however, investment in training facilities prior to the Olympics can lead to new facilities in different parts of the country. Part of our assessment of the economic benefits of the Olympics would be to ask precisely my hon. Friend's question: how dispersed are the benefits, and will the rest of the country benefit?

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): The right hon. Lady says that one of her four main tests is winnability, and that she has already commissioned research in that regard. Will she tell the House precisely how that research is taking place, and whom she has asked to determine that vital criterion?

Tessa Jowell: In relation to assessments of winnability, we have sought advice from the British Olympic Association and UK Sport, from which we have commissioned a report. My departmental officials have also made an assessment, and this Friday I will meet Jacques Rogge, the President of the International Olympic Committee, in Lausanne, to discuss the matter further. I will say more about that as I develop my argument to the House. The first three criteria of affordability, deliverability and legacy are more measurable than winnability, which is more of an art than a science. However, we have to make an important judgment before we commit a substantial sum to making a bid. We also have to assess whether the expenditure of time and effort across the Government and beyond will be worth it.

Mr. Mark Field: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Tessa Jowell: No, I want to make progress.

Dr. Rudi Vis (Finchley and Golders Green): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Tessa Jowell: I hope that my hon. Friend forgives me, but I will not. I want to make some progress because many hon. Members wish to speak.

Let me be the first to say that a powerful sporting case has been made for bringing the games to London. A successful bid would bring sport to the centre of our national life for a decade between now and 2012. It would motivate and inspire the young athletes who are beginning to enjoy the new facilities, opportunities and additional coaching provided by the lottery and directly by Government investment. It would also intensify the focus on elite sport, so that our athletes have the best possible chance of winning in front of our home crowds. The evidence of previous Olympics makes it clear that countries win more medals when they host the games.

The world of sport understandably relishes the prospect of a London games. Its only concern is that the expenditure needed to stage an impressive event and to prepare the UK athletes should not be at the expense of existing expenditure on sport. It understands that investment in sport at the grassroots—in talent identification and development, and in facilities and coaching to bring sporting opportunities to every community and school in the UK—should not suffer if we bid for the games. However, it is not unreasonable of others to suggest that if the Olympics games are of such high importance to the world of sport, it should be willing to reorder its spending priorities accordingly. The impact of any potential diversion of resources from within sport is one factor that we will weigh carefully before taking the final decision.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): Given that it will be 2005 before a decision is made and that the spending programme of the Government and the new

[Mr. John Greenway]

opportunities fund only run until then, does the right hon. Lady agree that there are still a further six or seven years in which to make the investments required?

Tessa Jowell: To some extent the hon. Gentleman is right, but he should remember that if we decide to bid for the games and win, every pound spent on developing Olympic facilities in London is a pound that will not be spent on schools, hospitals or grassroots sporting facilities in other parts of the country. We are confronting a tough set of choices and I welcome the debate as way of informing those choices.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): The Secretary of State rightly referred to the opinion in the sporting world that holding the Olympic games in London would be hugely motivational, but she also implied that the money might have to come from other parts of sport if we decide to bid for them. Does she really believe that to be the case? Surely if we want to bid for the Olympics and the Government support that, the money has to be over and above anything that is already going to sport.

Tessa Jowell: Money for an Olympic bid and for building the Olympic facilities would come from the same pool as money to fund the Government's other priorities. It would have to compete with schools, hospitals, the development of grassroots sporting facilities and the renewal of our transport infrastructure. That is a fact and it is why the decision requires us to face tough choices.

Every host city has found that the games come at a price. Past experience informs us that early estimates for the cost of major events or for other capital projects tend to escalate before their completion. The costs of the Manchester Commonwealth games, one of the great sporting festivals of the summer, more than doubled from Manchester city council's first bid, and the games had to be rescued by the Government and the national lottery before becoming the success that they were. The costs of the new Wembley stadium were originally forecast at £250 million, whereas the project that was finally agreed is budgeted at £760 million. Escalation of costs is not unique to Britain. Sydney found it necessary to spend double its original estimate, and Athens could be heading the same way.

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): As a northern MP, I am very supportive of the proposed bid for London. However, as costs rose so much for the events that my right hon. Friend just mentioned, we have to be sure from the beginning that we are not underestimating the likely costs of London's bid; otherwise we will hear damaging stories about costs escalating out of control, which will detract from the good news about the event. Hopefully we will win the bid.

Tessa Jowell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. He almost makes my point for me. I am determined to ensure that, as the funder of last resort, the Government are absolutely clear about the extent of any possible liability before we make a commitment.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): My right hon. Friend will know that many of us in London are greatly excited by the potential hosting of the Olympic games in London. That could do wonders for the regeneration of the city as well as for sport and Britain's standing in the world. She will know also, however, that the bid depends crucially on investment not only in sporting facilities and the running of the games but in London's infrastructure. Will she take the message from the House to the Chancellor that without Government investment in London's infrastructure, particularly in transport and housing, the games cannot be the success that they should be?

Tessa Jowell: I am sure that the Chancellor will have heard my right hon. Friend's intervention.

To ensure the extent of any Government liability, we have developed the work undertaken by Arup, which concluded that the total cost of hosting the 2012 Olympics would be £3.6 billion, requiring a net public subsidy of £1.1 billion. In our view there is a significant risk of the total cost rising to £4.5 billion, with a net public subsidy requirement of £2.5 billion. The scale of work needed, the impact on the regeneration of east London and the total costs involved mean that sport alone cannot fund the Olympics, nor can sport alone justify the total expenditure. Those wider considerations must be weighed before a decision can be made.

Mr. Gareth Thomas (Harrow, West): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Tessa Jowell: I shall make some progress.

Any public subsidy of the games must, by definition, come from other areas of public spending. It is the job of Government to balance what are inevitably competing claims, and I hope that one of the outcomes of the debate that we seek to have will be greater public understanding of the extent of those choices. If the Olympics would carry forward the regeneration of east London, if they would contribute substantially to the UK economy and if they could be financed without distorting other spending priorities, they could be affordable. However, if they would do none of those things, but rather inhibit regeneration and fail to leave a valuable legacy, the argument is clearly considerably weaker.

Many, if not all, Olympic host cities have justified their expenditure by those wider considerations. Hon. Members will know that the Minister for Sport and I have, over the past few months, visited a number of past and prospective Olympic cities in order to understand those points at first hand. For the 1992 Olympics, Barcelona wanted to rebuild and even reinvent itself—to turn it round to face the sea, as one resident put it to me when I visited. It wanted to emerge as a new, modern city and as the capital of a vibrant region, to increase hugely its capacity as a tourist destination. It spent accordingly, perhaps £8 billion in today's terms. Beijing clearly wants to use the Olympics to promote the city and to turn it round to face the rest of the world. Athens, too, is using the impetus of the games to rebuild and rebrand its city.

In this context, it is important to recognise what our Olympic expenditure would cover. It would cover the cost of making the bid; land reclamation and the development of sport sites and the village in the east end;

transport enhancements for the period of the games; preparation for our elite athletes; a world-class Olympic fortnight; and the Paralympic games. The level of funding would not provide for wider Thames gateway redevelopment. Those who look admiringly at Barcelona and Athens, with their dramatic changes to their cities, and assume that the London gain would be similar, need to know that public works on that scale would increase the costs still further and would not make a London bid any more winnable.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Tessa Jowell: No. I shall make some progress.

The third test is legacy. The best estimate to date is that the lasting legacy of the Olympic buildings and associated infrastructure could be otherwise provided for about £300 million. That would include the stadium, a 50 m swimming pool, some improved sports halls and other facilities in east London, around 160,000 sq m of employment floor space and about 400 permanent jobs, 4,000 new homes, and expanded rail capacity at Stratford station.

The subsequent use of the stadium is important. More recent Olympic and world event stadiums have been economically unsuccessful unless a viable anchor tenant has been found. That is true of Stadium Australia and also of the Stade de France. Arup's preferred solution is for the £280 million, 80,000-seater Olympic stadium that London would need to be reduced after the games to 20,000 capacity and to be used for athletics. However, even at that capacity, the stadium would make a loss and would require continuing subsidy. An alternative considered by Arup was to follow the Manchester example and find a football club to take over the venue. That would leave the stadium with a 60,000 capacity, but Arup felt that residential and commercial neighbours might be wary of being close to football grounds, and that that would be reflected in the development prospects.

There are other legacies to consider. The Olympics could bring a substantial boost to London's tourism. The benefit is estimated at £400 million to £600 million over four years.

Mr. Gareth Thomas *rose—*

Tessa Jowell: It is true that London is already the most popular destination in the UK, and steps would have to be taken to encourage visitors to venture beyond the capital so that the rest of the country would benefit from the Olympic impact. There could be a legacy of people enthused to take up sport because of the excitement generated by the event, but experience shows that that immediate effect is short lived, when high standard facilities and coaching are available. Even in Australia, which in 2002 had one of the most successful Olympic games ever, participation levels have fallen away, and its couch-potato population is estimated to be equal to ours. To capitalise on the Olympics in that way would require further expenditure if people are to be engaged in sport in the longer term.

Mr. Hawkins *rose—*

Bob Russell (Colchester) *rose—*

Tessa Jowell: No, I shall make progress.

A further consideration is the impact that the games decision could have on the wider Thames gateway, giving confidence to investors that it is an attractive place to invest. The games could revitalise the image of London in the eyes of the world, confirming its position as a leading world city. There is the potential for improving the image of the UK around the world, something done to great effect for their countries by Sydney and Barcelona. There is the undoubted value of the games in terms of national pride. We had a foretaste of that in the Manchester games this summer, which showed that we really are a can-do nation.

Deliverability is the third of our criteria and perhaps the one in which I have greatest confidence. There is absolutely no doubt that Britain can stage a great Olympics in 2012. The Queen's jubilee and the Manchester Commonwealth games show how we can organise and deliver vibrant and exciting events, bringing together hundreds and thousands of people to celebrate. Some of our detractors will point to Picketts Lock and say that we cannot be trusted to deliver, but Manchester, the jubilee and the 1996 European football championships all show otherwise, as do the outstanding regular events that this country hosts in football, cricket, rugby, golf, tennis, rowing, sailing and many more sports.

Of course, the Olympics are on a different scale and level of complexity, but given the time available and provided that the games are fully funded and that we are confident about the costs, we can be confident about delivering an impressive event with which London's infrastructure is well able to cope. Our current assessment is that transport would not be an obstacle to a successful bid. The Government are currently considering what measures would be necessary. We would also ensure that the necessary planning and development powers are in place—an important lesson from other Olympic cities—and that the Mayor of London and relevant local authorities have all indicated their support for a bid. We would look to the mayor and the London development agency for a substantial commitment of their resources, to reflect the fact that London would inevitably be the main beneficiary of the games.

I am very grateful for all the work undertaken across government in assessing the practicality and deliverability of the games, and I should like to thank my colleagues for their wholehearted co-operation. As a result of all that work, I can say that a high-quality games is well within our reach to deliver.

I turn finally to winnability, which, as I have indicated, is not an exact science. The ballot is secret and the delegates are drawn from more than 80 different countries, each with different traditions and attitudes. We know that the competition will be intense.

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Tessa Jowell: I am going to draw my remarks to a close.

It is obviously in the interests of the IOC to have as many high-quality bids as possible. Nevertheless, I welcome the encouraging remarks made by Jacques Rogge, its president, and look forward to meeting him

[Tessa Jowell]

in Lausanne on Friday. However, as he says, any London bid will face very stiff opposition. We can expect New York, Paris, Moscow, Toronto, a Spanish city, a German city, possibly a city in South America and others to throw their hats into the ring. Paris and Toronto have both made recent bids. Athens and Beijing both failed with bids before they subsequently won. No matter how good the London bid is technically, we must acknowledge that winning will be difficult. Our bid will have to be highly convincing. It will have to be well organised and professionally run, it will need dedication and hard work and it will cost a substantial amount.

The final decision by the IOC will take place in July 2005. In the intervening years, we will have to show that our proposals are sound, fully funded, protected against risk and capable of being delivered on time. We would be up against cities that, in some cases, will have much more of the necessary infrastructure in place. We are also advised that we would have to demonstrate our commitment by beginning key elements of the work well in advance of the 2005 vote. We would have to begin land assembly, as well as construction of at least one key venue and probably a 50 m pool for the aquatic centre. In all, we would expect to have to incur costs of more than £200 million even before the vote took place.

London is a great city, however. It is truly a world city, the match of any likely competition. None of the competitor cities has a unique winning proposition. Although winnability is a tough test, London remains a force to be reckoned with.

In conclusion, affordability, deliverability, legacy and winnability are the key tests. We know that people love the Olympics and that they are stirred by the prospect of people coming to Britain. Our poll of public opinion, the details of which will be released to the Select Committee tomorrow, suggests that 75 per cent. of people in this country are in favour of the games coming to London, and by and large believe that expenditure on health, education and transport are all more important.

Kate Hoey: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Tessa Jowell: We know that it would be wrong to waste money on an expensive bid if we had little chance of winning. We know that a commitment to the Olympics must boost regeneration to the east of London and must not hold it back. We know that a commitment to the Olympics must fit with a broader strategy for sport and not be at the expense of the rest of sport. And we know that a commitment to a London Olympics must not starve the rest of the country of the resources that it needs to develop sport or divert much needed resources from other key priorities.

This is an important decision, and the arguments are finely balanced, which is why before reaching a conclusion the Government are examining with such rigour and such care the extent of the liability that would fall on them. The Government are genuinely open minded, and I look forward to the opportunity to hear the views of right hon. and hon. Members throughout the House.

4.46 pm

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): I begin by reminding the House of my entry in the Register of Members' Interests.

Mr. Tony Banks (West Ham): What has that got to do with this?

Mr. Greenway: I am not sure that it has anything to do with this, but it is important to remind hon. Members that we have a wider experience than just politics.

This debate is very welcome and also very timely. It really is "make your mind up time". I note that the Secretary of State has made it clear that the Government intend to reach a decision by the end of January. We want that decision to be "Yes". There is no time left for any further prevarication.

My hon. Friend the Shadow Culture Secretary, the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale), is currently in Standing Committee on the Communications Bill, and so is unable to be here for this important debate.

Mr. Banks: This is the hon. Gentleman's big chance.

Mr. Greenway: I have had other big chances before. I like to think that they have at least maintained my position. I have been doing this job for almost three years, and that speaks for itself. With no disrespect for the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) or the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), I am still in my job.

On 6 August, the day after the conclusion of the Commonwealth games, I issued a press release which included the following statement:

"A well-organised, viable British bid for the 2012 Olympics will naturally enjoy the support of the Conservative Party."

We had twice supported an Olympics bid for Manchester and then the Commonwealth games bid, which was a huge success. I will not go into party political semantics as to who was responsible for that success; I make the point simply to say that our support for this bid is not opportunistic. It is part of a pattern of support which we showed when in office.

Since August my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition has made it abundantly clear that the Conservative party supports a London bid for the 2012 Olympics. I hope that this debate will equally convince the Government that the prize of a successful bid to stage the 2012 Olympics is so great that they should throw the full weight of the Government behind the bid and work with the British Olympic Association to secure the games for London.

The public have every reason to expect support. I found in my cupboard a copy of *Labour's Sporting Nation*, the Labour sports policy document published early in 1997, which I think was written by Lord Pendry, for whom I have the greatest respect. It is not what he said that I wish to quote; it is what the Prime Minister said:

"if we are to make the most of the wealth of talent we have in this Country, we must be ambitious as we strive to put Britain back on the sporting map. That is why a Labour Government will provide full support for British bids to host international sporting events."

That is my first quote—I shall use more later.

The Arup report concluded that if all levels of government and other agencies are committed to a common proposal, the potential advantages of the 2012 games centred on the lower Lea valley could be developed into a world-beating bid. We see no reason to doubt the wisdom of that conclusion or to challenge the BOA assessment that a UK bid based in any other city would be unlikely to succeed. A London-based bid, however, has an excellent prospect of success if, as seems likely, the International Olympic Committee decides that under rotation the games should return to a European venue in 2012. The Secretary of State is right—it is not an exact science, but that is the current indication.

The Minister for Sport, in an interview in *The Daily Telegraph* on Saturday, said:

"My job as sports Minister is to put the case for sport."

The case for sport is indeed overwhelming and has been well documented in both the summary of the Arup report published by Ministers and the BOA briefing for our debate.

I should like to emphasise four points. A successful bid would secure significant benefits for elite sports, with Team GB greatly increasing its medal haul, as other host nations have traditionally done so; create a lasting legacy of coaching and sports infrastructure, with 100 training venues throughout the UK, including refurbished school gyms, leisure centres and community facilities; create a legacy of encouragement and motivation so that more young people will take part in sport—for me, that is one of the most important reasons to support a bid; and secure the right to host the Paralympics, in which we lead the world—a not insignificant opportunity.

Mr. Hawkins: I strongly support what my hon. Friend is saying in my capacity as the deputy chairman of the all-party group on sport and leisure. However, does he agree that in her amazingly downbeat reading of her solemn brief the Secretary of State showed no enthusiasm for this matter and overlooked the clear evidence, starting in Los Angeles, of profitable gains to be made from the games, which *The Daily Telegraph* has highlighted in its very good campaign for a London bid for 2012. Back in 1984, Peter Uberroth made a profit of £260 million for sport, and $6 billion was generated through long-term advances in the tourism industry. Should we not be talking about that legacy when we look at making a bid?

Mr. Greenway: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and will make three points in response. First, we cannot always repeat the experience of others—we have to make a hard-headed assessment of the position in London. I shall return to that point in a moment. However, my hon. Friend is right that a huge public subsidy is not necessarily needed if the games are organised correctly.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Greenway: I want to respond to my hon. Friend and make two further points.

Secondly, *The Daily Telegraph* and other newspapers have, we hope, run a successful campaign and have certainly made the argument for holding the games here. Thirdly, this debate is an occasion on which we ought to try to have as much unity in the House as possible, so I will not overindulge in the opportunities that have presented themselves to me, save to say that at the end of the right hon. Lady's speech, I felt that we had reached half-time with a stalemate nil-nil draw. I hope that we can move on and put some balls in the net.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Greenway: I shall give way to the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) first, then the hon. Members for Leigh (Andy Burnham) and for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas), but that is all.

Mr. Banks: I join the hon. Gentleman in hoping that we will bid for the 2012 Olympics, not least because many of the facilities will be in my patch of east London. As he has talked about the Ove Arup report, will he tell the House whether he agrees with its cost estimates? He has rather brushed over that, but I am sure that he will come back to it. My instinct is that the report grossly underestimates the cost of mounting the Olympics.

Mr. Greenway: I intend to come to that in a moment. I will give way to the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas), whom I am going to mention in a minute.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: I am grateful for that advert. Does the hon. Gentleman share my concern that if Arup has underestimated the cost of bidding for and staging the Olympics, it has probably also underestimated the benefits of the games? It admits to using the relatively conservative figure of £610 million for tourism income, when Sydney benefited to the tune of £2 billion, and Barcelona estimates that the net economic impact of its games was £11 billion.

Mr. Greenway: The hon. Gentleman has, as ever, anticipated precisely what is in the text that I have prepared for the House. I will give way to the hon. Member for Leigh.

Andy Burnham (Leigh): The hon. Gentleman mentioned the public subsidy that would be required. It will be significant, as we have heard. We also know that the Conservative Front Bench is committed to a 20 per cent. cut in public spending. In that context, is the hon. Gentleman absolutely clear from which budget he would take the money required to stage the Olympic games?

Mr. Greenway: I shall address that issue as well. The Conservative party is committed to ensuring a viable and strong economy, and the Olympic games would provide a huge opportunity for wealth creation and job creation, and for more revenue, not less, for the Exchequer.

I want to finish my assessment of sport, then I must make some progress. New facilities need only be permanent when that is essential, and when a long-term future has been identified. We accept, as the Secretary of State said, that the future use of a new main stadium to host the games remains to be settled. It is important that

[Mr. Greenway]

we face up to that. We do not, however, believe that that is an intractable problem, as the initial 80,000 capacity could be reduced, depending on its future use. The Secretary of State mentioned two such possible uses.

Sport will not be the only winner at a successful Olympics. This debate gives us the opportunity to highlight the significant wider benefits of staging the Olympics in London. The benefits from social change alone that a successful Olympic bid would secure would include a more fit and healthy generation, less crime and vandalism, and the regeneration of a wide area of deprivation in east London—the constituency of the hon. Member for West Ham. Those gains would, in themselves, justify hosting the Olympics here in Britain.

I also suggest that all the interests for which the Department for Culture, Media and Sport is responsible would benefit from a successful Olympics bid; not just sport, but tourism, culture, art, heritage, the media and broadcasting. All would be major beneficiaries of a UK-based Olympics in London. The English Tourism Council has said in a letter to the Culture, Media and Sport Committee that

"the 2012 Olympic Games in London represents a major 'once in a generation' opportunity for UK tourism. It will strengthen London's claim to be one of the top five cities"—

in the world—

"and promote huge opportunities for tourism in the rest of Britain, both during the Games and for many years afterwards."

The ETC goes on to give examples of how tourism in the north-west of England benefited from the Commonwealth games, bringing in some 300,000 additional visitors and more than 6,000 new jobs. I well remember visiting the British Tourist Authority office in Dublin when it launched its campaign for more people to come to the north-west from Ireland, both in association with the Commonwealth games and more generally.

The Arup report estimates up to £610 million from additional tourist revenue but points out, as the hon. Member for Harrow, West mentioned in his intervention, that Sydney benefited by some £2 billion from new inbound tourism. I would like to suggest to the House that London is a bigger attraction with a much larger hinterland for potential visitors from the near continent. The inbound tourism sector—a major growth area—includes events, conferences, meetings and incentive travel, and would also be expected to experience a significant increase in associated activities if the Olympic games were held here. The British Tourist Authority estimates that, on current trends, business tourism could account for as much as 45 per cent. of inbound tourism expenditure by 2010. In opposition, the Government agreed with that and the sports-tourism link. The document to which I referred earlier states that international events provide a major boost to the earnings of our tourism and hospitality industries and the Exchequer. I agree with that.

As the Secretary of State knows, the Athens Olympics will revive the cultural Olympiad, and United Kingdom arts organisations will participate in those events. There is a great opportunity for us to do the same in London. The world would spend 16 days being reminded through television of our unique heritage that is unrivalled in so many ways. More than 3 billion viewers watched the Olympic games in Sydney. Our broadcasting media will have the opportunity to demonstrate what we know: they are the best at covering major international events. One has only to compare the coverage of English or British teams overseas with that in Britain to appreciate the difference.

Can we succeed? The British Olympic Association recently said:

"we don't want to bid for the sake of bidding. We want to bid to win".

I understand the Secretary of State's desire to ensure that a bid has a good chance of success—her "win-ability test"—and I agree with her analysis. However, we should not ignore the positive benefits of the bidding process. The bid that Manchester submitted helped to stimulate regeneration in that city and in the north-west and put the area back on the map.

News coverage of the bidding process, especially the visits of leading athletes and sports administrators and the International Olympic Committee, would encourage interest in sport, provide significant media opportunities and help those who promote tourism to the UK, especially to London. Positive promotion of London and Britain during the bidding period would support the process and the chance of winning.

Public support and cross-party unanimity are vital. It is rumoured that more than 75 per cent. of those polled by ICM for UKSport said yes to the games. Will the Secretary of State or the Minister tell us whether that is accurate? When do they expect to publish the results?

It is important to be open and candid about costs and the significant challenges of delivery. The point has been made that it is easy for the press to be on side now but off side when bad news arrives. Let us therefore have the whole truth. We would have liked the Ove Arup report to be published in full, but we understand that parts of it are confidential and could give competing bidders an advantage.

Nevertheless, more of the report could have been published, thus helping to confirm the quality of the study, and the advice and conclusions given to Ministers and other members of the key stakeholders' group. Will the Minister confirm that the Ove Arup study represents the most thorough in-depth analysis in advance of an Olympic bid and that no major city that wanted to stage the Olympics has had the benefit of such a detailed, location-specific analysis?

In an interview in *The Daily Telegraph* on Saturday, the Minister said:

"We should not be events-driven, we should be strategy-driven."

He has made that point previously. However, surely any long-term strategy should be ambitious and aspirational. If we want our athletes and our teams to win more often in international competition, the strategy for sport should include the aim of hosting international events such as the Olympics, World cup and so on. Again, I pray in aid the Labour party's pre-election document—*[Interruption.]* I believe that it was written by a first-class parliamentarian who is a good friend and now in the other House. The document states:

"A Labour Government will provide full support for British bids to host international sporting events."

There it is—it could not be clearer, and one could almost describe it as an election pledge. The public need to ask the Government to think about realising that pledge, notwithstanding the fact that, as I accept, challenging problems do exist.

The Minister for Sport also said:

"we don't want a Wembley or a Picketts Lock".

We certainly agree with him on that, but if we want to learn the lessons of these problems, we must first understand that they occurred under this Government. We also need to decide what we think is more important. It is perhaps tempting to argue that we should not make promises and enter into commitments that we cannot deliver on, and that is certainly one lesson of the bid for the 2005 world athletics championships. *[Interruption.]* The Minister is agreeing with me, but it was his Government who made that promise.

Arguably, the real lesson is to understand more clearly the role of the Government. They cannot adopt an arm's-length approach, just dipping in and out when it suits them. A successful Olympics would require strong leadership at the highest Government level, and—I say this with no disrespect—probably not even within the right hon. Lady's own Department. Someone must be able to ensure prompt and decisive action across Government Departments, but that did not happen with Wembley, as those of us members of the all-party group on football who took part in the various meetings with the planners of Brent quickly discovered.

The key stakeholders group represents a good start. Ironically, of all its members only the Government have yet to make clear their position, or to voice any real enthusiasm for the bid. We also need to engage a fourth partner: the business community.

On costs, Ministers have challenged some of the conclusions of the Ove Arup report, and they now suggest that the cost of hosting the games could be as much as £5 billion. A different figure seems to be given every time that a statement is made, and we shall have to read tomorrow's *Hansard* carefully to find out the exact figure that the right hon. Lady quoted. However, the Arup consultants do not accept that their original costings of £1.8 billion were wrong to anything like the extent suggested. Having re-examined all their costings—they based them on 2002 prices, as the key stakeholder group asked them to do—they believe that the new figure should be no more than £1.9 billion.

On a like-for-like basis, the Arup figures are robust, but if the Treasury were to use inflated prices on costs, and if no account were taken of the increased revenue that the same inflation costings would generate, it would not be surprising if a higher figure came out at the end. The calculations must be made on a like-for-like basis. There is a real suspicion that costs are being loaded just for the sake of it, and the Government seem determined to adopt a "more than worst case" position in their deliberations, over-egging the contingency to take account of other failings such as the millennium dome.

Bob Russell *rose—*

Mr. Banks: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Greenway: No, I will not give way. I know that many Members want to speak, and I am getting close to the end of my remarks.

If we want to learn a lesson from the millennium dome, it is to have a clear view on whether the investment under consideration is likely to deliver value for money. I suggest to the House that an Olympics bid, with all the advantages that I have outlined, is far more likely to deliver long-term, lasting value for money than the millennium dome. Whatever figure is arrived at, the total cost is not the cost to the Government. The cost to Government is much less because of grants from the IOC, sponsorship and inward investment.

The hon. Member for Harrow, West got it exactly right when he said in the Westminster Hall debate of 26 November that he sponsored:

"I believe that London could host the Olympic games at a much lower cost than is perhaps widely accepted at the moment."—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 26 November 2002; Vol. 395, c. 45WH.]

I agree with his analysis. Having commissioned the Ove Arup report, the members of the key stakeholder group need to show more support for its conclusions.

It is argued that the money could be better spent on hospitals and schools—the philosophy of despair advanced by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) in an interview the other day. That approach misses the point completely. It ignores the benefits for health, education and the fight against crime that would accrue from increased sporting activity among young people. The Government's own performance and innovation unit confirmed as much: the news may have been slipped out on the last day before Christmas, but the unit confirmed that those would be major benefits.

The approach that I have described also fails to recognise that a London-based Olympics would be the engine of increased economic activity, especially through tourism and regeneration. That would lead, in turn, to more jobs and more revenue. That potential was instantly recognised by the Conservative party and it underpins our enthusiasm for the project.

A London Olympics would be the inspirational catalyst for the realisation of many worthy and vital public policy objectives. For us, it is inconceivable that the Government should say no unless they can demonstrate some deep-seated and major practical obstacle that is not apparent from the Arup study. A lack of political will would not be tolerated by the public at large as the only reason not to go ahead.

In her closing remarks, the Secretary of State said that Britain was a "can do" society. There is no better way to prove it. I urge Ministers not to be afraid of failure, but instead to recognise the enormous benefits that our nation, not just our capital, would derive from success. Ministers should recognise the tremendous feel-good factor that a successful bid would bring. Above all, they should recognise that a country with the fourth largest economy in the world, which gave so many sports to the rest of the world and which has a capital city still widely regarded as one of the world's finest, ought to be capable of hosting the world's biggest sporting event. If Athens can do it, why cannot London?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Before I call the next speaker, I remind the House that Mr. Speaker has placed a 10-minute limit on all speeches by Back Benchers in this debate.

5.12 pm

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport is conducting an inquiry into the potential Olympic bid. I am Chairman of that Committee, and I speak today in a personal capacity, not on behalf of the Select Committee. In the near future, the Committee will publish its report, by which I shall be bound, whatever it says.

Considerable reference has been made to *The Daily Telegraph*, which yesterday published an interview with Matthew Pinsent, a member of the International Olympic Committee. He asked a series of questions to do with who, where and how: he wanted to know where the village was going to be, how the transport would work, and so on. This afternoon, I want to ask a series of questions to which we need precise answers. Those answers must cohere if a bid is to be justified. Regardless of my personal opinion about whether a bid should be lodged, I believe that a bid will not be tenable if the questions that I am about to ask are not answered in that way.

I hope that my questions can be answered at the end of the debate by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Sport, or when Ministers come before the Select Committee tomorrow. If not, I hope that they can be answered pretty soon, as I think that the country has a right to the information.

The first question has to do with costs. So many different estimates have been made of the cumulative costs of staging the games that it is impossible to be sure about the matter. The hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) quoted the Ove Arup report, but only a short time ago the *Financial Times* said:

"The cost of a London bid for 2012 is estimated at up to £5.4bn, with almost £3bn coming from public funds."

We must be clear that the cost of any public sector project will be higher than originally estimated—and probably a lot higher. The building of the British Library cost seven times the original estimate, and took 30 years rather than the estimated five. The costs of such projects tend to balloon, so it is important for us to know them.

I want to know the cost of the projected stadium in east London. Can it be built? Can planning permission be obtained? What is the timetable, and can the stadium be built on time? If not, it is not worth building.

I note that my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) is present. The whole basis of Sport England's support for a rebuilt Wembley stadium, and the whole basis on which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State eventually agreed to Government support for it, was dual use: the stadium was to be used for athletics as well as football. This morning, the Select Committee heard that there would be a new stadium for athletics, and that Wembley would be used for football and for nothing else. What, then, was the point of that laborious process involving Wembley stadium?

Then there is the question of the village. Where will it be? How much will it cost? What about planning permission? What is the timetable? Moreover, several swimming pools are to be built, of which one, apparently, is to be retained. Where will they be, what will they cost, and can they be built on time? We need to know those things, or we shall walk blindfold into a morass.

There is also the utterly bewildering question of transport. The Ove Arup report assumes that although Crossrail is not due to be completed until 2016, it will be available in time for games that will take place in 2012. The Mayor of London—whose main contribution to transport has been to make the west end static for months on end—says that he hopes for Government approval of Crossrail very soon. He says:

"Trains could start running by 2011, providing a crucial boost to London's chances of holding the 2012 Olympic Games".

In its submission to the Select Committee, however, Transport for London says:

"The transport strategy described in this paper assumes that Crossrail is not in place for the Games. The provision of Crossrail would provide significant additional capacity... However, the transport strategy should not be made contingent on the successful delivery of Crossrail by 2012."

Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kaufman: If the hon. Gentleman does not mind, I will not.

So there are three different attitudes to Crossrail, which is the key link to a stadium in the east end of London. We must also bear it in mind, even if the timetable is accepted, that such projects are not necessarily delivered on time. The Jubilee line extension to North Greenwich was supposed to be ready at least two years before the opening of the dome, but it was ready only a few days before that—and the budget was so enormous that Mr. Tunnicliffe of London Underground did not even know what it was. We cannot operate on the basis of huge blank cheques being signed by our constituents, as taxpayers, without knowing what will happen.

It is all very well for the hon. Member for Ryedale to say that there is huge public enthusiasm for this in 2003. Of course there is—*The Daily Telegraph* and the *Evening Standard* are running campaigns—but what will happen in 2005 or 2006 if things start to go awry, as the track record shows they will? The Government will be about to be re-elected or will have been re-elected, and all the people who are now saying that we should bid for the games will regard this target as an Aunt Sally. That is what happened with the dome, which the Conservatives started. Indeed, under the Conservatives, £120 million was given by Sport England for Wembley stadium. It does not stop them being opportunistic.

Mr. Andy Reed (Loughborough): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Kaufman: No, because I have only two minutes left.

There is also the question of organisation. Huge tributes are paid to the success of the Commonwealth games. The only reason they were a success is because my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister appointed my right hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) to create a structure for the

Commonwealth games that had not existed before. That enabled the athletes and volunteers to achieve their superb successes.

We have no such structure now. Instead we have a concordat whereby a bevy of organisations all put their oars in. If we are to bid for the Olympic games, we must have a Minister in charge. The New South Wales Minister for Sport, for example, was in charge of organising both the games in Sydney and the transport.

It is not negative to ask these questions, it is essential. Unless the answer to every one of them is yes, our constituents will say that spending £5 billion or £6 billion—$12 billion was spent on the Barcelona games—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

5.22 pm

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): I welcome the opportunity for this debate. I am proud to sport my Team GB tie. I admit that it is not very subtle—in fact, it makes the ties of the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) look positively anaemic. However, it has the advantage of making Liberal Democrat support for the bid clear from the outset.

Our reasons for supporting the bid have been well rehearsed, and the Secretary of State set out many of them in her opening remarks. The bid is not London-centric. There is no doubt that other towns and cities would benefit, whether from holding camps, football competitions or the resulting increase in tourism. The Secretary of State referred to Barcelona. Between 1991 and 1997, Barcelona witnessed an increase in overnight stays of 70 per cent. That is the sort of increase that we could hope for in tourism in London and beyond. She spoke about the need to spread the benefits of tourism and to export it to other parts of the country, which we support.

We should support the bid for reasons of regeneration. Parts of east London have objective 2 status and clearly need regeneration. The bid could act as a catalyst for transport projects such as Crossrail. Even if Crossrail were not completed, having a portion of the line up and running would contribute significantly to increasing capacity in London, which would benefit the games. Furthermore, it is possible that, as happened in Greece, EU grants might be available to assist with some transport projects.

A further reason for supporting the bid is the fact that Londoners back it, as other Members have said. The Government pushed ahead with something that Londoners most certainly do not support—the part-privatisation of the tube. Why do they not push something that Londoners actually support? The issue does not affect only Londoners. Disparate bodies such as the *Evening Standard*, *The Daily Telegraph*, the Mayor and the London chamber of commerce and industry agree on their support for the bid, as do many London Members of all parties.

Sport has an impact on health. If the Olympic games took place in this country in 2012, it would act as a strong motivator to our children. The health of many children is at risk because of our sedentary lifestyles and the games would give them something to aim for. Ten and 11-year-olds who turn away from sport as they become interested in other things might focus on the date of the Olympics, perhaps because they want to compete or because it would make them realise the importance of keeping fit.

The Secretary of State referred to the competing demands on funding—for example, for hospitals or schools. However, when the costings are being drawn up, I hope that she will take into account the effects on health that could result from motivating a generation of youngsters to participate in sport and, we hope, to maintain that participation.

I understand that Arup's presentation to the Select Committee was not entirely convincing, but if there is more confidence in the figures, we ought to support the bid. As the Cabinet will discuss the matter on 30 January, we have written to all its members asking them to back London's bid; we want them to be lions rather than chickens. As Members will have noticed from my tie, the lion is part of the British Olympic Association logo. The Government must trust our capital city and the entrepreneurial skills and drive that exist there and throughout the country—the can-do culture—to deliver on this important project.

There are as many reasons for opposing the bid as there are for supporting it, as the Secretary of State outlined so even-handedly. There is the problem of overrun that we have experienced in many sporting projects. Surely, however, the Government and the private sector have learned their lesson and we can complete projects on time and to cost.

There is a risk that we might lose money if the bid is not successful. One cannot really deny that. However, the Government push local authorities to bid for specific grants or pots of money. If they are encouraging local authorities to do that, should they not do the same?

When the Minister for Sport sums up, I hope that he will confirm that the overriding reason for the Government refusing to back the bid is not their concern that the Mayor and the Government cannot work together. That would be a great pity. If that is one of the Government's reasons they will, in effect, have been hoist by their own petard. They were scared to give the Mayor a full range of powers, so they have been left in a situation where neither party has sufficient power to push the matter through. I hope that the Minister will confirm that that will not stop the bid going through.

What is needed from the Government? First, we need the Government to state their full support for the bid. We have heard a series of very mixed messages. Obviously, the media will spin what Ministers have said to a certain extent, but today's *Evening Standard* quotes the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport as pouring cold water

"on the campaign to stage the Olympics".

She is also quoted as saying that Ministers had not yet made up their minds. Yesterday, *The Times* said that the Secretary of State was going to argue that there was

"a very strong sporting case"

for hosting the Olympics. Such messages do not give us a clear picture as to where the Government stand on this important issue, and her remarks have not clarified matters further. When the Minister sums up, perhaps he will make the Government's position a little clearer.

We need a clear statement from the Government on what they expect the costs to be. Arup has said that the Treasury might have to contribute about £500 million,

[Tom Brake]

but the Government suggest that £2.5 billion of public subsidy might be required. We need to know how they arrived at that figure. What does it include and how much is for projects such as transport that are necessary but that have been brought forward? How much could be described as "wasted"? If the research commissioned shows that the bid has a significant chance of success and that the games will make a small surplus, as Arup have suggested, or will require a costed and controlled financial contribution from the Government, I hope that the Minister will be able to guarantee that the Government will come out in favour of the bid.

As a country, we are capable of sending, at just weeks' notice, an armada to the other side of the world. Our scientists are working with other European scientists to land a space probe on a comet—in 2012, as it happens. A rocket will have to be launched in the next couple of weeks and a probe will loop round Mars and twice round the earth before it slingshots to make contact with the comet in 2012. However, it seems that the Government's prevarication and poverty of ambition are such that we could, as a country, be deprived of the opportunity to bid for and host the world's greatest sporting event.

5.33 pm

Alan Keen (Feltham and Heston): Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), I am a member of the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport. I will not prejudge the issue; I will listen to the evidence tomorrow and to this debate. However, I am also chair of the all-party football group, one of the vice-chairs of the all-party sports group and joint secretary of the Lords and Commons cricket team, so I should at least express an opinion. It will not be surprising if I say that I support the bid. *[Interruption.]* Attack is usually the best form of defence, and I shall leave it to my hon. Friends to determine when I find time to enjoy myself.

The Olympics have a special value for me. I may not look it but, in 1948, I was old enough to be taken by my father, who was a racing cyclist, to Herne Hill to see the sprinting. We had the disappointment of seeing Reg Harris being beaten by the Italians in that event and in the tandem sprint. I also have a special memory of Windsor great park. Among the only 12 words in French that I remember are, "Allez, allez, allez".

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): Only nine left then.

Alan Keen: I obviously know another nine words. The hair still stands on the back of my neck when I picture the scene. One of the French team had blown a tyre and his whole team stopped while he changed it. When he got back on his bike, the call was, "Allez, allez, allez". I can remember being greatly inspired by the Olympics when I was a kid. They were drab days, of course, in 1948, after the war, and the Olympics made a big difference to everyone. I can remember the atmosphere in London and being taken to Harrods to see the special display that was then in that shop. Those games were an inspiration to many people.

If we bid for the Olympics in 2012 and our bid is successful—I expect that it would be—the games would also inspire many young people and show those in my constituency and the four London boroughs that would be the main hosts of the 2012 games that the world is multicultural and that the fact that they exist in a multicultural community is just as things should be.

The world may not be so drab now, but it is pretty drab for those who live in housing that is not of an acceptable standard and whose jobs are not as good as they would want them to be. The Olympic games can make a big difference to people. They can teach young people that it is well worth living healthily. The Olympics inspired me to work hard and keep free of crime—at least until I was elected to the House in 1992, anyway. Let us hope that the games will have that effect on many young people, especially those in east London. We want people to aspire not only to be world champions, but to look outside their own lives and realise what they can achieve if they set their minds to it.

I want to give one or two examples to illustrate what sport can do. Again, I very well remember the 1966 World cup, when Middlesbrough, which I still regard as my home town, hosted the North Korean side that played three first-group games and knocked out the favourites, the Italians, in the first round, probably helping England to win the 1966 World cup. Hon. Members should bear in mind the fact that that was only a few years after the Korean war, yet the people of Teesside took the North Koreans to their hearts and supported them. Thousands travelled to Liverpool to watch the North Koreans play at Everton's ground in the quarter-finals.

That friendship still exists today. The North Koreans from that original team came over here, and Mr. Speaker entertained them in his apartments. We took them to Middlesbrough, and there was a special dinner for them. The man who scored the goal against Italy was led out on to the pitch at Riverside and allowed to put the ball into the back of the net, as he did way back in 1966. Sport can cement friendships. On the day the North Koreans arrived here, we heard the first announcement that North Korea was not going to get rid of its nuclear weapons programme, but friendship through sport can overcome many difficulties.

It is worth talking very briefly about the Manchester experience. We members of the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport were lucky enough to attend the opening ceremony of the Commonwealth games, and I attended the first day of athletics the following day. I stayed in one of the hotels at the airport and travelled on public transport and then on the special buses out to the stadium. The Manchester people were absolutely thrilled and proud of their city on that day. The athletics were good and the opening ceremony was brilliant, but what I remember was that the hair on the back of my neck stood up—sport often causes that—as I listened to the conversations on the train and on the buses. People were really inspired; they were proud of their city.

More than anything else, what came out of the Manchester experience for me was the fact that those on the volunteer scheme—I met a lot of the volunteers, and they had given up work to do the job or had already retired—were so proud to be part of something. Many of them realised that they were able to give something.

probably at a time in their lives when they thought that they were past it. Again, we should build on that example.

I do not want to digress too much from sport, but we are all concerned about the future of the nation's health and social care system. As fewer people work and more are retired, how will we look after people? A controlled, co-ordinated and supported voluntary system will probably help to get us through the next half a century, when public services cannot get the funding that is needed because the working population is getting smaller and smaller. Apparently, 50,000 people have already volunteered for the Greek Olympics, and what we learn from such volunteer schemes can be applied outside the sporting world.

We are 10 years away from the 2012 Olympics, and if we set our minds to it, we can win this bid. I put out a call to those who are much higher up in politics than me: if we put our minds to it, we can use the Olympics as an example, and if we really work at it, the only conflict in the world in 2012 could be the competition at the Olympic games in London.

Before I finish speaking, I want to thank those who have already worked hard, such as the BOA and others, to advance the case for London. I hope that we make the bid, and that we are successful, because I believe that much more will come from that outside the world of sport.

5.41 pm

Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): There is good news and bad news. The good news is that the Government are having this debate, which all of us in London appreciate. The bad news is the downbeat assessment by the Secretary of State of the outcome of the Government's deliberations. She made a realistic assessment, but it left many questions open. Given that only two weeks remain before the Government must make a decision, I cannot help feeling that they must already have answered some of the questions, and the bid is getting the thumbs down. I hope that the outcome of the debate will be to give the Government confidence to support the bid.

First, I support the bid because it is no less than the catalyst for the regeneration of London. Secondly, I have pride in my city, and I believe that the Olympics will leave a legacy of which London will be proud not only for decades, but, possibly, for centuries. The three most important factors in making an Olympic bid are confidence, confidence and confidence. I see confidence in the British Olympic Association, confidence in the other place, confidence in every business group in London, and confidence in British Airways, which is supporting the proposals. The London boroughs have confidence, as has the London Development Agency.

There is hesitation, however, on the part of two of the three major stakeholders: the mayor and, sadly, the Government. The Greater London Assembly has confidence, but today's debate has not really focused on the key role that the Mayor of London will play in the whole process. He is a central figure in the process: he has published a press release saying that he is in favour of the bid, although his support is fairly lukewarm, if he does not mind me saying so. He answers a few questions but then returns to arguing with the Government about the underground.

The question is whether the Mayor of London will offer the leadership that the bid deserves. If London ever needs a champion, he is the guy to be the champion, and this is the moment to do it. He should organise the shadow London organising committee. Where is the shadow Olympic development agency? He should be arguing the case and banging the drum. The difficulty—this is a serious point—is that his communications with the Government are not perfect at the moment so it is difficult to have a dialogue with them over something so central, in which he is a key player and in which he must lead the bid.

The Government are the second hesitating stakeholder, seemingly for two reasons: first, cost; and secondly, they had their fingers burned over the Wembley stadium and the dome. The Government should learn the lessons from Wembley. They saw where they went wrong, and now they can get it right. The lesson of the dome is even clearer—the problem was that they did not know what they were going to put in it, and they did not know what they were going to do with the dome afterwards.

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): It was your project, not ours.

Richard Ottaway: And we would have made a better job of it. What did the Government expect, leaving it to the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) to decide what went in it? It is crystal clear what the dome is for. All the infrastructure will produce a legacy that lasts for a substantial time.

Those of us who have not had a chance to consider the detailed Ove Arup report because it has not been published are slightly in the dark, but it is possible to get a feel for its approach. It says that the cost of hosting the Olympics will be £1.8 billion and explains that although the cost in Sydney was £2.2 billion, the revenue was more than double that, at £5.5 billion. Other cities will also benefit from events such as football and sailing. We should remember that the cost will be spread over nine years. The difficulty is trying to do a cost benefit analysis of civic pride.

There are a couple of things on which the Government have to show confidence and leadership. I agree that that must come from the very top, from the Cabinet and lower levels of the Govt. The conservative estimates of Arup were that the games would break even. If they are well planned, well marketed and well run on a world-class basis, and not in a half-hearted way, they can be profitable.

The role of the private sector will be important. The dome and the Excel exhibition centre are in place. We will, of course, need a new stadium. Frankly, it will have to be built by the private sector and, as the Secretary of State said, it must have an anchor tenant. Perhaps the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) can tell us whether West Ham football club might be interested in taking it on.

Mr. Banks: I am a Chelsea supporter.

Richard Ottaway: I know where the hon. Gentleman spends his Saturdays; I also where his votes come from.

[Richard Ottaway]

An anchor tenant of that nature is important and the Olympic village will become low-cost social housing afterwards.

The Secretary of State's second test is deliverability: can we do it? The answer is yes, of course we can. Much of the transport infrastructure is already in place. The Jubilee line goes right up to the lower Lea valley. Whether it needs another station or platform remains to be seen, but it has the capacity of taking 400,000 passengers a day. We have the docklands light railway and the Stratford channel tunnel rail link. If the Minister wishes to revisit Conservative Government decisions, perhaps he will agree that locating the terminal in Stratford was a visionary decision. We may also have Crossrail. The games could take place without it, but if that can be completed, so much the better.

The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) asked whether the transport infrastructure could cope. In the morning rush hour, between 7 and 10 o'clock, 1.1 million people come into London on public transport. If we contrast that with the estimate of 500,000 people a day moving around during the Olympic fortnight and a peak movement in the morning of 150,000, it is clear that the existing infrastructure can cope providing it is running efficiently. On any Saturday afternoon, the grounds of Arsenal, Chelsea, Crystal Palace, Charlton, Millwall and Twickenham turn out at a quarter to five. The infrastructure in those areas copes with hundreds of thousands of passengers and we can cope with the extra people who come to the city because of the games. We can deliver. We have the hotels and airports and can build the necessary infrastructure.

So let us consider the legacy. Manchester is a good example because it has been left with decent stadiums and facilities from which it can benefit. It can rightly be proud of those. The games will give a tremendous boost to the sporting culture. London has many world-class facilities and it can become the sporting capital of Europe. There will also be economic benefits for the constituency of the hon. Member for West Ham. That area has some of the highest unemployment in London, so it is a great place to locate such an economic development. The benefits are obvious; for me, the whole question is a no-brainer.

We come to the final test, which is winnability. Can we win? Can we see off Paris? It is down to us. If we are confident, if we have the leadership and if we go ahead, we will win. If we are half-hearted, unsure and hesitant, we will not. This is a unique opportunity. By 2012, it will be 60 years since we last had the Olympic games in London. To delay would be an absolute disaster. I understand that our next opportunity would be 2024, and by then the land in the east end of London will almost certainly be developed and unavailable. This is a golden opportunity. Let us face it—if the capital city of the world's fourth largest economy cannot stage this bid, it does not say much, does it?

5.50 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (West Ham): I thank the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Richard Ottaway) for the nice things that he said about my constituency. We are grateful for his support, and he is always welcome to come and have a curry with me in the East India Tandoori. There are plenty of curry houses and they serve good dinners.

Obviously, I have to declare an interest, although it seems that most Members have declared it for me. Most of the proposed Olympic site is in east London; 50 per cent. of it is in Newham, and a substantial amount of that is in my constituency. Naturally, but not for that reason alone, I support the bid. I fully believe that there will be long-term economic and sporting benefits not only for London but for the country as a whole. Having said that, and knowing how much my area will benefit, we should bid for the games only after the most rigorous, dispassionate and objective assessment of the costs and benefits leads to that conclusion.

If we are to proceed, it is essential, as hon. Members on both sides of the House have emphasised, that the Government demonstrate their total commitment, both financially and politically, to the bid. Without that there can be no success and it would be folly to contemplate bidding. We also need to be aware of two inescapable basic facts. First, the organisers and supporters of major sporting bids invariably overestimate the revenues and benefits and underestimate the costs and difficulties. That seems to be almost an immutable rule.

Secondly, bids are usually launched amid intense media and public enthusiasm, but as soon as the first problems are encountered, the supporters who have been cheering from the sidelines largely disappear or become prophets of doom. They cross their arms and say, "I told you we should never have gone for it in the first place." We must be wary of listening to siren voices, whether they are those of Opposition Members, the *Evening Standard* or *The Daily Telegraph*. We must say, "If you're going to support the bid, you must continue to support it when the problems emerge."

Problems will emerge, because every bidding city has run into problems. Athens, Sydney and Barcelona ran into problems, and we will run into problems. Will we be able to count on those who have been huzzaing from the sidelines? Frankly, I think not. It seems to be one of the harsh rules of politics that if it all goes well, someone else takes the credit, but if it goes badly, the Government take all the blame, so it is little wonder that Ministers are treading very carefully. They are on a hiding to nothing. In the end, all the rhetoric in this Chamber is no substitute for a critical examination of the facts. If we go for the bid, everyone has to sign up, preferably in blood, and that includes the media, who are so negative when things go a bit awry.

Turning to the costs, my instincts and bitter experience tell me that Ove Arup's projections, both for the bid costs and the capital costs, are a gross underestimate. It is not just public projects that go over budget. A private project such as the channel tunnel went grossly over budget. I have seen costs estimates ranging from £1.8 billion to £5.4 billion. The Government would be wise to take the thick end of that estimate—£5.4 billion—and add a further sum. Then they might come somewhere near the outturn budget. Any optimistic estimate of costs at this stage, which there always are, should be ignored. If they get it wrong by overestimating the costs, they are quids in. If they get it wrong by underestimating the costs, all the problems

will come their way. We should examine the matter closely and assume that all the costs that we have been told so far are an underestimate.

When I went with the Secretary of State on an inspection tour of the east end sites, I pointed out to her that the regeneration of most of those sites and the investment in Tower Hamlets, Hackney and Newham will take place eventually, because it is such an obvious area for development, if one looks at the map of London as a whole. Clearly, the impetus of the Olympic games coming to London will make that development happen so much faster, providing, as I said at the outset, that the Government are fully signed up to the bid.

Crossrail has been mentioned, and it is a good case in point. London and the south-east desperately need Crossrail. That has nothing to do with the Olympic games at all. We have needed Crossrail for decades. We should have had Crossrail before we had the Jubilee line extension. It has been one of the facts of transport life in London for ages. Crossrail is essential to the success of an Olympic bid. I know that the Government support Crossrail and will be providing the money for it, so it seems sensible to bring that money forward and add it into the bid costs. We need Crossrail, whether or not we get the Olympics.

I shall deal with some of the other aspects. The after-use of an Olympic village in the east end of London is obvious. It will provide a large concentration of affordable, decent, new housing in an area that desperately needs it. We can see the benefits coming through immediately. Crossrail and other transport improvements will be good not just for the Olympic bid, but for the whole of the south-east region. The village will provide us with decent, affordable houses. We begin to see how a bid stacks up in terms of its long-term economic benefits.

There is a different problem arising from the after-use of the Olympic stadium. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have discussed the matter. An 80,000-seater Olympic stadium is far too big for athletics. Even if it were scaled down to 20,000, it would still be too big. Clearly, as the hon. Member for Croydon, South suggested a moment ago, the Government need to look for a football club to take it over. West Ham is a possibility, and so is Tottenham. I might add, having read the *Evening Standard* tonight, that with Craven Cottage being sold off by al-Fayed—there's a surprise, I might add—perhaps Fulham might be a candidate. Knowing football fans as well as I do, I recognise that it is a lot easier to make those suggestions than to bring them to fruition. It is a problem that we need to consider.

The boroughs in the east end will be worried about inheriting sites and facilities that no one wants to use or which are under-utilised. It is not just the capital costs that matter at that point, but the revenue costs. We cannot afford another dome in the east end of London. The dome came in on budget, but we did not have any set idea of what the after-use would be. When I was a Minister, I went to see my right hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) when he was the dome Minister of blessed memory and told him that that would be an ideal site for the Olympic games. Unfortunately, he did not see any sense in that, and we still have a very empty dome.

In summary, a successful Olympics are a wonderful showcase for a city and a country and could provide long-term economic benefit, particularly in terms of transport, jobs and regeneration. We should go for the bid. It is important for London and its status, but as I have said time and again, it has to be done on the basis of a cold, calculated and even cynical view of the costs and benefits. It is easy to hear people in a pub on the Romford road, where I am, say that we should go for the Olympic games, but whatever public opinion says now, when the problems come in, we can sometimes find that the people who were cheering us on have all disappeared. That is the bitter experience of the past. That point is not downbeat, but realistic. Unless we are realistic, we will find ourselves running into difficulties.

Finally, will the Secretary of State bear in mind the Olympic truce? Anyone who re-reads the founding principles of the 1894 congress will see how the political, cultural and economic objectives of the Olympic games were stated and how many of them have now been lost. I hope that she will consider that point.

6 pm

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Beckenham): We have just listened to a most fascinating contrast in styles. When we read *Hansard* tomorrow, we will see that the message from the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) is pretty similar to that of the Secretary of State. However, we got a "can do" message from the hon. Gentleman, while from the Secretary of State, we got not just a "can't do", but a "won't do" message. That is very sad, as having an Olympic games in London is the most exciting and thrilling prospect that we have to look forward to. I hope very much that the message from this debate and all the work that the Secretary of State says that she has set in train will change her attitude to a "can do" one and move it away from the negative and very low-key response that we got this afternoon.

I should like to point out to everybody who has mentioned Crossrail, which is a key part of any Olympic bid, that contrary to what the hon. Member for West Ham said, I understand that London Regional Metro has just formulated a proposition that it is putting to the Government in which the private sector would build and run the project without any cost to the Government and in time for the Olympics. I hope very much that the Secretary of State for Transport will hear the message from London Regional Metro that it can deliver Crossrail on time and at no cost to the public purse.

The reason I wanted to contribute today was not to put in a second bid for the site of the Olympics, as there is clear agreement that it should be in the east end of London, but to raise the constituency issue of the future of Crystal palace. The Secretary of State will know Crystal Palace well, as it is next door to her constituency, although it lies wholly in mine. It has been the national athletics centre and is still very well used as an athletics centre. I am sure that Ministers will know that the lease that Sport England has on Crystal Palace is due to come to an end, and that it had a full repairing lease. There are £20 million worth of dilapidations to the centre to be made good when Sport England gives up the lease, as I understand that it plans to do. There have been negotiations about a very exciting and innovative renovation, working with Bromley council, and a situation in which minimum dilapidation costs are paid and the whole thing reverts to Bromley.

[Mrs. Jacqui Lait]

I do not want to go into the ins and outs of the situation, which are far too tortuous. Indeed, I am conscious that a lot of hon. Members want to speak and I do not want to take too long on this point, but until a stadium is built in the east end, there will be no athletics venue in London for grand prix events other than Crystal Palace. Once a stadium is built in the east end, it is possible that it may continue as an athletics stadium after the Olympic games, but it sounds more likely that a football ground will be used. So London would be left yet again without a venue for grand prix athletic events.

There is a real need for the Government to make absolutely clear to Sport England what they see as the future of Crystal Palace, so that London is not faced with an interim situation in which there could be no grand prix athletics events at all between the end of this lease and the Olympics events and beyond. That is the crucial matter that the Government have to clarify, because I am sure that, without that pressure from the Government, Sport England will dither and duck and dive so that we may be left with no athletics for London held in London and no grand prix events.

I very much hope that the right hon. Lady and the Minister for Sport will take on board this constituency point, which, while it directly affects me and everybody in Bromley, is also key to the future of athletics provisions in London. It is also key to attracting the elite athletes, a group whom, with their investment in sport, they are trying to develop not just in London but throughout the rest of the country. If there is no venue, it will be a very sad day for athletics in London.

6.6 pm

Mr. Graham Stringer (Manchester, Blackley): I should like to make it clear that I believe that at some time in the future it would be right for this country to host the Olympic games. In many ways, I regret the advice that I shall give to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, which is not to support the British Olympic Association in its bid for the 2012 Olympics. I regret it not least because I formed many friendships with members of the BOA when they supported the previous two British bids for the Olympic games, in 1996 and 2000.

There are three prime reasons—one could have a longer debate and go into many more—why the Government should not, in the next two and a half weeks, rush into a bid for the 2012 Olympics. The first reason, which annoys me the most, although it is probably not the most important issue, is that every other time this country has decided to bid to host the Commonwealth games or the Olympic games there has been a national competition in which any city in the country that wanted to bid to host them could put its case forward and it would be considered by the Commonwealth Games Council for England or the British Olympic Association. On this occasion the British Olympic Association has decided that it can only be London. I find that completely unsatisfactory.

It may well be that, in competition and under examination, it turns out that London is the best bid. I doubt it, because over the past 18 years or so London has bid three times, twice to host the Olympic games and once to host the Commonwealth games. Each time when the issues that are important to hosting the games—transport, legacy, the local political structures—have been examined, London has been found wanting. I believe that if the British Olympic Association organised that competition as it has in the past it would look at the political structures in London, which are defunct, look at the relationship between the Mayor of London and the Government, which are not good, and have second thoughts. It would examine the transport structure in London and find that it would be very difficult to host the Olympic games within London.

Mr. Banks: I would ask my hon. Friend to clarify the point about London having bid before. We had the Olympic games in 1908 and 1948, but I do not remember our being a bidding city. We might have been interested in becoming a bidding city, but it was at a time when we had no one to represent London at local government level, because the Conservative party had abolished the Greater London Council.

Mr. Stringer: I am sorry if I was not clear. London tried to be the bid city for both the 1992 and 2000 Olympic games, as well as the 2002 Commonwealth games. When its case was examined by the appropriate bodies, it was found wanting. Such an examination should have been undertaken on this occasion, not least to assure the Government and everybody else of the viability of the bid.

Tom Brake: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that the BOA did not receive advice that, from an international perspective, only London would have competitive status, or that that advice was wrong?

Mr. Stringer: I was going to come to the reason why the BOA made that decision after receiving advice on an IOC survey. Before I answer the hon. Gentleman, I advise my right hon. Friends on the Front Bench not to take seriously anything said by the Liberal Democrats in support of an Olympics bid, as they opposed holding the Commonwealth games in Manchester, even though they supported such a proposal in the Chamber. That is exactly the kind of problem to which my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) referred.

On the specific point made by the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake), the IOC conducted a survey in 1994 after the failure of a previous bid. IOC members, some of whom have since been sacked for corruption, found people who were willing to say that only London should be considered. Over the years, I have talked to IOC members, and a body of them holds that view. There is also a body holding the opposite view—six of the last eight cities chosen to host the Olympic games have not been capitals. The most important power of IOC members is their power to choose a bidding city, and they do not tell the absolute truth when asked which city they will support. The voting population is 100 or so, but when we talk to bidding cities we find that their votes add up to about 500.

The Government are mainly interested in the issue of whether London and Britain can win the bid. I do not believe that they can, partly for the reasons that I have already given It was a mistake not to hold a competition

for other parts of the country to bid, and it is now difficult to get them to back an Olympics bid. I also agree with my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham—if we spend the public money envisaged by the Government, that sum is almost guaranteed to double. At a time when the health service, the transport system and the criminal justice system are not perfect, within six months of a bid many people will say that the money spent on it and the facilities required should have been spent on health. One of the enormous strengths of the Manchester bid was the fact that, until the very last minute, when the Government put in £30 million and Manchester city council put in £30 million, we did not use ratepayers' or council tax payers' money—that advantage will be absent from a London bid.

It has been assumed in our debate that the successful bid will come from a European city. Toronto and New York made increased television rights part of their case, so it is highly likely that many IOC members will be seduced by the prospect of having more money. Atlanta, not the most attractive city in the world, managed to win the 1996 bid basically because of the television rights it offered. The value of such rights is always higher when the Olympics are held in US time zones.

There has never been a time when British sport has had a weaker position in international sport's corridors of power. A small number of people make and have influence over decisions. We have two members of the IOC but, as far as I know, we do not have a single officer in international sporting federations for any of the recognised sports in the summer games, which puts us in a weak position, particularly when combined with the legacy of bad feeling after Picketts Lock and the bid for the world athletics championship. On that occasion, we promised to do something, but failed to do it, and that is remembered.

It is also remembered that, apart from at the Commonwealth games, we have not performed at that level for many years. We have been going backwards. It is false logic to say that because we organised the Commonwealth games in Manchester very well, we can also organise the Olympic games well in London. That logic does not follow when we look at the different projects that have taken place in London: the Wembley fiasco, Picketts Lock and the dome, for example. Those projects were not supported nationally, and they have given us a bad reputation internationally, in the case of two of them, and nationally in the case of all three. There is a long discussion to be had about whether we could win the vote. I do not believe that we can, at our current strength in international sport and with our recent legacy.

I realise that my final point will not be popular with hon. Members from London. If London represents the best bid, which has not been proved, we also have to ask ourselves whether the bid is a national priority. The Minister for Sport, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn), regularly tells us about regional disparities, and about the fact that London is, with the possible exception of Luxembourg, the richest region in Europe, while every other English region performs below the European average. If we are going to put investment into east London over and above the investment that would naturally occur, when more public money per head already goes into London than anywhere else, will that make regional disparities greater or will it lessen them? Frankly, I do not believe that spending what may well be £10 billion in London is a national priority when we have those regional disparities. If London is the answer to that level of investment, it is a very strange question.

6.17 pm

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): I must confess that I instinctively support the enthusiasm shown in the positive comments about sport made by my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway). I am a keen sports fan and, without going too far down memory lane—I could not go as far as the hon. Member for Feltham and Heston (Alan Keen)—I, too, recall the first time that I came to London to watch a sporting event. It was the Ashes test match at Lords in 1972, and it has left me with a very positive approach towards sport over the past 30 years. I am sure that that experience is replicated by millions of schoolboys and schoolgirls.

I share some of the concerns expressed by the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks). We must take a hard-nosed view of this issue and I know that he, too, is a keen sports fan. One might ask how any London Member of Parliament could possibly oppose these plans, but we have to ask whether this is a realistic proposition, or whether there is a great danger that, in spending the £13 million to £30 million that it would cost simply to put a bid together, we might be throwing good money after bad.

We have seen the story of the London Olympics bid in recent weeks, and, as ever in recent London governance, it has been a shameful mix of Mayor Livingstone's grandstanding and central Government's dissembling over their financial obligations—to the capital, at least. Of course, the Mayor desperately needs a PR win. He has an election of his own to run within the next 18 months, and there has been an apparent lack of delivery in the two and a half years he has held office. Transport is in a desperate state, and my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait) rightly pointed out that Crossrail is key to what we are trying to achieve in London. Above all, the Mayor sees this as a way of distracting attention from his own failures with a prestige bid, but we should not be fooled. This is opportunism masquerading as vision. Rather like King Midas in reverse, anything that Mayor Livingstone has touched has tended to turn to dust.

I know that we have all tried to have a positive outlook in this debate but, without being over-critical, I believe that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport has lived up to its reputation as one of the most monumentally useless Departments of Government. Its lack of clout means that the Treasury's view prevails too often. An Olympics bid would detract from other sporting priorities. I was sorry that the Secretary of State put the dampers on by saying that schools, hospitals and transport could suffer. I should like to believe that that would not happen. However, other sporting priorities throughout the United Kingdom would inevitably suffer if we won the bid.

Many hon. Friends drew attention to the great worry that the Treasury appears to have changed the financial goalposts several times in recent weeks. The initial report suggested a subsidy of approximately £495 million. Even on the Secretary of State's figures, that sum has increased to £2.5 billion, possibly rising.

[Mr. Mark Field]

After the Wembley fiasco and, perhaps more important, the Picketts Lock debacle, when financial squabbling resulted in our being forced to give up the 2005 world athletics championships, we must ask whether there is a realistic chance of winning a 2012 Olympics bid in the next two years. We cannot assume that the International Olympic Committee has suffered collective amnesia.

I am worried that the Government want to get out of a hole and are keen to find a pretext, as the Secretary of State showed today. We must wait and see what happens in the Cabinet discussions in a fortnight. The Government would ideally like to find a financial or, at worst, logistical reason to walk away from the bid. Perhaps the decision will depend on the "win-ability test", whatever that means. The Secretary of State did not make that any clearer during her comments.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): Is the hon. Gentleman personally in favour of bidding for the Olympics? Is he expressing unequivocal support for Conservative Front-Bench Members' positive view of a bid?

Bob Russell: The Secretary of State refused to say whether the Government supported the bid.

Mr. Field: It is a rare occasion on which I take advice from the hon. Member for Colchester (Bob Russell), but he is right. I have spoken for five minutes; the Secretary of State's speech was six times as long, yet we did not get an answer to the question that the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan) asked.

I personally support making a bid, and I should like the Olympics to take place in London. However, I am worried about "win-ability" or other tests. If we have no viable, realistic chance of winning, there is little point in making the bid. We need leadership, support and vision, unfortunately not from the Conservative party but from the Secretary of State.

Mr. Reed: I agree with many of the hon. Gentleman's points, but the matter comes down to a crucial question, which the Secretary of State and the hon. Gentleman should answer. At what level does the cost become unacceptable—£2 billion or perhaps £5 billion? I support the bid, but there must be a cut-off point at which it becomes too expensive; the Government cannot write a blank cheque. Has the hon. Gentleman any views on what that figure should be?

Mr. Field: That is a fair point. As the hon. Gentleman knows, my constituency contains this country's economic powerhouse. The hon. Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Stringer) pointed out that even in depressed economic times, London tends to provide a net output of £15 billion to £20 billion. That contribution alone probably means that we should run with the bid if there is a realistic chance of success.

Clearly, the tourism benefits could be huge. A conservative estimate is £750 million. The benefits for my constituency, which contains the west end and its hotel trade, would be enhanced not only during the Olympics but before and after the games.

However, it would be best for the Government either to commit themselves wholeheartedly to a bid for 2012 or to take the longer-term view of making a bid sometime in the future. Much depends on who wins the 2012 Olympics. If the winner is a non-European country, London would be in the running for 2016. Above all, I hope that Ministers, not only in the Department but throughout the Government, and especially in the Treasury, commit themselves to spending the next four years in the run-up to any formal bidding procedure improving London's infrastructure, especially its transport. Only then can Londoners be confident that our city is worthy of being home to the global showcase that we are considering.

6.24 pm

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): I wonder why we spent five years on Wembley, which we were told would be both a football and an athletics stadium, given that we may now have a new stadium in the east end of London. I find that extraordinary.

This morning, Sir Steven Redgrave said something to the Culture, Media and Sport Committee that struck me. He said that if London does host the games, many cities and towns in Britain will be partners in that project. We could put the Japanese team in Sunderland, which built the Japanese imperial navy and is now home to Nissan. As a result, five or six years of cultural and artistic activity could be established in Sunderland. Peter the Great came to Chatham, which is near my constituency, to discover how to build a modern navy, so we could create Russian events there. The whole of Britain could be partner to a London bid that is in fact a British bid.

Sir Steven also pointed out that the British Olympic Association spent £1 million on building a brilliant rowing centre on the gold coast to win more gold medals than we have ever won before. Look what that did for Brisbane, even though the games were actually held in Sydney. The games would have a regenerative impact on the whole of Britain, because the overseas Olympic associations—of which there are more than 150—will ask us to build first-class facilities, not all of which could be sited in London. We should therefore bear it in mind that this is not just a London bid.

I am not sure why we need a stadium that can hold 80,000 people. Can the Minister confirm whether that figure relates just to the opening and closing ceremonies? As I said this morning, on 31 December 1999, 300,000 people were in The Mall, and some 3 million people were in London, to celebrate the millennium in the most spectacular way. We could bring a new buzz to the Olympic movement by changing the way in which the opening and closing ceremonies are conducted. We could celebrate the ceremonies by holding them among our people. I see no reason why we cannot twin with every city that has hosted the Olympics, and have an opening ceremony for them as well. We have the most amazing technology, so we can do all that. We could bring a different pizzazz and feel to an Olympic bid.

If we do not need a stadium that can hold 80,000 people, perhaps it would be better to build a smaller one. That would give West Ham United the chance to move, or enable athletics to make such a stadium its home. I should like confirmation of the 80,000 figure.

Wherever the games might be held, I wonder whether we might nick a few names to make the bid sexier. Instead of saying that it will be held in the east end of London, we could say that it will be held in "the royal city" or "the Olympic city". Perhaps we just need to brand the bid differently. At the moment, what we are saying is rather boring, and the bid needs to rise in our estimation. Have we considered putting an ambassador for sport in our Swiss embassy? FIFA and the IOC, the bodies responsible for the major sporting events, are based in Switzerland, and we need to be at that table. We no longer have political clout on the world's sporting bodies, and we need to get it back. I repeat that we should consider putting an ambassador specifically for sport in our embassy in Berne.

On the question of the best site, I take a deep breath and suggest that there is perhaps an alternative site. If the Government tick the idea that we should bid, I hope that they will allow an alternative bid from north Kent. *[Interruption.]* Hold on—hear me out. I have talked to Sandy Bruce-Lockhart, the leader of Kent county council. Three weeks ago, the Audit Commission gave Kent county council premier league status. Kent should be allowed to open discussions with the Government, because if its bid were accepted, there would be a single owner, rather than having to involve the Greater London Authority and four boroughs as co-hosts. We must consider organisation. The recent Commonwealth games worked because Manchester city council owned them. If the GLA is not prepared to own the Olympic games, they will not work. I want us to take a deep breath and allow Kent to make an alternative bid.

Mrs. Lait: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wyatt: No, I will not give way.

In the next couple of weeks, an education paper will be published. Many of the university colleges in London are in a mess, and many do not have student accommodation. The need to provide accommodation in the event of a successful Olympic bid gives us the opportunity to give Imperial college, University college, or Queen Mary college a new campus site. After the games, students could use that accommodation. We would need to find a working campus after the games, and the greatest legacy that we could provide would be to give Imperial college university status, and the chance to be as good as the great Massachusetts institute of technology.

We cannot do these things in two weeks. We cannot bully the Government into saying on 31 January, "Okay, we are going to bid." We need to look rationally at the alternatives and the costs of the investment.

How do we cost the bid? I have a couple of ideas. In July 1997, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor created what he called a domesday book. What is in it? I could probably find £1 billion by privatising Channel 4, and another £4 billion by privatising BBC 1. I am sure that the book contains 10 properties worth at least £1 billion.

The Wall street market is up 20 per cent. this week. It is said that if that market rises in the first week of January, it will end the next year another 20 per cent. higher. The City of London is recovering too, so the price of projects from the Chancellor's domesday book would be higher than what could be achieved at present. I should like some of what is listed in the book to be costed.

Who will own the games? As I said, a bid from north Kent would mean that there was only one owner. That should be taken into consideration.

Finally, the Select Committee noted in its 1999 report on international events that such events require a Minister of Cabinet rank. That is most important: we used to have half a Minister acting in that role with the present Minister for Pensions, my right hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney), and he did a fantastic job. We need someone else to do the same job.

I want us to bid for the Olympics. I do not think that we have an alternative on 30 or 31 January, but we must be careful about rationalising the costs and looking at the opportunities open to us.

6.31 pm

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): Both personally and as deputy chairman of the all-party sports committee, I am totally and unequivocally in favour of a 2012 bid. I was delighted by the passionate speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) and by the support that he received from all the Conservative Members who have spoken. As my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait) said, that contrasted strikingly with the downbeat way in which the Secretary of State read from her brief. She accentuated the negative: if that was her being enthusiastic, I should hate to hear her damn something with faint praise. If she is meant to be a champion of sport, I am fearful of what the Cabinet will do.

I want to accentuate the positive in my speech. Hon. Members of all parties know of my passion for sport. I was never fortunate enough to be able to compete in an Olympic games, but I was lucky enough to do quite a lot of competitive swimming in my teens, including at international level. My coach was Charlie Wilson, who took the British swimming team to the 1972 Olympics and who remained involved in international swimming through 1976. I was lucky enough to host him at this House only a few weeks ago, after his recent recovery from a stroke. He is long past normal retirement age, but still coaches swimmers.

The captain of my swimming club, the Bedford Modernians, was the captain of the British Olympic swimming team at the 1972 games. I have seen what Olympians can do, as have all those in the House and outside it who have worked with them. I have seen the enormously positive effects that sport can have in turning around people's lives. That cannot be measured on a balance sheet. One cannot measure the positives accruing to the Australians from the success of their Olympic games.

The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) is Chairman of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee. Before that Committee has started taking evidence, he has already told *The Daily Telegraph* that he opposes a UK bid. It is beyond me to know how he can separate his role as Select Committee Chairman from his personal opinions. It is scandalous that so much doom and gloom should come from leading Labour Members.

The Government have set certain tests. I hate the word "winnability", which is an abuse of the English language, but the Government are right to say that there

[Mr. Nick Hawkins]

would have to be a legacy from the games. We must also look at the financing that would be necessary from now on.

The Government say that they do not want to bid unless they can win, and that they cannot fix the result. The Prime Minister is the antithesis of Bob the Builder—with him it is not, "Can we fix it? Yes, we can", but, "Can we fix it? No, I don't think so, so let's not go in for it." The Prime Minister should not approach the matter in that way. He is worried about his place in history, but if the bid were made and won, the games would not be held until long after his time. He is really worried about making an unsuccessful bid in what may well turn out to be an election year.

All Members must be very conscious of the fact that far more people in this country care about sport than about politics. None of us should forget people's passion for sport and the good that it can do in turning the young away from the drugs subculture, encouraging them to keep fit, reducing obesity and saving money for the health service. Such benefits cannot be valued in the Red Book. It is vital that we give proper weight to those factors as well as so-called winnability.

In the few moments I have left now that our speaking time has been reduced, I want to mention extra ways in which funds can be raised. I said in an intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale that we should think of Olympic successes, starting with Los Angeles, and the amount of additional money that has been put into tourism as a result. The hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) said that the costs always go up and the income figures always prove to be inflated, but that is not true: although the costs tend to increase with inflation, estimates of the income generated by recent Olympic events have been too low.

Various commentators have drawn attention to sources of income that have not even been considered in the Government's report. The possibility of re-energising the lottery through money provided by a successful Olympic bid should not be underestimated. The columnist and distinguished former editor, Donald Trelford, has pointed out that, unfortunately, the lottery has lost £1 million a week because of controversial—and, in my view, wrong-headed—decisions that allowed the community fund to provide grants for things that were not worthy of grants. But if we said that the lottery would support a successful British Olympic bid, it could indeed be re-energised.

There is a lot of business support out there. The London bid for 2012 has already received support from the London Business Board, a coalition consisting of CBI London, the London chamber of commerce and industry and London First. Unprecedentedly, those bodies have sent the Prime Minister a joint letter pointing out that the bid represents a "unique opportunity" for London. They say:

"The Government's wholehearted commitment to the bid is essential. To be successful requires central, London and local government to work together effectively as a team throughout the bidding and implementation stages. Business is keen to play its part. To gain business's full support, we must be wholly engaged in the development process from now on."

A DCMS official spokesman has told the press, "We are worried. What the Government is keen to avoid is starting with a low figure and then seeing it rise dramatically so people end up thinking, 'Oh Christ, where is the money coming from?'" Apart from the fact that that is a disgraceful thing for a Government spokesman to say to the press, I think that we can give answers on where the money is coming from. It can come from business and from re-energisation of the lottery.

Let me end with a constituency point. Only one venue would be the same in the 2012 Olympics as it was in 1948. The only place where the Olympic shooting event could happen is Bisley, a range that is partly in my constituency and partly in that of my hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Mr. Malins).

It is vital that we take at face value the words of the hon. Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt). An Olympic bid can help the whole country, including my constituency, which would be one of the venues. I unequivocally support the bid; I only wish the Government showed real signs of doing so as well, but I do not think that they do.

6.38 pm

Mr. Gareth Thomas (Harrow, West): Like the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins), I am enthusiastic about the bid, but I think the hon. Gentleman did its prospects no favours with his weasel words attacking my right hon. and hon. Friends for the way in which they have conducted the debate and the discussions in Government. I think they were entirely right to visit countries that have hosted the Olympics in the past and to assess the benefits, and I also think they have been entirely and consistently clear about the criteria they would use to decide whether a bid should go ahead.

Unlike my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt), I do not support the case for north Kent or indeed the case for Manchester. I am a passionate supporter of the case for London, which would accelerate the regeneration of east London—so long the poor relation of our capital. It would stimulate new investment in housing, which London and the south-east desperately need. It would also stimulate new investment in transport capacity and sporting facilities, which the Commonwealth games helped deliver for Manchester.

Before the last election, the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport published an excellent report on the decline of swimming in the United Kingdom, highlighting the decline in the number of swimming pools in London. Holding the Olympic games here would help generate investment in grass-roots sporting facilities, which London is crying out for.

Above all, the case for holding the Olympic games in London rests on the prospect of huge benefits to British business, from engineering and construction to tourism and conference industries. It would provide a powerful opportunity to stimulate new pride in London and Britain and to foster a new sense of ambition for many of the communities that would benefit directly from the Olympic games.

I recognise that the case for a London bid is finely poised and that the most obvious argument against it, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) said, is the cost. There are a number of estimates—will it cost £1.8 billion,

£2.5 billion, £4.5 billion or even £5.4 billion, which I saw flagged up in *The Sunday Times* only this week? The one financial appraisal made, which has been conducted by Arup, estimates that the net cost of holding the Olympic games here would be half a billion pounds. I am not an accountant, and I am not an advocate for Arup. Its figures may be underestimated, but those who criticise the Arup report should publish their assessment of why Arup has it so badly wrong. If Arup is wrong about the costs, it may also be wrong about the benefits of the games. As I said in my intervention on the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), Sydney benefited from £2 billion-worth of in-bound tourism and the net economic impact of the games on Barcelona was some £11 billion.

It is worth stating that Arup did not carry out its analysis in an ivory tower but before a reference group, which included some hard-headed civil servants from the Treasury, no less. Its analysis includes considerable cost overruns in the last three years when most of the construction work would take place. It is also worth highlighting the fact that the highest costs will inevitably be for the infrastructure—the stadiums, the swimming pools and warm-up tracks that will be necessary for the Olympic games to take place. However, those facilities offer a benefit long before and long after the Olympic games take place.

Some people, thinking of Picketts Lock and Wembley, fear that London cannot get its act together and deliver the games. However, London agencies regularly work together to deliver ceremonial and sporting events, and proper facilities for our tourists. To be fair to Manchester, the fact that the games held there were so successful is a powerful reminder that Britain could bid successfully for and deliver the Olympic games.

I agree strongly with the point of my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton and of my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey. We need a Minister for international events, of Cabinet rank, to organise the bid and work alongside Ministers in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. Manchester showed, albeit on a smaller scale, that the UK can be appealing.

The worst argument that I have heard against an Olympic bid is the suggestion that London—and, implicitly, Britain—does not need the Olympics. We are, after all, one of the world's great cities already and, unlike Sydney, we do not need to use the games to advertise the benefits of our city, because tourists flood here already. According to this argument, east London needs regeneration but the Olympic games would simply confuse or delay the plans that are already in place. Proud Londoner that I am, I think that such an argument reeks of complacency about our city. In a global culture, where information, money, jobs and business are moving in and out of countries ever more easily, the idea that we should pass up the opportunity to showcase our capital and our country to a massive international audience at their time of maximum receptiveness to the case for London and for the UK seems little short of lunacy. The Government could make no greater statement of intent about the case for regenerating east London than to launch a bid for the Olympic games.

There are people who say, rightly, that we might not win the bid and that New York may stand a better chance, given the emotion generated after 11 September, and the financial case that could be made. Paris, too, may have a better chance than us. The competition will certainly be tough. We may not win but we have a realistic chance of doing so; no less a figure than Jacques Rogge, the head of the International Olympic Committee, has made that clear. We may not start as favourite in the bidding competition but, given the British media's love of building a pedestal for its favourite projects or people and then tearing it down, perhaps that is no bad thing.

We need to be realistic with the people of Stratford, London and the wider UK about the prospects for an Olympic bid. A well planned, albeit unsuccessful, bid could still help to accelerate investment and regeneration in a part of the UK that has been crying out for that for much of the past 30 years. I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport will succeed in persuading the Cabinet to back the bid.

6.46 pm

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): One of the facts of life on the Opposition Benches is that we always seem to be opposing things. Being negative sometimes gets depressing so it is a great pleasure for me to endorse something enthusiastically. An advantage of being called at this late stage of the debate is that although I am short of time most of what I wanted to say has already been said.

I shall briefly reiterate what the Olympics would mean not only for London but for the country more widely. An important aspect of the bid is that it would give us a deadline for dealing with some of the problems in London—on law and order or transport. We keep talking about all those problems, but nothing seems to happen. If there were a deadline, we could finally sort them out.

The Paralympics were mentioned. All the facilities generated by a successful bid would be replicated for disabled people. They would come to this country from all over the world and that would give us the opportunity to ensure that our facilities in London and elsewhere were up to scratch and were the best in the world. We should flag up the importance of the Paralympics.

I do not want to echo the comments about the Secretary of State sounding downbeat on the radio, because she has been enthusiastically nodding throughout the debate, to show that she really loves the whole concept and will put everything into it. Of course, I do not blame her for sounding downbeat. The trilogy of Picketts Lock, the millennium dome and Wembley is a little depressing and gives the impression that the Department cannot even run a bath.

There are some successes, however: the Millennium stadium in Wales, for example. The bid would be an opportunity for London and for the whole country. Football matches would be held throughout the country—apart, I think, from Northern Ireland because there is not a big enough stadium there.

There will be opportunities for tourism. With our skills in that industry, I am sure that once people arrive in this country for the Olympics we will be able to persuade them to travel throughout the country.

[Mr. John Randall]

I am most enthusiastic about what the bid will do for our young people. We need to get a culture of sport under way and ensure that it brings fresh impetus to sport in schools and elsewhere.

As we know, the lottery has lost some of its popularity. I like the idea that the bid might bring some excitement back to the lottery and get the nation behind it again. I have pride in my country and in London—my city—but the Olympics would be an advertisement for British business and expertise and for the British people.

I am rather worried by the word "winnability". When athletes go out to compete—whether they are disabled or able-bodied—are they really thinking about winnability? Do they say that they will not enter because they may not win? They go out to try to win because they believe in themselves.

Of course, we must consider the bid carefully, because we cannot rush around spending lots of money. However if we do not go ahead with the bid, that will show an incredible lack of ambition by this country. It would be an opportunity wasted.

6.50 pm

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): If being a new Member making a speech were an Olympic event, it would be a sprint. We always speak at the end of the debate and we do not have much time.

I am not a London Member of Parliament; I represent a seat in the capital of Wales. However, I want to make it clear that I am a strong supporter of the bid for London to hold the Olympic games, for a number of reasons. The first is that Britain has not held the Olympic games since 1948. It is about time we did. Secondly, the bid has the potential to bring benefits to London, as many hon. Members have said, and to the whole country. Thirdly, I am pretty sick and tired of the country's growing reputation for not being capable of organising world-class events. We should be able to take on the challenge and to do it with enthusiasm and effectively. We can win the bid.

This country has held world events in recent years. The Commonwealth games are mentioned very frequently, but the rugby world cup has been ignored. It was held in 1999, with the final in Cardiff. The event was spread around the country and to Ireland and France. It was hugely successful and showed that this country can hold world-class events. I am not suggesting that the Olympic games are not much larger than the rugby world cup, but the evidence is that we can host such events if we get our act together. It can be done.

We should, however, be clear about one or two issues. Despite Manchester's laudable ambitions and the bids that it has made in the past, I seriously believe that no Olympic bid from Britain would be successful unless it were a bid from London. Ironically, that is also a weakness. Many Members have pointed to the weaknesses in London, not least the political weaknesses in the lack of cohesion between the Mayor of London and the Government. The failure of Britain to hold the 2005 world championships in London also represents a serious handicap. We must try to overcome it by bidding for events such as the Olympic games.

I believe that the bid for the world championships went wrong mainly because people gave in to the football lobby over Wembley stadium. It will be a huge white elephant unless it finds a tenant, as it will cost £700 million to build. Although I agree with the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) about the Millennium stadium, it is becoming a millennium millstone round the neck of the Welsh Rugby Union and it nearly bankrupted Laing's construction division. Although it cost more, the Welsh Rugby Union paid only £100 million for it, and £46 million of that came from the lottery. However, the debt on the stadium, even with the low interest rates that we have now, is already a millstone round the neck of the Welsh Rugby Union. It is actively considering selling the stadium.

The cost of Wembley stadium and the debt that will be carried on it will be huge. As I have argued all along, a Stade de France option should have been chosen for Wembley, as such a stadium could then have been used to host an Olympic games. If we are building an athletic stadium for the Olympic games in London, it is vital that it will provide a legacy and can be used by a football club afterwards; otherwise an 80,000-capacity athletic stadium will become a huge white elephant. Let us make sure that that point is built into the plans.

Despite that warning and despite what I have said about the Millennium stadium, it has proved a huge success. It is important that we remember the economic regeneration impact and benefit that can be brought to London and to other parts of the country by a London Olympic bid. I hope that rugby—perhaps its seven-a-side version—will be in the Olympics by 2012. Along with other events such as football, rugby could be played around the country. The competing teams will need training facilities around the country and I hope that some of them will base themselves in south Wales and in other parts of the country. However, I want to make it clear that, even if there were no direct economic spin-off to my constituents, as a Member of the UK Parliament I would support a bid for this country to hold an Olympic games.

Several people have been mentioned during the debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt) mentioned Sir Steven Redgrave in his very clever little name-drop during the debate. Well, I want to drop in a name that many people may not have heard of before. *[Interruption.]* The Whip is waving at me, but I will finish this point. Before Sir Steven Redgrave, Britain's greatest Olympian was undoubtedly Paul Radmilovic. I see nods of recognition around the Chamber. He was born in Cardiff; won four Olympic gold medals and competed in five Olympic games if the interim games of 1906 are included. He would have competed in two more if Britain had bothered to enter the 1904 games in St. Louis and if it had not been for the first world war. He won three gold medals for water polo and another gold medal in the four by 200 m freestyle relay. We have heard a lot about swimming, and, in the spirit of Paul Radmilovic, I wish to say that he would not shilly-shally about our bidding to hold an Olympic games in Britain. He won two gold medals at the 1908 games in London. Let us have an Olympic games here in 2012.

6.56 pm

Mr. Malcolm Moss (North-East Cambridgeshire): This has been an excellent debate, although a little curtailed by the time allotted. We welcome the Government's decision to hold this debate on a very important issue, and we look forward eagerly to the Government's decision in a few weeks' time.

I should like to reiterate the key points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) in his excellent speech. Although he pointed out some of the difficulties, he was positive and bullish about an Olympic bid and its likely success. That view is shared by all in the shadow DCMS team. It is still not clear, however, where the Government stand on this issue. Perhaps the Minister can come a little closer in his winding-up speech to mirroring my hon. Friend's enthusiasm.

Several hon. Members commented on the Secretary of State's rather downbeat contribution. That may have been because of her delivery or body language, but I am sure that she will want to give a slightly different impression from that which she gave. Indeed, with so many doubts being raised in her contribution, and with only two and a half weeks before a decision will be taken, my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Richard Ottaway) feared that a negative decision had, in fact, already been made. That view was endorsed by my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait), who bemoaned the impression of a "can't do", rather than a "can do" or, better still, "will do" mentality.

Most hon. Members spoke positively and supportively, none more so that the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas). The negative contributions came from northern Members, such as the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) and the hon. Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Stringer), both of whom challenged the costing and the provision of adequate infrastructure and housing.

The hon. Member for Manchester, Blackley went even further and challenged head on the accepted wisdom that London is the only possible location. Although his idea of holding a competition between London and other centres for the privilege of bidding for the 2012 Olympics has some merit, no doubt the Minister will confirm in his winding-up speech the Government's view that London is their only realistic choice on grounds of winnability alone.

There is no question among Conservative Members but that London is indeed the one and only location. We were grateful to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) for his support. He represents a northern constituency, but he recognises that London is indeed the only viable location throughout the United Kingdom.

Other hon. Members, particularly the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake), emphasised the fact that the United Kingdom's bid would be not just London-centric, but would involve many other regions and cities in this country. My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale emphasised the knock-on effect of investment in sporting facilities across the board and throughout the country.

My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South primarily supported London's bid in his contribution, particularly because of the opportunity that it will afford regeneration in the city. However, he referred to the role of the Mayor of London, who appears to have adopted a slightly ambiguous position. He says that he is for the bid, but he seems keener on the parallel improvements to transport and housing infrastructure. Perhaps the Minister will clarify in replying to the debate the significance, as he sees it, of the relationship between the Government and the mayor and whether the current political difficulties represent a hindrance or a benefit.

The Secretary of State referred in her comments on funding for a bid to the potential distortion of other areas of Government spending, and implied that if the choice were between money for schools and hospitals versus an Olympic bid, there would be only one outcome. In addition, she implied that the sporting community may have to adjust its spending priorities to accommodate an Olympic bid. That view was challenged by my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale and by the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey). Both expressed incredulity that, given the huge importance of the Olympic bid for the nation as a whole, the Government were not prepared to commit their resources fully to the success of that bid. Will the Minister confirm the Government's position on that when he winds up the debate? If the Government decide to back the bid, will they finance that independently of other investment in sport?

Mr. Reed: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Moss: I am afraid that I do not have enough time.

On costings, a number of contributors, including the Secretary of State and the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks), alluded to the underestimates, as they described them, of the Arup report. The question is: why does such a large discrepancy exist between the figures from Ove Arup and those from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport? On the one hand, it is £1.8 billion, while on the other, it is £4.5 billion to £5 billion. It is pertinent to ask the Minister to clarify which model is being used in the calculation, particularly in his Department. Are we comparing like with like in this instance? Why should we give greater credence to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport's figures, which are worked up by civil servants with little or no experience in analysis of this kind? Given that only a few weeks remain before a decision is taken, it is imperative that we have figures that are universally accepted as accurate.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale said, it is now time for the Government to make up their mind. It seems inconceivable to the Opposition that the Government could turn down this opportunity, given the case made in this debate alone in relation to regeneration in London, the economy as a whole, future tourism, the country's pride in its sporting achievements, the knock-on effects in terms of sport infrastructure and facilities, and the health and well-being of the nation as a whole. We want the Government's decision to be yes, and we want the full weight of Government, right up to the steps of No. 10 Downing street, to be thrown behind a bid. We believe that we can win, and if we believe that, we will win.

7.2 pm

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): First, I want to thank the 17 Members who have contributed to the debate this afternoon. It has been an excellent debate, and we can infer from the interventions that have been made that a consensus exists to move forward, which will be taken into account by the Cabinet in making the decision.

Some of the comments made in the House this afternoon have been unfortunate, as we are genuinely trying to make sure that the we engage the House properly in the decision-making process on a serious matter that will have an impact for the next decade. If the Cabinet agree to go forward, and our bid is successful, it will concentrate a lot of minds and involve a lot of expense, and I hope that there will be a degree of unity in the House to support that. I genuinely welcome the contribution of the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), who said that he would be very supportive and called for the whole House, the population outside and the media to get behind the bid, if the decision is taken to make it.

That is why I disagree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). It is about time we changed the way we make these major decisions: not by having a fancy dress parade around the country, but by having serious dialogue and discussion. If we had done that in relation to many major projects in the past, some very expensive mistakes, which have been made by Administrations of both parties, would not have been made. When we say that we are strategy driven, not events driven, it is important that we mean it. What has become clear to my right hon. Friend the Secretary and State and me as we have visited many of the cities that have staged the games is that an exit strategy must be in place. Consequently, when the games are finished—they all finish on a high—the infrastructure can be used in a sustainable way for sport or other activities, thereby providing added value. That is what the debate is all about. It will feed into further discussions, as we said in the PIU report, because the Olympic games are the mega-event.

Let me say at the outset that although people have tried to undermine the Department, it has used its power to engage in a partnership. I want to thank the British Olympic Association and the Mayor's office for coming together to fund the first cost-benefit analysis—the Arup report—which has formed the basis of our debate. Indeed, we have gone further than that. We have again engaged the BOA and the Mayor's office to discuss the differences in the figures. They are with their professionals at the moment working out the differences and ensuring that the terms and costs that go to the Cabinet represent a shared view of the tripartite.

I can go further than that and make an offer: the official Opposition spokesmen can see the Arup report and how we evaluated the figures. If we are to move in partnership and bat for UK Ltd., we all have to understand our approach. Unfortunately, one or two hon. Members made glib remarks. We could all do that, but we are trying to act in a partnership, within the terms of the modernisation of the House, so that we act in unison for UK Ltd.

We have held discussions with the IOC and its new president, Jacques Rogge. He is an extremely honourable man and it is clear that he wants to modernise the Olympic movement. As my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) said, he has returned to its fundamental principles. The president wants to remove the tarnished image of the Olympics. I hope that with our support he will be successful. Part of the modernisation is to make the games manageable so that most countries can run them. What Jacques Rogge is doing is right and I hope that his efforts will yield results by 2005, when the bid is made.

As I cannot address all the issues raised, I shall cover the main points. On the cost, no modern Olympics has taken place without a subsidy by the host country except the Los Angeles games, which came on the back of the Montreal games. The Los Angeles games used existing facilities and little capital. However, they received a heavy subsidy from the IOC, which wanted to ensure that the games after Montreal did not go into bankruptcy and again bring the IOC and the movement into disrepute. So every Olympic games except Los Angeles has received a state subsidy.

We are working through the broad figures with the BOA and the Mayor's office in a constructive way. It is Arup's view that the games will cost £3.6 billion and that the revenue will be £2.5 billion. That leaves a subsidy of £1.1 billion. As a result of the uncertainty over the 10 years, we have revisited the figures in a realistic, not a destructive, way. We have gained experience from the dome, Wembley, Picketts Lock and Manchester. We could also put Silverstone into the pot. Hon. Members who said that the civil servants in my Department do not have the necessary skills should retract that allegation. My civil servants are very skilful in such matters. We have taken their advice and revisited the figures to ensure that the Cabinet is given sound information. Our officials have worked out that the games would need a subsidy of £2.5 billion. We are working through that with the BOA, which challenged the figures to some extent, and I hope that we will agree a position that we can present to the Cabinet.

It is not for the BOA or the Government to decide the size of the stadium. That is a matter for the IOC and it is one thing that Jacques Rogge will investigate. There was some discussion at the last bidding process about whether we needed an 80,000 seater stadium. It is debatable, but we will see what happens. We will bid according to criteria laid down by the IOC.

Those who say that Wembley could be used for the Olympics are not taking into consideration the extent of the games. The Olympics are the biggest sporting event in the world, and they could not take place at Wembley, even if we wanted them to, simply because the area could not accommodate the athletes. We must remember that these are the finest athletes in the world, so we could not stick them on the tube and tell them to get over to Wembley from accommodation that may be 20 miles away across London.

The aim of the Olympic park is to bring together the facilities so that the best athletes in the world have access to them, with minimum disruption, and can perform at the highest standard. Anyone who thinks that we can build an Olympic village in Wembley is wrong. We have considered that, and I think that it would be extremely difficult even to put a warm-up track around Wembley.

We must consider the size of the Olympics and what it entails. Apart from the number of athletes, there are 20-odd events, perhaps more.

Mr. Banks: More like 30-odd.

Mr. Caborn: That is right. There were 17 events in the Commonwealth games, which was one of the largest Commonwealth games ever run.

I turn now to the questions asked by the hon. Member for Ryedale about the opinion poll. The results of that have been given to the Chairman of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, so that the Committee can consider them tomorrow. They show that 73 per cent. of respondents are in favour of the games, and that result is for people who were asked about the costs. In fact, about 81 per cent. of people support the bid, and I hope that people will consider that figure. Regional analysis of the poll results has been undertaken.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton asked about the project costs. I know that the Select Committee has gone through Arup's costings, and I hope that when its report is completed, it will give us a view on Arup's realistic assessment. Tomorrow we will present the Committee with evidence about the development of facilities that is needed, and we will try to answer questions on transportation.

Departments are still in the process of realistically considering the potential problems and cost implications raised by Arup. We will work through those and make sure that the Cabinet has the necessary information when it comes to make a decision. That is the job of the DCMS, as the lead Department for sport, and nobody can say that the Secretary of State has not championed sport in the quest to host the Olympics.

As the lead Department, we also have a wider responsibility to the Government. It is our job to co-ordinate the partnership, outside the Government, with the BOA and the Mayor's department, and to try to convince our colleagues within the Government. Sometimes that takes a little quiet diplomacy and a little persuasion, and sometimes matters are better kept out of the press. I hope that when push comes to shove, the press will be behind us all the way, as I know that the Secretary of State will be behind us, all the way.

I say to the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) that I, too, am wearing a tie. Mine is from Sapporo in Japan, where England beat Argentina. We both boast sporting ties this evening, but mine is more successful than his—at least we beat Argentina in Sapporo. I welcomed the hon. Gentleman's remarks, and I hope that the Liberal Democrats, including those in local authorities, will remain consistent.

Bob Russell: It is the Government we are worried about.

Mr. Caborn: The hon. Gentleman should not worry about the Government; he should worry about the Liberal Democrats. I hope that they will pass on the sense of partnership and unity in the House to their minions in local authorities who will, like their colleagues in Manchester, bash the hell out of the bid. I have no doubt however that the comments of Opposition Members this evening were genuine. If we decide to make a bid, we accept that they will support it.

I assure hon. Members that we are working with the Mayor's office. In the event of our making a bid, it would be a red herring and a dangerous sign to send from the House that there were differences between us on the project. The partnerships that we have forged with the Greater London Authority, the Mayor's office and the City—my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has been working hard with City leaders and the Bank of England to make sure that we know the attitude of the private sector—will stand us in good stead. A message should not go out from the House that there are major differences of opinion. There are not. We are working together with those other bodies to make sure that if we do make a bid, there will be unanimity.

May I tell my hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Alan Keen) that, in my opinion, his command of the French language is brilliant? What he said was true: one can know the price of everything and the value of nothing—

It being three hours after commencement of proceedings, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put, pursuant to Order [7 January].

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am seriously concerned that Parliament is not being kept properly informed of very significant changes in Government policy.

Over the past few hours, it has become evident that the Government are planning to make a statement tomorrow on Government policy on missile defence. It is being reported already on the Press Association wires, and the written press is preparing to report in detail, that the Government are minded to accept the American request for the use of the Fylingdales base in Yorkshire, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway). I hope that you will share my concern that the announcement appears to be being made outside this place, instead of in this place as a courtesy to Members and to allow proper scrutiny.

If that were not enough, earlier today a written statement was issued on further contingency preparations being made for possible military action in the Gulf. Little was made explicit in that written statement, but it is being taken by the informed defence press to mean that that constitutes the final decision to deploy 7 Brigade and elements of 4th Armoured Brigade, possibly comprising as many as 20,000 men. Although the Government may have made no final decision about that deployment, it again seems that they are trying to smuggle announcements out to avoid embarrassment and proper scrutiny, instead of being honest with the British people, Parliament and the armed forces. Will you express this concern to the Government and ensure that we have proper statements tomorrow on both subjects?

Mr. Speaker: This is the first that I have heard of the matter and the complaints that the hon. Gentleman makes. The best thing that I can do for him is to investigate the matter. I will reply to him as soon as I can.

ELECTRICITY (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) BILL

Ordered,

That, in respect of the Electricity (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, Notices of Amendments, new Clauses and new Schedules to be moved in Committee may be accepted by the Clerks at the Table before the Bill has been read a second time.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

HUMAN RIGHTS

Ordered,

That Mr Norman Baker be discharged from the Select Committee appointed to join with a Committee of the Lords as the Joint Committee on Human Rights and Mr David Chidgey be added.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

PETITION

Arms Controls

7.18 pm

Rachel Squire (Dunfermline, West): I am honoured to present a petition signed by 178 pupils of St. Columba's high school, Dunfermline, and organised by the school's Amnesty International youth group.

The petition declares that the current arrangements for arms controls are in need of improvement, and that the United Kingdom Government need to display a more robust style of leadership on the issue. The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to strengthen UK arms controls, make the export control system more open and accountable, and demonstrate robust international leadership in pushing for the adoption of tough regional and international controls on arms transfers.

To lie upon the Table.

Public Services (Isle of Wight)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

7.20 pm

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): I am grateful to you, Mr. Speaker, for offering me the opportunity to raise this subject in an Adjournment debate. Although the debate is about public services on the Isle of Wight, for reasons that will become apparent, I shall devote my speech almost entirely to health, and I thank the Minister for taking up the challenge.

I should like to acknowledge the hard work done by all those involved in the provision of health services on the island—and not only those at the front line, as the managers sometimes come in for undue criticism. I acknowledge with thanks the help that David Crawley and Graham Elderfield, respectively the managers of the primary care trust and of St. Mary's and the Isle of Wight Healthcare NHS trust, have given to me in preparing for this debate.

I wanted to raise four issues—dentists, financial allocations, HealthFit, as it is called, and the King Edward VII hospital at Midhurst—but the Minister and I had a little outing over dentists earlier today and I do not propose to repeat it. I shall therefore start with island health funding. The question that concerns many people on the island is whether we are to live a hand-to-mouth existence in health funding or whether the funding formula will explicitly recognise the island's needs. In autumn 2000, the case was made for recognition of the island's particular needs and it was referred to ACRA—the advisory committee on resources action—on 23 August 2001. ACRA made recommendations that led to Ministers turning down our case for the island's specific needs, and we were notified of that decision on 19 December 2001.

I recognise that the Government are putting an extra £37 million into the Isle of Wight primary care trust over three years, as was announced on 11 December last year. However, is that a recognition of the island's explicit needs or merely part of a funding uplift that the Government are imposing generally? The basis of the argument that has been advanced, which is set out in more detail in the document "The Isle of Wight Health Economy: The Island Factor", dated September 2000, is that the Isle of Wight is an atypical health authority or PCT. Indeed, it is a unique health authority—or PCT—as it is, first, an island. Things cost more on the island because of the cost of transport. There are diseconomies of scale on the island that cannot be met by merger with an adjoining health authority. Secondly, we have a population of 125,000 most of the year round, which is swollen to 350,000 by tourism in the middle of the year. Thirdly, we are one of only two non-ambulance trusts with responsibility for ambulances. Fourthly, our boundaries are defined not by arbitrary and easily adjustable lines on maps, but by something that is rather more difficult to adjust—coastlines and cliffs. Travel to the mainland takes about one hour and 45 minutes from St. Mary's hospital in Newport to the Southampton hospitals, or one hour 15 minutes to St. Mary's in Portsmouth.

The manifestations of our needs are that we have more consultant posts per head of population because they are needed to provide 24-hour cover. We have an

increased cost of specialist residential care. For example, when patients go to the mainland for cancer treatment, they need to stay at the Abbey unit in Southampton. In their condition, they are unable to take two sea journeys a day, five days a week for up to six weeks. That is an additional cost, and there are additional costs in running the ambulance service. Of course, there is also unused capacity. It was estimated in 2000 that those additional costs, which are unique to the island, amounted to between £2.4 million and £2.8 million.

I recognise that the Government may argue that those costs have been met in 2003 to 2006, but I ask the Minister to confirm whether those needs are explicitly met in the funding allocation formula for PCTs or whether it is merely a matter of luck. If they are explicitly met, how has the formula been changed to take that into account?

The assumption underlying our argument is not like those for Scottish islands or remote rural parts of England, where there is a population of fewer than 30,000 or where there are road links to other hospitals. It is that 350,000 people in the summer and 125,000 in the winter must have an accident and emergency service, and therefore must have the 24-hour cover that supports that accident and emergency service, which has been described by the joint consultants committee of the BMA as acute medicine, acute surgery, trauma and orthopaedics, obstetrics and gynaecology, paediatrics, a full anaesthetic service, ITU, CCU and HDU, pathology and radiology, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 52 weeks a year. That is a basic minimum without which A and E cannot function effectively or, indeed, safely. The excess cost of having that was £1.4 million in 2000.

The island also runs its own ambulance service and has made great efforts to improve the quality and efficiency of that service. The cost of patient transport is not covered by other activities as it is in other areas. I am asking the Government to recognise the continuing need for the accident and emergency service, for patients on the island to be treated within that golden hour within which they need to be treated if they are to have a good chance of survival.

That brings me on to a proposal that emerged only last week from the strategic health authority. It is bringing forward proposals which, if implemented, would undermine the argument that there is a minimum "must have" provision for the population as I have described. Last week it published Healthfit, a set of proposals with the effect of reducing from five to three the number of district general hospitals in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

I recognise, of course, the continuing need to obtain greater efficiency and improved patient care, but the health authority itself states:

> "It is clear that further centralisation *per se* will not be tolerated by communities."

It proposes two primary care diagnostic and treatment centres with a range of functions, and it looks as though it is proposed that St. Mary's hospital in Newport should be one of those centres. Two sites would lose under those proposals—Winchester, which, of course, can speak for itself, and the Isle of Wight.

It is curious that the document states elsewhere:

> "The issue of access in an emergency situation is particularly sharp for the . . . Isle of Wight."—

I certainly recognise that—

> "However, the emerging view of the Healthfit event was that greater thought needs to be given to emergency access to the mainland rather than treating the Solent as a barrier".

Let us examine what the closure of accident and emergency services means. It means that 2,000 people in February and 3,000 in August would have to travel to the mainland accident and emergency services. Air ambulances at present are used about once a month. Emergency transfer by ambulance and ferry can be undertaken within 35 minutes, but what would the walking wounded do? What would those who do not need an ambulance do? What would happen when the ferry was fully booked? Would private cars be able to jump the queue if it were claimed that somebody needed accident and emergency treatment? What would happen at night, when ferries do not run for two hours and the high-speed service does not run at all? What about the occasions—only two or three days a year, perhaps—when the high-speed ferries are cancelled, and those occasions—fewer, but there are still some—when all ferries are suspended? That has to happen when there is a force seven gale or worse. As the Isle of Wight Healthcare NHS trust has said,

> "There have been several occasions in the past few weeks where ferries were unable to run and helicopters could not fly. Safe transportation of patients in a critical condition has been shown, through experience, to be difficult and the last option of choice."

Indeed, it is not an option of choice at all, as my constituents know to their cost.

What about maternity provision? I had the privilege of visiting the maternity unit at St. Mary's on the Friday before Christmas. The report says that a relatively small number of units offering the most high-tech care to women were required. In terms of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, it was suggested that two units at Southampton and Portsmouth would be sufficient. The group recognised the particular needs of the island, which it says will need careful thought. My reading of that proposal accords with that of the overwhelming majority of islanders. The *Isle of Wight County Press* described the report as "explosive". A packed meeting of the community health council last night rejected the proposals. The trust says that islanders

> "will not take any change, meaning a reduction in services, lying down."

The strategic health authority obviously thinks that it is Moses and can make the seas part. I fear that it is more like Canute, because the islanders are not the children of Israel and accident and emergency services in Portsmouth are certainly not the promised land. If the Department of Health is really putting as much new money into the NHS as it says, the proposals should be unnecessary. Whether or not that is the case, they are unacceptable to my constituents and to me. I very much hope that they are unacceptable to the Minister, too.

Finally, I come to the receivership and possible closure of King Edward VII hospital, Midhurst. One hundred of my constituents were brought together at 24 hours' notice on Friday, and were joined by many more people today from across the south of England. My hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie),

[Mr. Andrew Turner]

I suspect, will seek to catch your eye in a moment, Mr. Speaker, to add to my comments. It was an appalling and terrible shock to hear that that fine hospital was in receivership on 30 December. The immediate reason is clear—the failure of NHS purchasers to offer dependable contracts. Patients and supporters on the Isle of Wight have been harrying me, quite rightly, since my election to prevent the cardiology contract being moved to Brighton. The primary care trusts reckoned that eight patients could be treated at King Edward VII for the same sum that could be used to treat 10 at Brighton, which has greater capacity. However, waiting times at King Edward VII were three months, but are six months or more at Brighton. Brighton only counts waiting times—this is idiosyncratic in the extreme, with one doctor describing it as scandalous—from the point of the first appointment with a consultant. Patients are now being sent to Oxford, Tooting and further afield. The PCT has to pay the trust from patients' choice funding to send the patients elsewhere, despite the fact that Brighton cannot fulfil its contract. Last Wednesday, the Minister of State, Department of Health, the right hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), said:

"The Government . . . believe in the NHS. It can become the service that we want it to be, offering more choice to patients over where and when they are treated, greater access to higher quality care and faster, more convenient treatment."—[*Official Report*, 8 January 2003; Vol. 397, c. 276-77.]

I asked him about King Edward VII—words came aplenty, but answer was there none. I shied away from expressing my view on the PCT's decision when it was made—after all, I have to live with its members and have no reason to distrust them. Now, however, I know of other business taken from King Edward VII by hospitals across the south of England, and can report the view of a doctor in my constituency, who told me on Monday that

"overwhelmingly, the motivation was political."

I cannot begin to understand why a hospital that was built and upgraded at no cost to the NHS is good enough for the NHS when the NHS fails to meet its waiting list targets, but not at other times. I cannot begin to understand why it is wrong for a PCT to make a contract with a hospital, but it is right for a trust to sub-contract to the same hospital. I cannot begin to understand why 400 opportunities for cardiac intervention a year are lost while my constituents are waiting—and one or two of them regrettably die on the waiting list.

Dr. Mark Connaughton, the heart doctor at St. Mary's hospital, Newport, told me:

"South coast hospitals simply cannot cope."

He said that King Edward VII is of

"good provenance . . . There is really no problem that would stop you referring patients there."

Most people who need cardiac intervention are old. They have paid into the NHS since its inception, yet in their hour of need they are told to wait, despite capacity being available. That is quite simply something that neither they nor I can understand. I hope that if the Under-Secretary can understand it, he can explain it.

7.34 pm

Mr. Andrew Tyrie (Chichester): I should like to say a few words that follow on directly from what my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) was saying about King Edward VII hospital. The closure of that hospital, if it takes place, will indeed be dire for the citizens of the Isle of Wight and will make life difficult for many patients throughout the region.

I just want to put a few points to the Minister, so that they will be clear in his mind. First, the King Edward VII is not a private hospital. It is an independent charitable hospital that has taken roughly 50 per cent. of its patients from the NHS sector for the past 50 years. In many respects, it is a prototype of exactly what a foundation hospital should look like—that is, a genuine public-private partnership. As my hon. Friend said, many capital costs are borne by the private sector. The NHS reaps all kinds of benefits—some tangible, some less tangible—from having such a superb hospital available for its use. That is reflected in the fact that it generates enormous local charitable giving. People are keen to give to it; they want to support it. It has achieved exactly what the Secretary of State for Health has said he wants foundation hospitals to achieve: a genuine partnership with the local community.

The main reason the hospital is in trouble is that there has been a sharp drop in the NHS work being referred to it. The figures for patient discharges over the past 18 months show a drop from 270 per month to 112 per month. NHS funding has gone down 40 per cent. in the past six months. One of the reasons given for that is that the hospital is more expensive to run than others—that it costs more per unit of treatment. I notice that a press release from the strategic health authority today suggested that a coronary bypass costs 38 per cent. more at King Edward's than in Southampton. I have discussed that figure with experts, who tell me that it may look all right, but that NHS figure excludes all costs relating to consultants. There is no consultancy fee in the NHS comparator, so the figures are not comparable. I know from my time in the Treasury—I am sure that the Minister is becoming aware of this—that who really bears the costs in the NHS is a hugely complicated question. Most of the comparator figures that he is being given are questionable, to say the least. The more he delves into them and scratches them, the more he will discover that.

What will happen if the King Edward VII hospital closes? Patients from the Isle of Wight will find themselves on very long waiting lists at other hospitals—in Southampton, Portsmouth and Guildford, in particular. What will happen to waiting time targets for radiotherapy, for example? Those targets are already not being met. There is no way that the 2004 targets that have been published will be met by those hospitals, even without the closure of King Edward's. King Edward's has superb radiotherapy facilities, which would no longer be available. While all this is going on, patients are being sent abroad—for orthopaedic care, for example—at a much greater cost than that of the treatment they could get just up the road. That includes patients from the Isle of Wight. There really must be an absurdity in the NHS funding system if that is what is going on.

There is more to the closure of some hospitals than patients going through them like pieces of meat through a sausage factory. Here, we are talking about a centre of excellence. King Edward's has not just been a private hospital doing some routine surgery. It has been at the cutting edge of research, treatment and innovation, particularly in orthopaedics, in some aspects of cardiac care and now, with the equipment that it has, in radiotherapy. I implore the Minister to look at how these extraordinary decisions to cut NHS funding at such short notice have been taken. The constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight will be gravely affected by this, as will mine in Chichester.

7.39 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. David Lammy): I congratulate the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) on securing a debate on a subject that is important to the NHS and, especially, to his constituents. National health service and social services provision on the island is rightly of particular concern to him and he eloquently expressed the reasons for that. I assure him from the outset that the Government are committed to providing high-quality health services for everyone, wherever they live.

I am pleased to respond to the debate because it enables me to put on record the developments and improvements on the Isle of Wight in the past few years. Not only has health care provision been reorganised but the Government have invested considerably in NHS infrastructure and service delivery.

Health services are never stagnant: they adapt to new opportunities and challenges as they appear. That applied especially when the Government introduced the NHS plan and the "Shifting the Balance of Power" initiative. In accordance with those policies, it is up to strategic health authorities and primary care trusts, with their specific local knowledge and expertise, to plan and develop health services in line with the needs of their local communities.

It might help if I dealt with the hon. Gentleman's point on special status for the island immediately. As he knows, the advisory committee on resource allocation—ACRA—considered any additional cost that is associated with being an island in September 2001. The announcement was made in the following December.

The committee concluded that the arguments in a local consultancy report on behalf of Isle of Wight health bodies did not constitute a convincing case. It recommended no adjustment to the Isle of Wight's target under the resource allocation formula. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State accepted ACRA's recommendations.

Since 1997, there has been continuous investment in the Isle of Wight's health economy. It may help to remind the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) of some of that investment, which includes: £28 million to refurbish mental health accommodation; £640,000 for personal dental services; £631,000 to implement the free nursing care policy; £400,000 to improve intermediate care; £100,000 to help reduce waiting lists; £100,000 for local capital modernisation funding; £38,000 for smoking cessation programmes; £29,000 for palliative care; £17,000 to help reform the emergency care that the hon. Member for Isle of Wight mentioned, and a further £10,000 for the booked admissions programme.

However, we are considering not simply investment but improving health care for those who live on the Isle of Wight. I shall give one example of service improvement. The Government set ambulance services a target of reaching 75 per cent. of category A—life-threatening—calls in eight minutes. In 1997, the Isle of Wight ambulance service reached only 55 per cent. of such calls in the target time. The trust informs me that, as of January this year, the figure is 81 per cent. I congratulate the men and women who operate the Isle of Wight's ambulance service on fulfilling and exceeding the target.

The trust also anticipates reaching the 12-month in-patient waiting time, the 21-week out-patient targets and the accident and emergency access target times this year. I am sure that the hon. Member for Isle of Wight wishes to join me in congratulating all members of his local NHS team on their industry and hard work.

Let me consider the increases in financial resources. In 1997–98, the island received an allocation of £68 million—a 3.48 per cent. increase over the previous year. That has risen considerably to £108 million in 2001–02—a cash increase of 9.6 per cent. By any standards, those are considerable increases in financial allocation.

In fact, next year the Isle of Wight's primary care trust will receive a further increase of 9.7 per cent.—some £11.6 million. That is one of the highest increases in funding across the strategic health authority, and higher than the national average increase of 9.24 per cent. Even the hon. Gentleman must acknowledge that, far from the cash available for improvements to health care on the island being reduced, resources have increased dramatically during the period of office of this Government.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman will also accept that that proves that the principles set out in the NHS plan were not just empty gestures. We have put the necessary money into the system to carry the reforms through and to support service delivery. Of course, we are not stopping there. In December, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced the budget allocations that PCTs will receive in the next three years. For the first time since the inception of the NHS, local organisations can plan service provision years in advance, and according to local priorities and needs, many of which were articulated by the hon. Gentleman. As I said, the Isle of Wight PCT, which is the hon. Gentleman's local organisation, will receive a 9.7 per cent. cash-terms increase—a cash allocation of some £131.7 million. That is a significant amount of money.

The hon. Gentleman also raised the issue of HealthFit. HealthFit is a process that is taking place across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight to ensure that safe and sustainable health services are available for local people. We have a responsibility not just to provide health services today, but to ensure that they are fit for the future. The NHS in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight takes these responsibilities very seriously, and it is at the early stages of a process that will go on throughout this year and beyond, and which will include open discussion

[Mr. David Lammy]

and debate with patients, the public and partner organisations. It will ensure that local people are fully involved in that process.

Both the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Chichester mentioned the King Edward VII hospital in Midhurst. I do not want to make the point too strongly, but there is something of a paradox here. Both hon. Members are keen to ensure central intervention and investment in that local hospital, but in some senses that is in conflict with the policy position of their party. We are putting in the money, and ensuring that such local decisions are taken by local people.

Mr. Tyrie: If the money is going in, why is there a £60 million deficit in the strategic health authority's budget?

Mr. Lammy: The hon. Gentleman knows that, across the piece in Britain, different health economies find themselves in different positions for historical reasons. The issue that he raises goes back some considerable time, but we have reached a point where we are putting in significant investment. I should point out to him that a 20 per cent. cut would make the situation even worse for his local strategic health authority.

Much has been said in the media, and recently in this House, about the future of the King Edward VII hospital, and the issue has been raised again today. Let me state from the outset that the NHS remains prepared to continue with its current commitment to the hospital. Its refusal to provide the support that was requested immediately before Christmas related to serious concerns about the additional volume required, which was at a price and through a process that could not be defended in terms of accountability in the use of public money. Officials from both the Department of Health and the strategic health authority have held discussions with hospital representatives for a number of weeks, and all parties will continue to hold discussions with the hospital and with the liquidator. I can assure the hon. Gentlemen that there remains—

The motion having been made after Seven o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at ten minutes to Eight o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 15 January 2003

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

WALES

The Secretary of State was asked—

Urban Deprivation

1. **Paul Flynn** (Newport, West): What new proposals he has to assist deprived urban areas. [89725]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Peter Hain): The Government have designated the 360 most deprived areas in Wales as enterprise areas to boost jobs and enterprise, and our child tax credit and working tax credit will help to eradicate child poverty and to make work pay.

Paul Flynn: That is absolutely true, but does the Secretary of State realise that, although the businesses in the rural part of my constituency that lost out financially because of the foot and mouth epidemic received generous grants from the Government, other businesses in the urban area that lost out because of closures and redundancies did not receive a penny? Does he also realise that the Government are about to spend more than £500 million keeping open post offices in the rural areas, and more than £100 million on closing them down in urban areas, and that the objective 1 map for Wales is heavily distorted against the interests of the cities, towns and valleys in Wales in favour of the least deprived areas? Is it not time that we had another look at our—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State has heard enough to be able to answer the hon. Gentleman's question.

Peter Hain: I understand the points made by my hon. Friend, but, as he will undoubtedly be aware, unemployment has fallen hugely in his constituency. Newport has some of the fastest growing companies in the United Kingdom, and last year it was one of the places with the highest proportion of companies growing by more than 25 per cent. He will also certainly have noted this morning's survey, which shows that the Welsh economy is outperforming the British economy in key areas of output and new orders.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): The Secretary of State must pay some heed to our deprived urban areas, which are suffering greatly from an increase in crime and hard drug use. He must be well aware of the figures that show a 14 per cent. increase in hard drug use. Crack cocaine is responsible for 54 per cent. of all crime committed in urban areas. When a recent BBC poll asked people—64 per cent. of whom were Labour voters—whether they believed that the Government were tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime, they said that they did not. Is it not time that the Government made our deprived urban areas safer places in which to live by taking a tougher stance on drug pushers and establishing a tougher sentencing regime, particularly for burglars?

Peter Hain: It is nice to hear that the Conservatives want tough action against burglars, because they were responsible for burgling the Welsh economy and communities in Wales during every year that they were in power. Now, they are planning a 20 per cent. cut in public spending, which would reduce our effectiveness and our ability to implement exactly the kind of anti-crime measures that are needed in Newport and across Wales, and which we are implementing.

Alan Howarth (Newport, East): Given the importance of manufacturing to deprived urban areas, will my right hon. Friend ensure that during the transition period before accession to full membership of the European Union, the Governments of countries in central and eastern Europe are not permitted to operate regimes that allow their manufacturers to have an unfair competitive advantage? I have in mind particularly the steel sector.

Peter Hain: I understand my right hon. Friend's point, and the steel sector in Newport has indeed been a matter of great concern to its Members of Parliament and to the Government. It is important to recognise that we are undergoing a process of fundamental change. As he says, we are experiencing stiff competition from countries in eastern Europe, but also from countries even further to the east, notably China. However, Wales is doing much better than many of our competitors—in stark contrast to the Tory years, when we were doing much worse than the rest of the world.

Farming

2. **Mr. David Cameron** (Witney): If he will make a statement on the state of the farming industry in Wales. [89726]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): My right hon. Friend and I have regular meetings with the First Minister, and I meet Assembly Ministers and Ministers from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to discuss a variety of issues, including the Welsh farming industry.

Mr. Cameron: I thank the Minister for that answer, but what discussions have he and the Secretary of State had with farmers in Wales about the latest diktat from Brussels, whereby all horses, ponies and donkeys must have passports, which are to be carried with them at all times? Is the Minister aware that this crazy bureaucracy

has come about because the French want to know whether equine drugs are entering the food chain? Will he make the strongest possible representations to Brussels to stop this nonsense and tell the French that British horse owners will not stomach extra paperwork just to satisfy their deeply unsatisfactory eating habits?

Mr. Touhig: Far be it from me to comment on the eating habits of our friends and neighbours across the channel. I take account of the point that the hon. Gentleman makes, and I am sure that it will be brought to the attention of my colleagues at DEFRA. Welsh farmers have had a tough time, as we all know, but I was pleased to see the recent report from the Farmers Union of Wales that shows increased confidence in farming in Wales and a 40 per cent. increase in farming incomes. That is a good move in the right direction.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): The Farmers Union of Wales has also highlighted the fact that the 20-day rule has added to the heavy bureaucratic burden that farmers in Wales and across the country have to deal with. Since the Welsh Assembly has not got the powers to address the bureaucratic burden and paperwork, is the Minister willing to accept a submission that may help him to have a debate with DEFRA to try to reduce that work load so that farmers can do what they want to do—farm?

Mr. Touhig: I am always happy to receive submissions from the hon. Gentleman. I think that he has made quite a few to me since I have been in this job.

On the 20-day standstill, we are trying to achieve a balance between risk and free trade. The standstill has been relaxed several times in the past year or so. The Government must consider the risk assessment and cost-benefit analysis, and take account of scientific and veterinary advice. Until that process is complete, it is not possible to give any undertaking about changing the standstill period.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): May I, through the hon. Gentleman, congratulate the Secretary of State on having done rather well despite being a South African?

On a slightly more serious note, I want to return to the 20-day rule. This Government are proud of the partnership with the National Assembly. Given that the National Assembly is adamant across the political spectrum that the 20-day rule is ruinous to Welsh agriculture, is it not time for Ministers to speak up for Welsh farming in Cabinet, reflect the views of people in the National Assembly, who have been voted in by the people of Wales, and do something about the crisis in Welsh agriculture?

Mr. Touhig: Of course, if the hon. Gentleman's party had its way, there would be no Welsh voice in Cabinet or in this Parliament. Discussions are under way between colleagues in my office, DEFRA and the National Assembly in seeking, with the industry in Wales, to try to overcome some of the problems that farming faces, especially in terms of the 20-day rule. We would further complicate the whole process by simply making a decision to reduce the period without proper evidence. When we have the proper scientific evidence, and the risk assessment and cost-benefit analysis are completed, we will be in a position to take a decision.

Mr. Llwyd: When?

Mr. Touhig: The hon. Gentleman asks when. When we have that information, it will be proper to take the decision. It would be irresponsible to do so without that evidence.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): The Minister is being disingenuous in saying that incomes have risen by 40 per cent. He knows that they started from a very low level and that the average farming income is less than £10,000 a year, while some highland livestock farmers earn less than £4,000. Farming communities are still reeling from low incomes and escalating costs, but we have learned that objective 1 money that was intended for farming communities may well be clawed back because it is not going to be spent. Will he have talks with his Welsh Assembly colleagues to ensure that the bureaucracy that surrounds the objective 1 money, which acts like a dead hand, is lifted from the schemes? Will he guarantee that no money directed towards these poor farming communities will be clawed back by Brussels this year?

Mr. Touhig: I take the hon. Gentleman's point. Yes, I accept that farming incomes have risen from a very low point, but that is a move in the right direction. The FUW survey showed that 52 per cent. of farmers in Wales are planning to invest in new machinery, stock and infrastructure on their farms, which is again a good signal. I understand his point, but as far as this Government are concerned, in partnership with our colleagues in the National Assembly, we have no intention of handing any money back to Brussels; it will all be spent.

Mr. Evans: One reason why farming incomes declined so disastrously last year was the outbreak of foot and mouth. There is no way the farming community could withstand another outbreak of foot and mouth.

The Minister will know that new rules on the importation of meat and other food products came into force on 1 January this year. Will he tell the House what action has been taken to publicise those new rules about the importation of meat and foodstuffs into the United Kingdom and what extra resources are going into providing the extra manpower and sniffer dogs that will be necessary to make our ports of entry secure?

Mr. Touhig: We have to accept that DEFRA and our colleagues in the Assembly, in close contact with the farming unions in Wales, will ensure that all the appropriate information gets to farmers directly. It is important that we take every opportunity to ensure that they are aware of any changes. My experience, on the basis of knowing farmers in my constituency, is that farmers are very well up to speed on these matters and know what is happening.

School Transport

3. **Mr. Huw Edwards** (Monmouth): If he will meet the First Minister to discuss school transport. [89727]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I meet the First Minister to discuss a range of matters, including school transport.

Mr. Edwards: Does my hon. Friend accept that the current law allows gross overcrowding on scheduled buses taking children to school and that, although overcrowding may have been a factor in the Vale of Glamorgan bus crash, it was within the legal limits? Does he agree that bus companies exploit the law and that local authorities enter into contracts in which overcrowding is in-built? Will he commend Monmouthshire county council for trying to address the problem? Does he agree that where Monmouthshire leads, the rest of the country should follow, although legislative action may well be needed?

Mr. Touhig: I am sure that the entire House was profoundly saddened by the death of 12-year-old Stuart Cunningham Jones in a bus accident in Cowbridge just before Christmas, and our sympathies go to his family. I take note of my hon. Friend's point. Last year, he secured a debate in Westminster Hall on school transport that went some way in helping to overcome the problem in Monmouthshire. The three-for-two concession allows transport operators to have three children in a seat that, in normal circumstances, would take two people, but they must be sure that the children can physically sit in the seats. There is no statistical evidence that the concession puts children at greater risk, but new legislation ensures that since 1 October 2001 all new buses coming on to the road are fitted with seat belts, and that will lead to the death of the three-for-two concession, to which I look forward.

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): Many school children in Wales still have to rely on their parents for transport to school because of the lack of public transport, and that increases congestion, road danger and CO_2 emissions. Will the Minister discuss with the First Minister whether all school children in Wales can have access to public transport to school?

Mr. Touhig: There is a formula for funding public transport and children's transport to school, and, in Wales, local authorities have been generous in going beyond the formula and providing additional transport facilities. The Government are committed to a massive investment in public transport. In partnership with our colleagues in the Labour-led Assembly, that will benefit children, ensuring that they travel to school as safely as possible.

Pensioners (Living Standards)

4. **Bob Spink** (Castle Point): What recent discussions he has had with ministerial colleagues on improving pensioner living standards in Wales. [89729]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Peter Hain): Regular ones. We want all pensioners to have a decent and secure income in retirement and to share fairly in the rising prosperity of Wales.

Bob Spink: Is the Minister aware that the National Assembly is forcing local authorities to bear the costs of means-testing the elderly on the services that they provide to them? Does he agree that those costs will lead to cuts in services, and will he try to stop the National Assembly forcing those costs on to the local authorities?

Peter Hain: No, I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. The National Assembly is providing extra care for elderly citizens on top of free bus travel, free eye tests and all the other initiatives that have been taken by the Labour-led Assembly to support not just pensioners but all citizens in Wales.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): I endorse what my right hon. Friend says, but will he look at another aspect of pensioner living standards in Wales, in particular the plight of the former Allied Steel and Wire workers from Cardiff? Will he join me in welcoming the fact that Celsa has announced that it will reopen the steel plant in Cardiff and create several hundred jobs? Will he pledge to use his considerable reputation as a fixer and problem solver to look at the whole issue of the loss of the occupational pensions of hundreds of workers from Cardiff?

Peter Hain: I acknowledge the important points that my hon. Friend makes, and he will be involved in an important meeting next week with my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary to take the matter forward. The plight of the pensioners of Allied Steel and Wire in Cardiff is extremely important and we shall work hard to solve it.

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): Are not pensioners in Wales doubly disadvantaged because they face an extended means test as a deliberate effect of Government policy but are also less able to contribute to occupational pensions because of the lower rate of economic activity among older workers in Wales, 61 per cent. of whom are economically active compared with 75 per cent. in London and the south-east?

Peter Hain: We are injecting record help for pensioners in Wales. In October, an extra 250,000 pensioners in Wales will benefit from the pension tax credit, which will support thrifty, hard-working pensioners, some of whom have small savings or a small occupational pension. That is part of an increase in support that, by October, will bring pensioners in Wales between £21 and £30 extra on average a week. The hon. Gentleman should acknowledge that, and the fact that, if his plans for an independent Wales were ever introduced, all that support would disappear.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): My right hon. Friend will agree that, for pensioners in Wales and elsewhere,

an important part of their living standards is the quality of the health services that they receive. Will he confirm that the Commission for Health Improvement, established by the House to monitor the health service in England and Wales, will continue to do so independently for the foreseeable future?

Peter Hain: Yes. I acknowledge the expertise of my hon. Friend, who is a former Welsh Minister, and I welcome his point. Discussions are going on with the Department of Health to resolve this issue.

Miners' Pension Fund

5. **Huw Irranca-Davies** (Ogmore): What discussions he has had with his colleagues in the Department of Trade and Industry on the renegotiation of the surpluses to the miners' pension fund. [89730]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): I am aware of this ongoing matter. Issues related to the current guarantee arrangements are under discussion by the Department of Trade and Industry and the trustees of the mineworkers pension scheme and the British Coal staff superannuation scheme. As a representative of an area in which many former miners live, I will certainly continue to take a keen interest in this matter.

Huw Irranca-Davies: I thank my hon. Friend for his response. I do not underestimate the influence of the Wales Office among his Cabinet colleagues. I therefore urge him to continue to push strongly on this issue so that we get more money back into the pockets of miners and their families and into the mining communities, too.

Mr. Touhig: As the House will be aware, the Government guarantee that miners' pensions will rise in line with inflation even if the pension scheme were in deficit. The Government, of course, have a 50 per cent. share of the surplus from the pension scheme. Any changes to the pension scheme, as far as I am concerned, should benefit the pensioners, the miner pensioners and their widows. That should be our top priority.

Rail Services

6. **Mr. Chris Bryant** (Rhondda): What recent discussions he has had with ministerial colleagues regarding rail services in former mining constituencies. [89731]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Peter Hain): Regular discussions. We are determined to deliver better rail services.

Mr. Bryant: I know that my right hon. Friend is aware that the rail operators in Wales seem to find it impossible to provide a decent railway service after rugby matches at the millennium stadium. Is he also aware that the last train leaving Cardiff for the valleys is at 10.30 pm, well before most shows at the new millennium centre will finish? Is not it time that we banged some more heads together to make sure that the millennium centre does not become a millennium matinee centre and that English people do not find it impossible to attend matches at the best stadium in the country?

Peter Hain: I strongly agree with my hon. Friend. Indeed, last night, I was told by both the chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority and the Minister for Transport that, despite all their efforts, the necessary return London services to the England-Wales international next month could not be provided. That is a bitter disappointment. The rail companies have failed abysmally to provide the standard of service that Wales and Cardiff expect, and I have told them that they had better get their act together. Meanwhile, I have been promised temporary arrangements, including extra rail shuttles to Newport, to link with additional coach services. The 10,000 English fans who usually return by train, however, will be guaranteed a warm Welsh welcome—including in the Rhondda, I am sure—if they decide to stay overnight in Wales in many of the communities that will welcome them.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): The Secretary of State knows that the Strategic Rail Authority is looking to cut, under the new franchise for Wales, rail services in coalfield areas and the rest of Wales by 10 or 20 per cent. He has made much of the fact that we cannot get back out of Cardiff after hours, but what does he say about this huge reduction in services promised for Wales? With regard to the Strategic Rail Authority, will he insist that there cannot be any reduction in the funding for, or provision of, rail services in Wales?

Peter Hain: As the hon. Gentleman knows, funding for rail services across Britain, including Wales, has been rising from the abysmally low level that we inherited in 1997. Over a two-year period, it has risen from £3.1 billion last year to £4.3 billion next year. Certainly, the issue that he raised will be addressed.

Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): The Secretary of State will recognise that one way of overcoming deprivation and regenerating communities such as Blaenau Gwent is to improve the communication system. Although we welcome the planned reintroduction of the railway service between Ebbw Vale and Cardiff, does he accept that the plans are inadequate as long as they exclude Newport, where many of our people work, while many people come from Newport to Blaenau Gwent for jobs and leisure opportunities?

Peter Hain: I agree. We are therefore working hard with the Assembly and the SRA on the passenger service requirement to provide the extra services. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before I call the next question, the House should come to order.

Youth Unemployment

8. **Albert Owen** (Ynys Môn): If he will make a statement on youth unemployment in Wales. [89734]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Peter Hain): The new deal has been a huge success in Wales, especially in helping young people back into work, with 27,400 Welsh youngsters securing jobs.

Albert Owen: In 2002, unemployment fell faster in my constituency than in most other areas in Wales. During my right hon. Friend's recent visit to my constituency, he met many young people who were optimistic and enthusiastic about the future. Does he agree that, to maintain the enthusiasm, we need a proper skills strategy to identify crafts where there are skills deficiencies, such as plumbing and electrical work? Will he push for such shortages to be identified because such qualifications and skills are as vital as academic qualifications in building a better economy in Wales and further reducing youth unemployment?

Peter Hain: Yes. When I visited Holyhead high school, which my hon. Friend attended, I was impressed by the pupils and the new atmosphere in Holyhead as a result of the Government's record investment, falling unemployment and increasing job creation.

New Deal

9. **Gareth Thomas** (Clwyd, West): What discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues about the operation of the new deal in Wales. [89735]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): My right hon. Friend and I meet Cabinet colleagues regularly to discuss a range of issues, including the operation of the new deal. I am also pleased to have the opportunity to discuss its operation in Wales with the new deal taskforce in Abergavenny on Friday.

Gareth Thomas: Has not the new deal been enormously effective in tackling unemployment not only in Wales but throughout the United Kingdom? Does my hon. Friend agree that Labour Members at Westminster and in the Assembly, for which an election will shortly take place, can rightly be proud of that achievement?

Mr. Touhig: The new deal has been a huge success in Wales, where 27,000 young people have secured jobs since its launch. Of those, 80 per cent. have retained them for 13 weeks or more. My attendance at new deal taskforce meetings last year encouraged me about its progress.

In my hon. Friend's constituency, long-term youth unemployment has fallen by 91 per cent. since 1997 and the claimant count for Clwyd, West is down by 44 per cent. We can all be proud of that achievement by the Labour Government.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): What assessment has the hon. Gentleman made of the statistical evidence that shows that those who undertake the training and education option on the new deal for young people are twice as likely not to get a job at the end of it as they are to get one?

Mr. Touhig: It would be a change if the hon. Gentleman and the Conservative party said something valuable and good about the new deal. They opposed it and voted against it. Under the Conservative Government, unemployment between 1979 and 1997 reached 3 million. The Government are doing something about that. We should be congratulated on our success, not criticised. It is time that he woke up to that.

Rail Franchises

10. **Hywel Williams** (Caernarfon): What recent bilateral discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Transport on the Wales and Borders rail franchise. [89736]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Peter Hain): I have regular discussions with the Secretary of State for Transport about transport issues that affect Wales.

Hywel Williams: Does the Secretary of State acknowledge that the 20 per cent. cut that the Strategic Rail Authority demands would mean a real cut in services on vital lines such as the Cambrian coast line in my constituency? Earlier, he referred to the increase in investment in rail. If it is so good, why is the service so bad?

Peter Hain: I acknowledge that the hon. Gentleman properly raises some issues as a local MP, and we are dealing with them. However, we inherited a dreadful legacy from the Conservatives of a collapsing rail industry and under-investment. We are putting in a record amount of investment, which increases year by year, in rail in Wales, including west Wales, as well as elsewhere in Britain.

Flooding

13. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): What recent discussions he has had with the First Minister on flooding in Wales. [89739]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Peter Hain): I have regular discussions with the First Minister about issues affecting Wales, including flooding and flood prevention measures.

Miss McIntosh: I am most grateful for that unexpected reply from the Secretary of State. He will be aware that, in particular, flooding has caused enormous damage to farmland. What discussions has he had with the farming community and what representations has he received? What compensation might he make to the farming community for the damage that has been done to its crops?

Peter Hain: I am grateful for the unexpected question from the hon. Lady, especially as it is from her. This is an issue that we are addressing, and I recognise the point that she makes.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked —

Engagements

Q1. [90579] **Mr. Stephen McCabe** (Birmingham, Hall Green): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 15 January.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning I spoke to Michael Todd, the chief constable of Greater Manchester police, about last night's tragic murder.

I also had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I have further such meetings later today.

Mr. McCabe: In view of last night's tragic events in Manchester, will my right hon. Friend ensure that there is a review for police officers undertaking these very difficult operations, to see whether anything can be done to increase their safety? What further steps are planned to protect the public now from the all too visible threat from fanatics, with their obvious contempt for human life?

The Prime Minister: First, I am sure that the whole House would wish to express our shock and outrage at this wicked murder and our deepest sympathy with, and prayers for, the family of DC Oake. Once again we see the courage and commitment of police officers to the service of our country and the dangers they face daily on our behalf. I met DC Oake when he worked with my security team on visits to the north-west. His family has lost a very fine man; the community has lost a very fine police officer. We mourn his death and it should redouble our determination to tackle terrorism in all its forms.

As my hon. Friend knows, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will make a statement shortly. My hon. Friend will also know that the chief constable is doing all that he can to establish the precise facts of what happened.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): I join the Prime Minister in his sentiment and his words. Everyone in the House and across the whole country will feel a sense of shock at the murder of Stephen Oake in Manchester last night. As the Prime Minister said, our thoughts and prayers are with the families of Stephen Oake and the injured police officers. The whole House will recognise that we owe them an enormous debt of gratitude

Obviously, it is too early to comment on the details of the police operation; we shall wait for a fuller report of events. But does the Prime Minister agree that the terror raid in Manchester is a wake-up call to the nation, reminding us all of the increased threat that we now face?

The Prime Minister: Without any doubt at all, it reminds us of the threat that international terrorism poses here in Britain and of the need to take all the measures we possibly can to stamp it out in all its forms, which is why the House was right after 11 September to pass the emergency legislation that we did. We must make sure that groups of fanatics, who have no compunction about taking human life and who have no demands that any political system could possibly accede to, are defeated. The only way to defeat them is to make sure that we give every support to the security services and the police in the difficult and, as we can see, dangerous work that they do.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Prime Minister's answer begs a wider question as well. Our ambassador in Paris, we have learned, has told the Government that he shares the French Government's incredulity at this country's response to the threat from extremists. Does the Prime Minister agree that the priority for the Government must be that no person should be allowed to enter the country if he or she poses a risk to our security, and that those who do should be detained or deported immediately?

The Prime Minister: Of course that is right. The terrorism legislation that the House passed included a specific derogation from the European convention on human rights precisely to allow us to detain without trial those who are suspected terrorists. In addition, the asylum legislation that we passed last year gave us a power to prevent suspected terrorists from entering the country at all. There is now very strong co-operation right across European frontiers to deal with this.

I would point out that, unfortunately, the scourge of international terrorism is not limited to this country. Just in the past few days there have been arrests in France, Germany, Belgium and Holland, and there were arrests recently in Sweden. This is an international problem. We must take every measure we can here, but also every measure we can with other countries to co-operate abroad.

Mr. Duncan Smith: I agree with the Prime Minister: we must, but we also know that Home Office officials apparently advised Ministers after the events of 11 September that the key to fighting international terrorism would be to detain all asylum seekers entering the country in secure centres until their age, nationality and identity can be properly established. Will the Prime Minister now ensure that we make our borders secure and stop terrorists abusing the asylum system?

The Prime Minister: Of course. That is why we introduced the legislation that we did, and we have the ability for the first time not just to detain people, but to detain them without trial if they are suspected terrorists. I remind the House that, when that legislation was passing through the House, many people were opposed to it because they thought it was unacceptable in terms of our civil liberties. That is why it is important, I hope, that we continue to take the measures necessary here and abroad to make sure in so far as we possibly can that there is no hiding place for the terrorists. Of course, the arrests in the past few weeks have taken place precisely because the police and the security services are working closely to arrest and detain those whom they suspect of

terrorism and, if it were not for the powers that we now have, we would have been unable to take the action that we have taken.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): When the Prime Minister meets the American President at the end of the month, will he tell George Bush that there is almost certainly a majority of the British people against the idea of a war with Iraq? Will he tell him that a lot of the British people are against the war because they can see that it is all about America getting its hands on the oil supplies in the middle east? Will he also tell him that we are not prepared to fight a war based on the fact that this vain American President is concerned more about finishing the job that his father failed to complete 12 years ago?

The Prime Minister: It will not surprise my hon. Friend to hear that I am afraid I cannot agree with him. Let me first deal with the conspiracy theory that this is somehow to do with oil. There is no way whatever, if oil were the issue, that it would not be infinitely simpler to cut a deal with Saddam, who, I am sure, would be delighted to give us access to as much oil as we wanted if he could carry on building weapons of mass destruction. The very reason why we are taking the action that we are taking is nothing to do with oil or any of the other conspiracy theories put forward. It is to do with one very simple fact: the United Nations has laid down—indeed, it has been laying down for 10 years—that Saddam Hussein has to disarm himself of weapons of mass destruction and that he poses a threat because he used those weapons, and I believe that we have to make sure that the will of the United Nations is upheld. I also believe, incidentally, that a majority of the British people—who, I think, always take a firm view of the need for action in the face of dictators such as Saddam Hussein—knows that the UN, having laid down its mandate, has to see that mandate through.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Does the Prime Minister accept that we share the expressions of sympathy and support for the family and colleagues of Detective Constable Stephen Oake and the other officers injured last night? Is it not a reminder of how much we owe to those who risk their lives to protect our freedom—those in the police, including the special branch, and in the security and intelligence services who do that day by day?

Turning to the threat posed by Saddam Hussein, now that the full complement of inspectors is in place and equipped with more intelligence than before, what will happen if they report on 27 January that they need more time to complete their work? Does the statement made by the Prime Minister's official spokesman that they will be given the time and space that they need reflect President Bush's view or not?

The Prime Minister: First, in relation to Detective Constable Oake and the other injured officers, obviously I entirely agree with what the right hon. Gentleman says.

The inspectors are now seized of this issue. It was only last week that they began with a full complement, and they are being allowed to do their job. As I said on Monday, I am not getting into the position of speculating on arbitrary timetables. However, it is simply worth reading, if I may, what Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary-General, said yesterday because I agree with these sentiments entirely. He said:

> "If . . . it were to come out that Iraq continues to defy, and that disarmament has not happened, as I have said, the Council will have to face up to its responsibilities and take the necessary action. But, of course, this is the understanding and the spirit of the resolution, which I hope we will all respect."

That states the position exactly. We have a UN inspection regime in there. If there is a finding that is a breach of the UN resolution, I expect that action will follow, and, incidentally, I believe that action will follow with the full support of the UN.

Mr. Beith: Is the Prime Minister satisfied that, if the inspectors, perhaps with the support of Kofi Annan, say that they need more time, the US Administration will be ready to grant them that time? Surely this is about disarming Saddam Hussein, with the widest international support and a UN mandate. The consequences of military action, before the case for it had been made would be very serious indeed. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy) asked the Prime Minister last week, are there any circumstances in which his Government would decide not to commit our troops in support of US military action?

The Prime Minister: As I said last week, I would put it round the other way. I explained the circumstances in which we would be prepared to use force. In respect of the action by the United States, let me remind the right hon. Gentleman that the United States has gone down the United Nations route. I remember that, before the resolution was passed last November, many people were insisting to me that the US would not bother with the United Nations and that it was impatient with the whole process and would not give it a chance to work. That has not been the case, and I do not believe that it is the case. So we have the international community united, but the single most dangerous thing that we could do at the moment—which, in my view, would increase the likelihood of conflict—would be to send out a signal of any weakness in our determination to see the mandate laid down by the UN carried through.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): While I recognise the importance of the work of the weapons inspectors, is it not a fact that the regime constantly denied that it had any biological weapons until the two sons-in-law of the dictator defected in August 1995 and gave information that the regime then admitted was true? Why should we believe that dictator now? However much I dislike George Bush and his politics, I dislike the murderous dictator in Baghdad a million times more.

The Prime Minister: What my hon. Friend says about the regime of Saddam Hussein is right. It has always been a puzzle to me how liberal-minded people could possibly line up and support the continuation of one of the most repressive, murderous and barbaric regimes in the world. The point that my hon. Friend makes is worth underlining. People talk of the impatience of the United States, Britain or anyone else, but this has been going on for more than a decade. Saddam Hussein has had the opportunity time and again to comply with the

United Nations resolutions. What we did last November was to lay it down again in a fresh resolution so that he would be in absolutely no doubt. People say that the choice is ours as to whether conflict happens, but actually the choice is his. If he wants to avoid conflict, he can comply with the UN resolution, co-operate with the inspectors, tell us where this material is, and have it destroyed as it should be. Conflict would then be avoided. So we have made the choice that we had to make, and set it out in the UN resolution. The choice is now for Saddam.

Q2. [90580] **Mr. Mark Oaten** (Winchester): If the Prime Minister still supports an ethical foreign policy, and does not want to see our cricketers playing in Zimbabwe, will he consider paying compensation to the cricket board so that the cricketers are not forced to play there?

The Prime Minister: No, for the reasons that my right hon. Friend has already set out.

Q3. [90581] **Mr. Martin Salter** (Reading, West): The Prime Minister's new year message was a timely reminder of the clear and present danger facing this country, but for some of my constituents who live in areas of high flood risk, global warming is as worrying as global terrorism. The Local Government Association and the Emergency Planning Society have suggested that the current civil defence grant of some £19 million for England, Wales and Northern Ireland is inadequate and some £50 million short of what is required. Will the Prime Minister now review the resources available to the emergency planning officers and ensure that they have the tools properly to protect public safety in these circumstances?

The Prime Minister: I sympathise with my hon. Friend's constituents who have faced the problem of flooding over recent weeks. We are reviewing the flood defences not only in the Reading area but in all areas in which flooding has occurred. I would point out to him, however, that we are now spending about £500 million on flood defences. That is some 80 per cent. up on where we were five years ago, so we are putting in the extra money and obviously we must make sure that it is properly used.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): When it comes to dealing with Iraq, the Prime Minister said that a second United Nations resolution is preferable. The International Development Secretary says that it is essential. Which is the Government's position?

The Prime Minister: Both I and the International Development Secretary have set out the position, which is that of course we want a UN resolution. I have set out continually, not least in the House on 18 December, that in circumstances where there was a breach, we went back to the UN and the spirit of the UN resolution was broken because an unreasonable veto was put down, we would not rule out action. That is the same position that everybody has expressed, and I think it is the right position. However, having said that, it is not merely preferable to have a second UN resolution. I believe that we will get one.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Let me tell the Prime Minister what the right hon. Lady said. *[Interruption.]* They do not want me to. She said that Britain must

"not divert from the UN route."

When asked if that meant that Britain should not go along with any unilateral action, she replied:

"That is the logic of the position."

Everyone knows that most of the Cabinet back her position, not his, so I ask him: was she right or was she wrong?

The Prime Minister: We have all made it clear that it is right to go down the UN route; that is precisely the route that we are going down. The right hon. Gentleman is quoting my right hon. Friend selectively, because if he looks at other parts of the interview he will see that she made it clear that she did not want to confine herself to a second UN resolution, but of course we want a second UN resolution.

The point is that we have gone down the UN route very deliberately. That is because it is best that this were done with the maximum international support. *[Interruption.]* That is the position that everybody has taken on this issue. With the greatest respect, rather than trying to pretend that there is some difference where there is none, we should all surely unite around the position. I hope the whole House will unite around the sensible position that we have a UN resolution and that if it is breached action must follow, because the UN mandate has to be upheld.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Last week, the Defence Secretary contradicted the Foreign Secretary; this week, the International Development Secretary contradicts the Prime Minister. As we speak, British troops are being deployed, yet the Government are incapable of speaking with one voice. Does not the Prime Minister understand that he and his Cabinet must be clear and united to send a right message to Saddam Hussein, British troops and the British people?

The Prime Minister: The position that I have set out is very clear. We have chosen to go down the UN route; I think it is important that we do. That is because if Saddam is to be disarmed, it is important that he is disarmed with the support of the international community. We want the inspectors to do their work. If the inspectors come back and we find that there is a breach of the UN resolution, action will follow. We have said that a second UN resolution is preferable, because it is far better that the UN come together. We have also said that there are circumstances in which a UN resolution is not necessary, because it is necessary to be able to say in circumstances where an unreasonable veto is put down that we would still act. That is the position that the Government have set out throughout, and it is the position that remains.

Q4. [90582] **Caroline Flint** (Don Valley): The Prime Minister will be aware that Doncaster awaits a Government decision on the proposed Finningley

airport in my constituency. Some 150,000 people have signed letters and petitions in favour of Finningley, because they recognise the jobs and consumer choice that it will bring, unlike people in other parts of the country. Will he ensure that the forthcoming airports White Paper gives due consideration to building on the achievement of regional airports to contribute to the economic development of the whole country, not just the south-east?

The Prime Minister: On my hon. Friend's general point, I totally agree. I have Teesside airport in my area, so I understand the vital importance of regional airports to an area's economic well-being. In respect of Finningley airport, again I understand her strong support for the proposals, and the planning inspector's report is with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. I can tell her that the aim is to take a decision in the early part of this year. Obviously, until that decision is taken, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on the merits of the case.

Q5. [90583] **Mr. Jonathan Sayeed** (Mid-Bedfordshire): At his press conference on Monday, the Prime Minister implied that he had information that went beyond that contained in the British Government's dossier on Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. Has he given that information to the House of Commons Intelligence and Security Committee? If not, will he be doing so?

The Prime Minister: Of course intelligence about the situation in Iraq is coming in all the time, so it would be perfectly natural for there to be additional intelligence subsequent to the publication of the dossier. As for sharing that intelligence with the Intelligence and Security Committee, I am not sure of the exact position, but I can certainly find out and let the hon. Gentleman know. Of course we have very good relations with the Committee; we do share intelligence with it, and we have always found that it treats that intelligence in a very confidential way.

As I have said, we are gathering intelligence about this all the time, and we are also working closely with the UN inspectors.

Mr. James Plaskitt (Warwick and Leamington): Although it is welcome news that the number of people waiting longer than 12 months for NHS treatment has fallen by 20,000 in the last year, there are still 12,000 in that position, which is not acceptable. Can my right hon. Friend say how and when he will bring an end to the long waits?

The Prime Minister: We are, of course, getting those long waits down all the time. We have eliminated the 18-month and 15-month waits, and a timetable is set for the 12-month waits to be dealt with shortly. Moreover, the waiting times themselves are coming down. I think that well over 70 per cent. of people are now being seen within three months, and I believe I am right in saying that not a single national measurement of waiting does not show a better position than that of five years ago. That is a result of additional investment in the health service—which is why it is so important for us to keep it up, and certainly not to cut the extra investment by 20 per cent. across the board.

Q6. [90584] **Mr. Crispin Blunt** (Reigate): Today the Seventh Armoured Brigade waits in limbo for the Government to decide on its deployment to the Gulf. Twenty thousand more service men wait on standby to cover the firemen's strike, while the Prime Minister will not even try to obtain an injunction to stop the strike under existing law that makes a strike in which strikers knowingly endanger life illegal. When will he put the interests of the armed forces before his own narrow party interests?

The Prime Minister: I pay tribute to the armed forces and the work that they do, not just in any deployment for possible military action but in relation to the firefighters' dispute. They handled themselves magnificently during the strike.

As I have explained before to the Leader of the Opposition, the decision whether to seek an injunction is taken by the Attorney-General, on the basis of whether such an injunction would succeed or not. It is a decision for him, and not one that I can or should take.

Mr. Mohammad Sarwar (Glasgow, Govan): The Prime Minister referred to the United Nations 15 times during last week's Prime Minister's Questions, thereby demonstrating his support for the will of the international community. Does he agree that any breach of UN Security Council resolution 1441 should be a matter for the weapons inspectors and the Security Council, not President Bush and the American Administration? Does he also agree that if President Bush takes unilateral action against Iraq, he will be defying the United Nations?

The Prime Minister: It is, of course, a matter for all of us in the international community, including President Bush. Of course the weapons inspectors should be allowed to do their job. I must point out, however—because I think this is important—that the only reason we have UN weapons inspectors back in there is the firm stand that has been taken. Does anyone seriously believe that we would have UN weapons inspectors back in Iraq if there were a possibility of disarmament happening in a peaceful way? Does anyone really believe that they would be there if we had not sent the clearest possible signal?

It is also important at this time to ensure that we continue to send that signal of strength. If Saddam believes for a single instance that the will of the international community has abated—that the international community does not have the solidity of purpose that it needs to see this thing through—the consequences of either conflict or prolonged conflict are increased. As I have said, if we can avoid conflict we should, but the choice is Saddam's.

Let me tell my hon. Friend and others that if we do come to conflict and Saddam is removed, the people who rejoice first and foremost will be the Iraqi people themselves.

Q7. [90585] **Sandra Gidley** (Romsey): Does the Prime Minister agree that eight days allows a paedophile more

than long enough to abuse a child? If so, will he act to close the loophole that allows registered sex offenders to travel abroad for short visits without notifying the authorities in the country of their destination?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has said to me that the new sex offenders Bill will address that issue. It is obviously important that we legislate on it, and that we do so in a way that allows the House to debate such matters in full.

Q8. [90586] **Jim Knight** (South Dorset): In May last year, Mr. Andrew Shirley of Birmingham came within minutes of drowning at Durdle Door in my constituency. He was saved thanks to the eight-minute response time of the Portland search and rescue helicopter, which is based in my constituency. Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Maritime and Coastguard Agency is considering relocating that helicopter to Lee on Solent, adding 30 minutes to the response time—time that Mr. Shirley and the many others saved by the helicopter simply do not have? I have done all that I can to raise the issue in the House and with Ministers, but is not it time now for the Department for Transport to improve its response time and decide whether it is willing to commit £2 million as a one-off payment to save our lifesaver?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about the magnificent work that the coastguard does for us. I am aware that the Maritime and Coastguard Agency has been debating whether to move one of the helicopters, and the matter is being studied by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport. Urgent discussions are continuing, and we will let my hon. Friend know the results of those discussions as soon as we can.

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald): Given that record numbers of people are applying for asylum, that Ruud Lubers has said that Britain takes more than its fair share, and that there is now a link between suspected terrorism and asylum seeking, does the Prime Minister consider his asylum policy to have been a success or a failure?

The Prime Minister: We took additional measures on asylum in the legislation last year precisely because we recognise that there is far more to do. I point out to the right hon. Lady that when we introduced legislation that, for example, gave us the ability to deport people who were asylum seekers convicted of criminal offences, its provisions were watered down by Conservative Members who opposed them. We introduced measures that allowed us to derogate from the European convention and to make sure that suspected terrorists were not subject to the normal asylum procedures, but those measures were also opposed by certain Conservatives. So I entirely agree that we need to do far more to reduce the number of asylum applications. That is what the measures that we are taking are currently doing. However, it is no use the right hon. Lady asking us to take tough action unless she and her colleagues are prepared to back us.

Q9. [90587] **Helen Jones** (Warrington, North): Does my right hon. Friend share the view of many hon. Members that the decision by Nestlé to sue the Ethiopian Government at a time of famine is morally repugnant? Will he promise to give every assistance to the Government of Ethiopia in resisting that claim, and will he take the lead in urging the international community to take urgent action to tackle the famine facing many people in Ethiopia and throughout Africa?

The Prime Minister: First, we provided about £32 million in assistance to Ethiopia last year. We are looking at what more we can do in response to the famine there. My hon. Friend will know that the work done by the Department for International Development has to a significant extent enabled the proper co-operation between Ethiopia and the UN famine relief programme to take place. I assure her that we will continue to do all we that can in respect of the famine in Ethiopia and of the coming famine in southern Africa.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): The Prime Minister often says that he likes to do things because they are right. How could it possibly be right to risk the lives of young British service men and women on a venture in Iraq that does not have the backing of international law, or the support of the majority of British people?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman says that there is no backing in international law, but let us wait and see what happens in the coming weeks in relation to the United Nations. I will tell him why I think that it is right that we are prepared to take action if necessary in respect of Saddam's regime. It is right because weapons of mass destruction—the proliferation of chemical, biological, nuclear weapons and ballistic missile technology along with it—are a real threat to the security of the world and this country. *[Interruption.]* Someone mentions North Korea. I agree; we have to deal with North Korea too, but that is not a reason for failing to deal with Iraq.

The truth is that this issue of weapons of mass destruction is a real threat to the world. I believe, incidentally, that it is only a matter of time before it is linked with international terrorism. Does anyone believe that, if we do not take a stand as an international community now in respect of weapons of mass destruction, some terrorist group is not in future going to get hold of that material and use it?

Supposing I came along in August 2001 and said to the hon. Gentleman that there was an al-Qaeda terrorist network; no one would have heard of it. Suppose I said that we would have to invade Afghanistan in order to deal with it; no one would have believed that that was necessary. Yet, my goodness, a few weeks later, thousands of people were killed on the streets of New York.

This is a difficult time. I understand the concerns that people have, but sometimes the job of a Prime Minister is to say the things that others do not want them to say but that we believe are necessary to say because the threat is real and if we do not deal with it the consequences of our weakness will haunt future generations.

Greater Manchester Police Incident

12.31 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement on yesterday's events in Manchester.

I know that the House would want to reiterate the words of the Prime Minister in expressing great sadness, regret and outrage at yesterday's tragic events in Greater Manchester, which resulted in the death of Detective Constable Stephen Oake and the injury of four other police officers. Our deepest condolences go to Detective Oake's family; our thoughts must be with them and the injured and their families at this time.

Yesterday, I used my powers under the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 to certify the detention, pending deportation, of two foreign nationals who are suspected of involvement in terrorism and of posing a threat to national security. The Greater Manchester police were acting with immigration officers in support of the operation to detain one of those individuals. Police in Manchester detained three men in total. The second national certified by me has now been detained in London. In total, 15 people have so far been detained under the provisions of the Act.

Greater Manchester police have activated their major incident procedures and are conducting a murder inquiry. I shall, of course, report further to the House when I am in a position to do so.

On 7 November, I outlined in a written statement the scale and nature of the threat that we face from international terrorists. In the past few months, my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary and I have made it clear that that threat is a continuing and dangerous one. I know that the whole House supports the efforts of the police and the security services to detect and prevent terrorist incidents. Parliament has provided the authorities with extra powers through the Terrorism Act 2000 and the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act, and I regularly discuss with the security services and the police how those powers are being used and whether they are being used effectively.

Yesterday's events highlighted the ongoing threat that we face. In combating that threat, we rely on the bravery and commitment of police officers and security services in defending us against dangerous criminals and those who threaten the very safety of our country. I commend their bravery to the House.

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition made clear, we all share the Home Secretary's admiration for the efforts of police officers involved in protecting our lives against terrorism. Our condolences go to the bereaved and our thoughts are with those officers who have been wounded.

It is far too early to make comments or ask detailed questions about the operation, which clearly went badly wrong in some respects. I am sure that in due course the Home Secretary will give the House some information on the way in which the operation was conducted, on what can be done better to protect police officers under such circumstances, and on whether it is appropriate, in such circumstances, for them to be armed. However, this episode also draws our attention to wider questions.

For many months, I have been attempting to alert the Home Secretary and the Government as a whole—and the country as a whole—to the fact that although the Government very clearly have the protection of citizens at heart, and although they do have some machinery to achieve that effect, there are worrying signs that there is not yet the level of urgency that is needed to match the level of threat that the Government rightly acknowledge. The recent entry into Sizewell B power station by some protesters was a worrying sign; signs from the civil defence community that the level of preparedness on the ground is not all that it might be are also worrying.

I hope that the Home Secretary will tell us today that he will redouble his efforts to increase co-ordination to match the level of threat; but, beyond that, as my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition pointed out in Prime Minister's questions a moment ago, this episode raises the question of whether our current chaotic system of asylum arrangements, of which the Home Secretary is very well aware and which he has attempted in one way and another to mend, notwithstanding the fact that his predecessor left them in probably the worst state of any country in the civilised world—

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): The right hon. Gentleman should not say things like that.

Mr. Letwin: The right hon. Gentleman says that I should not say things like that, but they happen to be true, and have been known to be true. They have been known by the current Home Secretary to be true, which is why he has been trying to put them right. However, I regret to say that there is ample evidence that, at present, people are getting through the asylum system who do not have the best interests of this country at heart, and who intend to pursue terrorist activities. What will the Home Secretary do over the coming weeks and months urgently to intensify the security vetting of those who seek to enter this country? That is clearly the question that the House needs to ask, and it is clearly the question that the Home Secretary needs to answer.

Mr. Blunkett: I am deeply sorry that the right hon. Gentleman has chosen to attack the record and actions of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary—[HON. MEMBERS: "Why"?] He inherited a system that was on the verge of breakdown. I, at another time—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Opposition Front Benchers have asked the Home Secretary several questions, so it is only courteous to listen to what the Home Secretary has to say.

Mr. Blunkett: At another time and in a more appropriate setting I shall be happy to explain why we had to put in place a new computerised fingerprinting operation, why we had to restore a system following the collapse of the computer that had been ordered in 1996 and why my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) had to take the actions that he did; but let us deal now with last night's events.

[Mr. Blunkett]

The right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) is right to say that, as part of the inquiry, proper facts about what happened will be laid out. It is my understanding, however, that the initial incursion by a very large number of police, supported by immigration services, was made with the support of armed police officers and with the necessary body armour. It was subsequent events that led to the tragic death of Stephen Oake. It is my understanding also, and I think that it will be the understanding of the House, that the work of MI5 and of special branch and the police, leading to the arrests, shows how well our system is working in identifying and taking action against those who threaten our lives and security. It is precisely because we certificated those people whom we believed to be a risk that Greater Manchester police were acting on the advice given to me, through the security services. That affirms that the system is working—tragically, it led to the death of Stephen Oake—and underpins the fact that we are on top of those who threaten our lives and livelihoods.

We do not need to be reminded by the right hon. Gentleman that he has drawn my attention to the urgency of the matter. After all, the Government were held to account by the Opposition parties and by some elements of the press for what they described as acting too urgently and precipitately in autumn 2001. We were opposed for that very reason again and again in the House and we were ridiculed for it. In the past 12 months, certain elements of the Opposition and the press have constantly said that our action was disproportionate and that we did not have a balanced approach to the protection of our nation vis-à-vis the freedom of the individual. It is those who believe in global trade, global movements and the freedom of the individual who are now calling for even more draconian measures.

Let me deal head on with the issue raised by the Leader of the Opposition and, on his behalf, by the shadow Home Secretary, who must have to eat his words as he repeats his leader's decision to up the ante on asylum. Let us be clear about what we have done. We have introduced a warning system, whereby everyone who goes through the immigration process is identified to check whether they are on the security services' warning index.

I assure the House that, first, we will look into further refining that system by using the computerised fingerprinting and surveillance systems that Opposition Members so often oppose, which were in part introduced by the present Foreign Secretary.

Secondly, on 29 October 2001 I announced the introduction of a range of new processes—induction, reporting centres and an asylum registration card, which is now virtually completely in place—to make registration meaningful and enable us to track those moving through the asylum process. We strengthened the entire immigration process, as the Prime Minister reiterated, to ensure that those who commit a crime can be removed, that there is a fast-track system for doing that and that we can quickly reject those who come into our country clandestinely.

On the basis of expediency, the very people who have chosen to use asylum in the way they have this afternoon have opposed so much of what we have done. Let me make it clear that whatever the basis on which people enter our country—on a visa for tourism or for short stays, with a visa for a work permit or as asylum seekers—we will deal with them if they pose a threat to our country.

In the interests of community and race relations, however, let no one suggest that we can assume that asylum seekers pose the sole threat and that it is asylum that we need to fear. It is those people who use asylum and freedom of movement throughout the world and who organise against our interests whom we must fear. It is the people who are helping us to arrest, hold and secure those who pose that threat of whom we should be so proud today.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): First, I join my right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and all my colleagues around the country, especially those in Greater Manchester and Cheshire, in associating ourselves with expressions by the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary of love, sympathy and gratitude to Stephen Oake's family, and of support and solidarity to chief constable Mike Todd and all those who work with him in Greater Manchester police. Many of us have personal experience of their calibre and quality and want to put on record the debt we all owe them.

I endorse entirely the tone of the Home Secretary's response to the previous intervention. The raids in Wood Green, in Edinburgh, in Bournemouth and in Crumpsall yesterday show that the intelligence services and the police are very much in command of the situation. They are a tribute to the work done behind the scenes and in difficult circumstances, and the public need to know that the Home Secretary has every confidence that we are managing the terrorist threat and the threats from individuals to our liberties in a very professional, effective and advanced way. I share the right hon. Gentleman's views in that respect.

Will the Home Secretary deal with three matters that I hope are appropriate to raise now? Will he confirm that the police's view remains that the presumption should be that they are not routinely armed, but that any police force that feels that, to do their job, its officers need to be armed or to have special protective clothing or other protective equipment can use such equipment when the judgment on the ground is that it is appropriate? Will he also confirm that there are no restrictions on that?

Secondly, will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the reality today, even if it was not 50 years ago, is that the special branch of the Met, the National Crime Squad and the National Criminal Intelligence Service show that we have a level of national policing because there is national activity that has to cross the boundaries of police forces? Does not the reality of policing today mean that we must recognise, formally and openly, that, built on the foundations of local policing, we now need regional, national and international policing; and that unless that level of policing is fully supported, we will not be able to counter those who work internationally and are no respecters of police authority or police force boundaries?

Finally, while I share the Home Secretary's view that terrorism in this country is no more the province of asylum seekers than of other foreign nationals who come here or British-born persons who are persuaded of that awful route, is it not worth re-examining the recommendation of the Select Committee on Home Affairs that we could do well by toughening our border controls and replacing the three different agencies that share responsibility at our airports and seaports with one common border force? If the Home Secretary reconsidered that course of action, he would have considerable support. It would allow our liberties, including liberty of movement, to remain, but be the most effective way of ensuring that those who seek to undermine liberty are caught, dealt with and prosecuted according to law.

Mr. Blunkett: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's opening remarks.

It is not our intention that the police should be routinely armed, but our clear objective, and that of chief constables across the country, is that they should be able to make a local decision in the light of circumstances. I understand that the chief constable of Greater Manchester, Mike Todd, had made that decision in respect of the original incursion into the buildings last night.

Secondly, I share the view that we need the best possible co-ordination between existing crime and intelligence agencies. We are considering how to make sure that, as we do at European level and internationally, we do that more effectively nationally and regionally. SO13, led by David Veness from the Met, performs that role in anti-terrorist and special branch functions very well indeed.

On the third question, if memory serves, my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) raised that issue with me at the time of the proscription of the four organisations that we dealt with in the autumn. I said at the time that I did not rule out a change in the organisation of border and port controls. It is worth examining that, as we have in respect of security at airports, within the context of having a clearly focused, prioritised and objective way of using the services available to us to target those whom we know form a genuine risk.

Those people, whether in the press or in this House, who believe that we could surveil, secure details of and verify 100 per cent. the security ratings of the 90 million people who pass through our ports and airports each year are living in a totally different world. From talking to the Attorney General of the United States, it appears that the US takes the same view. Through intelligence work and security, we must take a prioritised and focused approach; it is the only way in which we can proceed, and it is all that we can do. Despite our best efforts and the efforts of those who work for us, in the end, in a global economy with global movements, we cannot create a fortress Britain.

Mr. Graham Stringer (Manchester, Blackley): I pay tribute to Stephen Oake and the other officers who were injured in my constituency last night. I wish particularly to pass on my condolences to the family. I have just realised, having read the front page of *The Daily Telegraph*, that I know Stephen's father quite well from the world of international sport. He chaired the Isle of Man commonwealth games committee and we worked together on the Manchester games and in the run-up to them. I therefore feel particularly emotional and upset. My thoughts are with Robin and the family.

I pay tribute to the refreshingly open way in which the new chief constable of Greater Manchester has provided a great deal more information than we have come to expect. I suspect that he has provided as much information as he can to reassure the local community and the country as a whole.

I live within a couple of hundred yards of where last night's incident took place. I know that the relationships in what is a very mixed cultural and ethnic community are extremely good. I ask my right hon. Friend to agree with me that there is a national problem of international terrorism, and that it is not a Manchester or north London problem.

Mr. Blunkett: Once again, we reiterate our condolences and understand my hon. Friend's words. I can confirm entirely what he said. The actions taken arising from the decision to certify one individual were taken on the basis that we want action wherever and whenever it is necessary.

Sir Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Detective Constable Stephen Robin Oake was one of my constituents. He lived with his wife of 20 years, Lesley, and his son and two daughters in the village of Poynton in my constituency. He was a thoroughly committed, dedicated and brave career professional policeman. His father, as we heard from the hon. Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Stringer), was an assistant chief constable in Greater Manchester, following which he was chief constable of the Isle of Man constabulary.

I make a plea that the media and others respect the grief and the privacy of the Oake family. I ask for a total commitment from the Home Secretary and express the hope—I am grateful, on behalf of the family, for the sympathy that has been expressed by the Home Secretary, by the Prime Minister, by the Leader of the Opposition and by the spokesman for the Liberal party—that the Government, the House and all political parties will do all within their power to ensure that Stephen's life was not lost in vain and to ensure that terrorism does not succeed.

Mr. Blunkett: We all join the hon. Gentleman in requesting that the privacy and integrity of the family be respected and agree that we have an obligation, whatever debates take place across the Dispatch Boxes, to ensure that Stephen Oake did not die in vain. We must learn lessons from what is happening and what happened last night, and apply them in protecting ourselves.

Mr. Kaufman: Following the dignified and moving intervention of the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Sir Nicholas Winterton) and the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Stringer), may I say that the people of Manchester and the family of the murdered police officer, who are mourning that death and lamenting the injuries to the

[Mr. Kaufman]

other police officers, will not take kindly to politicians seeking to score cheap political points over a deeply sad, tragic and alarming event? Hon. Members who seek to do so will win scorn rather than support.

I agree with what the hon. Member for Macclesfield and my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Blackley said, but this terrible event demonstrates that terrorism knows no frontiers inside the country or outside it, and that the measures that we are taking against terrorism are justified.

Mr. Blunkett: I share entirely the points made by my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): I, too, extend my condolences to the family of DC Oake. It may be too soon for the Home Secretary to comment, but I ask him to assure the House, if he is able to do so, that last night's tragic events were not in any way caused by a co-ordination failure between the security services, the local special branch and Greater Manchester police. Does the right hon. Gentleman feel that any lessons can be learned in improving that co-ordinaton, which might save other tragedies in future?

Mr. Blunkett: On the latter point, I think that there will be lessons to be learned; the review arising from the major incident report will highlight the lessons. I can give an assurance that co-ordination between the security services, SO13—the anti-terrorism branch—and the local police was very good, and that the initial incursion was a success. As I said earlier, arms and body armour were available and were used. It was a subsequent part of the process of dealing with the three people in the dwelling and with what was discovered that led, tragically, to Stephen Oake's death.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): I join my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and the whole House in offering my commiserations to the family of Stephen Oake. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is at times such as this that we are forced to focus on the great bravery that we ask of servicing officers in Greater Manchester police and in police forces generally? It is a dangerous job. Fortunately, this sort of tragedy does not happen too often, but it is something that is in the very nature of the role that the police perform.

My right hon. Friend had to act against those suspected of involvement in terrorism. Will he make it clear from the Dispatch Box that asylum seekers in Manchester or elsewhere in Britain are not collectively accused of involvement in terrorism? We must recognise that the vast majority of those who seek refuge in this country want to contribute to the British way of life and do not, sadly, as in this case, want to take from it.

Mr. Blunkett: I reiterate my hon. Friend's point. We must make it clear that we deal with individuals who threaten our lives, not with groups of individuals whom we can dub in a particular way at a particular time for a particular purpose.

We have all commented on police bravery. High-profile events such as yesterday's capture the headlines, but it is worth remembering those who lost their lives in less high-profile events because of the bravery that they showed. I think that our families would want us to do that as well.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Sir Nicholas Winterton), I represent members of Greater Manchester police who live in east Cheshire. I know that Stephen's death will be felt deeply in the police community and throughout the Manchester area and the Cheshire area.

May I ask the Home Secretary about the nature and scale of the terrorist threat? I have heard informed Government sources say that there are about 1,000 people in this country who are potential international terrorist operatives. Is that figure really correct—are we talking about a threat of that magnitude?

Mr. Blunkett: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman seriously expects me to speculate on the number of people who may or may not pose a terrorist threat. What I can say clearly to the House is that anyone who is suspected of posing a terrorist threat, or who is suspected of dealing with or succouring terrorists, will of course be under surveillance and will be dealt with appropriately. There are no meaningful and verifiable figures of the sort used in the media, and I do hope that the considered and sensible way in which we have normally dealt with these matters in the House not only prevails here, but is reflected in the media. One of the great strengths of our country is that we are not just stoical; we deal with things with a clear and hard head, and we know what does and does not make sense.

Angela Eagle (Wallasey): May I also associate myself with condolences offered to the family of Stephen Oake, and to those officers who were injured? I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), in that the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman's response to today's statement constituted a misjudgment. Will my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary comment on the progress that is being made in international co-operation among law enforcement agencies, particularly within the European Union, to try to anticipate such threats, and to prevent the threats to our country and our way of life that the arrests of Algerian terrorist gangs in the past week have demonstrated?

Mr. Blunkett: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's work in helping to secure precisely that co-operation across Europe, both in terms of immigration and of the policing and security services, and I thank her for it. We have been building on that through genuine co-operation between the services, and by enabling people to share data. Eurodac—the fingerprinting database that was announced only a day or two ago by the relevant Minister—assists us by enabling the sharing of that information and the tracking of those who pose a threat to us all.

Dr. John Pugh (Southport): May I add my condolences to those eloquently expressed by other Members; and can the Home Secretary say how long the suspected terrorists involved in this case have been in this country, and in the north-west in particular?

Mr. Blunkett: I can deal with the individual who was certified yesterday, and who was arrested in

Manchester. He has been in this country, off and on, for about four years. He sought asylum and was refused, took his case to appeal, absconded and disappeared, and was then tracked. This is the real issue for the House: he was not let go and forgotten about; he was tracked by the security services, to the point where we were about to arrest and deal with him under legislation passed in autumn 2001.

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): In passing on my condolences to the Oake family, may I ask my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to look again at taking action against those who incite such violence? I am referring to Abu Hamza, for example, who, incidentally, was given permission to remain in the United Kingdom by the previous Government. May I remind my right hon. Friend that when Abu Hamza spoke in Burnley four years ago—Burnley is not that far from Manchester—he used language to incite precisely such violent knife attacks on what he called "non-believers"? What happened last night was exactly the sort of incident that Abu Hamza has been inciting for many years. Is it not time to take such threats and statements seriously, and to take action against Abu Hamza and others of his ilk?

Mr. Blunkett: My hon. Friend has been assiduous in rightly pursuing these incidents and issues—as have I—to ensure that the Metropolitan police and, where necessary, the security services evaluate the words and the actions of individuals such as the one mentioned this afternoon. We all know how difficult this matter is, given that there are those who are very careful not to overstep the mark. Baroness Thatcher had exactly the same problems with this individual—this is not a party political point—way back in 1990–91. Real attempts were made to deal with him, but his care in not crossing the line caused the then Government and the police to back off. However, make no mistake about it: every word and every action is being monitored, and we need to do so in a way that secures the confidence of people who are sick and tired of individuals like him abusing our hospitality.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): May I briefly touch on one point that has been raised on several occasions? The fact that my right hon. Friend the shadow Home Secretary asks questions that occasionally discomfit the Government does not mean that they are illegitimate, and it is a pity that the manner in which his questions have been considered has created that reaction.

Yesterday's events in Manchester, about which people have spoken movingly, demonstrate—if ever it needed to be demonstrated—that the distinction between our domestic security and our foreign security is not a real one. I therefore suggest to the Home Secretary that he and his right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary discuss a means whereby we can have a debate in this House during which the security of this country at home and abroad is considered in a calm, rational and mature atmosphere, so that the Government can explain their overall policy on international terrorism overseas, and its effects on our national security in this country. That would help us to avoid being reactive, and therefore ill tempered.

Mr. Blunkett: On the first point, I do not want to get sidetracked into considering the actions or words of the shadow Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin). I have reflected, however, on whether my first reaction if I were in opposition would have been to appear on "Newsnight" and to make the remarks about asylum that he made. I can only presume that the dramatic change of character and approach of the past few weeks has been engendered from elsewhere. I have a great deal of time for the right hon. Gentleman, and it is very sad indeed to see this transformation taking place.

On the point made by the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) about having a debate, we had a measured, sane and rational debate on 11 July, but as I have said before, I think that it was reported in only one column of one newspaper. I commend that newspaper—I think that it was *The Independent*—because it usually has a real go at me; in fact, I have never known it not to do so.

Secondly, we will shortly be debating the renewal of some of the powers in part 4 of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001. I hope that that will also provide an opportunity to reflect on these matters, and that we are able, as we so often are, to transcend party politics in not only addressing the issues, but making sensible suggestions that a wise Government are clever enough to take on board.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): I am one whose voice and vote have always supported the current Home Secretary in his attempts to deal with difficult questions, and for everyone in this House difficult questions do indeed surround this issue. As he knows, my constituency office deals with a high number of asylum seekers, the vast majority of whom are here genuinely. However, last week an Afghan refugee came into my office and said that he was claiming asylum as a former fighter with the Taliban. One needs to question whether this is a sensible system. If we have a war in Iraq, at the end of it supporters of Saddam Hussein would presumably be entitled to claim asylum in the west. This is a ridiculous position.

Mr. Blunkett: I do not consider that it is not possible for people to return to Afghanistan. After the fall of Saddam Hussein, I would not consider that it was impossible for people to return to a free and democratic Iraq. However, I take my hon. Friend's point entirely. Sanity has to prevail in the way in which we legislate and process matters, and in the way in which the judicial system deals with appeals. If the individual in question was trying to hide his intent or past history, he was not doing a particularly good job of it by coming into my hon. Friend's surgery and announcing his past endeavours.

Lady Hermon (North Down): Speaking as the wife of a former Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, which of course lost 302 officers at the hands of those involved in terrorist activity, may I say how desperately sorry I was that we learned last night of

[Lady Hermon]

the murder of a young police officer doing his duty in Manchester? Mercifully, we have been spared such acts in Northern Ireland in recent years. I am terribly sorry for Stephen Oake's family that they have been put through such pain and suffering, as well as his colleagues and the community of Manchester. Such an event is a terrible tragedy in any community.

May I urge the Home Secretary to consult the present Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, Hugh Orde, to see what lessons can be learned further to protect police officers, to ensure that there is no repetition of last night's appalling incident in Manchester?

Mr. Blunkett: Yes, I am very happy to do that. We all accept that the hon. Lady was closer to such events through her husband than any of us have been. We respect and understand her very strong feelings.

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald): May I add my condolences to the family of Stephen Oake? I also pay tribute to the security and intelligence services, which have obviously twice now got the right information and managed to track down activity that is dangerous to all of us.

Nevertheless, will the Home Secretary answer the questions asked by my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) from the Front Bench? Will he specifically tell me what his reasons are for not adopting a policy of securely housing all new applicants for asylum until either, under my proposed policy, their cases are determined, or, according to the advice that he received from his officials, at least until their identity has been determined?

Mr. Blunkett: First, I did not receive such advice. I am aware of the disclosure to the right hon. Lady under the appropriate Act and of the e-mail sent by a junior official shortly after I had made a statement to Parliament laying out how the induction reporting and ARC—application registration card—system would register and track those who came to the immigration service in a way that was not possible before June 2001. Secondly, I said that the logistical cost of providing wholly secure accommodation for every single asylum seeker and their dependents while they are assessed and their security rating is evaluated is enormous. As we have seen in respect of planning consents, we could still be in the process of trying to secure those centres without the reporting, the ARC card and induction in a way that would not have ensured our security—but might have made her feel better.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Having finished the admirable 20-day parliamentary police service scheme in Brixton only last Friday, may I express my especial sympathy to the family of DC Oake and to the officers who were injured in Manchester? It is our duty to the police service and the country as a whole to ensure that our systems of immigration control really work and that those who are in breach of the immigration regulations are returned promptly. In respect of applications for asylum, we must ensure that the provisions of the Dublin convention are upheld. Thus, applicants who come from EU countries should not, prima facie, have to be dealt with in this country, but should be returned to the EU country in which they first arrived.

Mr. Blunkett: I agree entirely. I know that the whole House will support the Government in future when we deal with those cases, as we had to with the Ahmadi family.

Patrick Mercer (Newark): As someone who has been present at the scene of the murder of several police officers, I should like to join the rest of the House in expressing my sympathy for Constable Oake and my admiration for the security services in the success that they have achieved. However, when such an incident occurs, it is not currently clear whether the Security Service, the chief constable of the region concerned, or the national co-ordinator of the Metropolitan police's anti-terrorist branch is in charge. If some good is to come from the death of this brave constable, can we ensure that that situation is resolved?

Mr. Blunkett: The Security Service does its job in detecting, conducting surveillance and advising. The anti-terrorism branch works, as it always has, with the local police, as they are the enforcement and arresting authorities. The police are therefore co-ordinated through the anti-terrorism branch in incidents such as yesterday's. It obviously behoves those immediately in charge to ensure that at each stage of the process—there are different stages, as I am sure will become clear as the evidence emerges—the appropriate force is in charge of the aspect in question. I do not want to go further in that regard, as it is important that the major incident programme be undertaken. It is also important that the evaluation of the evidence from those involved be brought forward at a time when, after the terrible trauma caused to those who were present at the incident and had to deal with the attack on the officers who were injured, as well as the death of Stephen Oake, we can evaluate it more carefully.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): The Home Secretary is undoubtedly correct to say that what has ended as a police tragedy began as a Security Service success, but does he recall a not dissimilar incident in a prison camp in Afghanistan, when an American interrogator was murdered by someone whom he was interrogating in circumstances in which one would normally have thought that violence was unlikely? Is not one of the lessons that should be drawn from what happened that the mentality of fundamentalist Islamic terrorists is such that they will lash out whenever they can, even if it is to their own obvious disadvantage? Should he not, without prejudging the circumstances of this case, perhaps consider when all those circumstances are known whether guidelines should be issued saying that people who are arrested on suspicion of such terrorist activities should be held in handcuffs until they are removed to a secure environment?

Mr. Blunkett: I am sure that the lessons of yesterday's incident will be learned and that there will be an evaluation of the process that took place in terms of the

unhandcuffing of the individual who committed the act and obtained a knife. At this stage, I think that it would better if we said no more about the incident.

Missile Defence

1.18 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): With permission, Mr Speaker, I should like to make a statement on missile defence.

The House will recall that in the defence debate on 17 October I described the work in the United States on the development of ballistic missile defence systems and the Government's thinking on the issue. Subsequently, on 9 December, as I informed the House during defence questions that day, I placed in the Library a discussion paper produced by the Ministry of Defence setting out the role that active missile defence might play within a comprehensive strategy for tackling the threat from ballistic missiles. On 17 December, I informed the House of the receipt of a request from the United States Government to upgrade the early warning radar at Fylingdales for missile defence purposes.

I have repeatedly emphasised that the Government would not respond to such a request without a further opportunity for discussion in the House. Next week's defence debate is a timely further occasion for the House to discuss the challenges that the United Kingdom faces in the new international security environment, including those posed by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile technology. I hope that the House will find it helpful if today I set out the Government's thinking on the US request.

The Government recognise that missile defence raises important strategic issues, as well as local concerns in North Yorkshire. Following the release of the discussion paper in December, with its invitation to all interested parties to contribute their views, we have had around 300 responses. In addition, I visited North Yorkshire last week, and heard the views of local people and their elected representatives, as well as meeting representatives from the planning authorities. We have taken those views into account as we have considered the central question, which is the key test that the Government will apply to the US request: would agreeing to the upgrade of Fylingdales ultimately enhance the security of the UK and the NATO Alliance?

The background to the US request is the marked increase in the threat to our security from weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery. The Prime Minister has described weapons of mass destruction as the key issue facing the world community. It is a real threat to our security, fanned by proliferation from irresponsible regimes. As we all know, threat is a combination of intention and capability. Intentions can be debated, but they can also change at very short notice. The evidence of expanding capabilities, therefore, cannot responsibly be ignored. The hard fact is that a number of states of concern are making major investments in developing ever-longer range ballistic missiles. We are not referring here to countries developing standard military technology against the risk of conventional conflict. These ballistic missile programmes are being developed solely in order to threaten the delivery of mass destruction—nerve gas, toxins, biological agents or even nuclear warheads. It is the combination of ballistic missiles and the possession of these weapons of mass destruction, together with the demonstrated willingness to use those capabilities, that

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makes Iraq the most immediate state threat to global security. Elsewhere, if North Korea ends its moratorium on flight testing, it could flight test a missile with the potential to reach Europe and the United States within weeks. Other countries may acquire similar missile systems, not least through the proliferation of missile technology from North Korea.

Based on the analysis and discussion that we have undertaken so far, I have therefore come to the preliminary conclusion that the answer to the US request must be yes, and that we should agree to the upgrade as proposed.

RAF Fylingdales has operated since 1963 as a ballistic missile early warning system, which together with other radars in the United States and Greenland provides tactical warning and attack assessment of a missile attack against the United Kingdom, North America or western Europe. It has been upgraded a number of times over the years. Many hon. Members will recall the old "golf balls" that were dismantled in the late 1980s and replaced with the existing pyramid-like structure. Indeed, a life extension programme is under way to maintain its capabilities to provide early warning and track objects in space. These missions will continue to be the primary function of RAF Fylingdales.

I have sought to dispel a number of misapprehensions about the US request in various meetings in North Yorkshire. The proposal is for an upgrade of the existing radar, not some massive new construction. No change to the external appearance of the radar should be involved. The upgrade essentially comprises modification to the hardware and software of the computers within the base. There will be no change in the power output of the radar, which is many times below statutory safety limits. We therefore believe that no health risk to people or livestock could arise. We have already explained to the local planning authorities that we see nothing in the upgrade proposals that would require formal planning consultation, and we have promised to provide them with full supporting evidence in due course.

The upgrade of the Fylingdales radar can and should be considered as a discrete proposition. It does not commit us in any way to any deeper involvement in missile defence, although it gives us options to do so, should we decide on that at a later date. It will not involve huge costs. The upgrade will be performed at US expense, and we do not expect any significant variation in the running costs of RAF Fylingdales, which, as is appropriate for an RAF station, we already bear.

Agreeing to the upgrade is not at odds with the wider approach of our NATO allies. The Prague summit agreed

"to examine options for addressing the increasing missile threat to Alliance territory, forces and population centres".

The Danish Government have received a parallel request to upgrade the early warning radar in Greenland.

Missile defence is a defensive system that threatens no one. We see no reason to believe fears that the development of missile defences will be strategically destabilising. Reactions from Russia and China have been measured. Missile defence would need to be used only if a ballistic missile has actually been fired. At that point, no matter how much we emphasise our other means of addressing the threat—non-proliferation, intelligence, law enforcement, conflict prevention, diplomacy and deterrence—those means will have failed and cannot be of further help. There would be no way of preventing a devastating impact without intercepting and destroying the missile. Once the missile is in the air, it is unthinkable that anyone could not want us to be in a position to shoot it down.

Those are the reasons for concluding that agreeing to the US request would not prejudice the UK's interests. But beyond that, the key consideration is that it would represent an invaluable extra insurance against the development of a still uncertain, but potentially catastrophic, threat to the citizens of this country. There is not yet an immediate threat to us of this kind, but there is a distinct possibility that this threat could materialise in the relatively near future. It would therefore be irresponsible for the Government to leave the United Kingdom without a route map to acquire a defence against this threat. An upgraded Fylingdales radar would be a vital building-block on which missile defence for this country and for our European neighbours could later be developed, if the need arises and if we so decide.

We are confident that agreeing to this request will not significantly increase the threat to the UK. The security interests of the UK are already closely identified with those of the US and other NATO allies. That will not change, regardless of decisions on missile defence. Keeping a low profile and hoping for the best is simply not an option. We also believe that any increased threat to RAF Fylingdales itself is negligible. For the foreseeable future, states of concern are very unlikely to have the sophisticated capability or size of arsenal to consider targeting specific points or military installations. Long-range missiles in their hands will essentially be weapons of terror, and, as with all military installations in the UK, the station is well defended against terrorist attack. But we must not forget that what drives the threat against the UK is not the deployment of missile defences, but those states of concern who develop or acquire weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery.

The upgrade would indicate no commitment to further involvement with missile defence deployments. Separately, we intend to agree a new technical memorandum of understanding with the United States that would give us full insight into the development of their missile defence programme and the opportunity for UK industry to reap the benefits of participation. But any UK acquisition of missile defence would be subject to a separate decision, at the relevant time. We must approach this in stages, considering each step in the light of how both the threat and the relevant technologies evolve.

The Government have not yet formally replied to the US Administration on their request to upgrade the Fylingdales radar. I await with interest the views that hon. Members will wish to put forward, today and in next week's debate. But it is only right that the House should know the Government's preliminary conclusion that it is in the UK's interests to agree to the request. From the UK's national perspective, this specific decision is one that has real potential benefits at

essentially no financial cost. It will ensure that if, in the coming years, we find that a potentially devastating threat is becoming a reality, we have the opportunity to defend against it.

Weapons of mass destruction present the gravest risk to UK security. A ballistic missile launched at the UK is the most catastrophic potential threat to our people in the future. A Government's first duty is to protect their citizens, and that is a duty that this Government will not shirk from undertaking.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): I thank the Secretary of State for giving me an advance copy of his statement. However, I start by lamenting the fact that Parliament seems to have been the last to know of this significant and controversial decision. By 5.30 pm yesterday, the Press Association wires were reporting that there would be a statement today and

"Mr. Hoon is expected to say . . . he is minded to accept the American request to use Fylingdales."

The way in which the announcement has been dribbled out is all too typical of the way in which the Government treat Parliament.

I welcome next week's opportunity for debate, but rather than a general debate, which will inevitably be taken up by other defence issues such as the preparation for military action against Iraq or the outcome of the NATO Prague summit, should it not be a specific debate on missile defence? Is that not what the House of Commons is truly for?

Her Majesty's Opposition have consistently made the case for missile defence. We therefore welcome the decision as far as it goes, as we believe that it is in the interests of British national security. Many of our European allies—France, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, Greece—are already involved in missile defence programmes, particularly theatre missile defence, some of them in co-operation with the United States. Given that some 276 Labour Members have signed an early-day motion against the Secretary of State's policy, does the right hon. Gentleman not recognise that he must now convince those who would prefer to believe that the Government are simply a slave to the United States agenda? After all, it was only on 10 May 1999 that his predecessor Lord Robertson said:

"We are not in favour of developing ballistic missile defence systems. We are in favour of the anti-ballistic missile treaty".—[*Official Report*, 10 May 1999; Vol. 331, c. 10.]

Incidentally, that is a treaty whose demise the Government have now accepted without a hint of protest. It was only on 21 March 2000 that the then Foreign Office Minister, now Secretary of State for Wales, the right hon. Member for Neath (Peter Hain) said on the BBC's "Newsnight":

"I don't like the idea of a star wars programme, limited or unlimited."

Of course, we are not talking about "star wars".

The Secretary of State has spent most of the past year stonewalling on this issue, and I now welcome the refreshing tone that he has adopted towards British participation in missile defence. Does it reflect the fact that the Government are now confident that the technology will be successfully developed to make missile defence a practical reality? What Government control will there be over the use of the facilities at Fylingdales and the information gathered there? Is it possible that Menwith Hill will also be included in the programme at some future date?

On the wider issue, the Secretary of State says that the decision does not commit us to deeper involvement in missile defence, but why is it necessary to approach the issue, as he says, in stages? Surely the conclusion from his statement must be that we should be fully committed in principle to global missile defence now. What is the Government's policy on the possibility of having ground-based interceptor missiles on British soil, or sea-based interceptors on British ships?

The Secretary of State has made a clear case for missile defence. He refers to the possibility of North Korea representing potentially an imminent missile threat "within weeks"? What is the benefit of putting off those decisions? Full support for UK partnership with the United States on missile defence will not only enhance the opportunities for the British defence industry but is clearly vital for our national security. We therefore urge the Government to be candid with the House and to state now that a full commitment to missile defence is their real intention.

Mr. Hoon: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman chooses to criticise the fact that, in a short space of time, the Government are making available a full day for debating defence issues. That will be an opportunity for right hon. and hon. Members to debate this and other issues. If the hon. Gentleman feels so strongly about the issue, it is open to the Opposition to use the time that they have available to debate the question as soon as next Monday, which is the next Opposition day. He and other Opposition Front Benchers can use that time to debate the issue in the way that he suggests is so important. I anticipate that he does not really regard the matter as so important; otherwise, he would use the time as he has advocated—*[Interruption.]* I look forward to any debate. As I said, the Government have made time available next week, and if the Opposition want an extra debate, I will be delighted to be here to respond to any motion that they care to put down.

On the hon. Gentleman's more detailed points about the process, it is important that he examine carefully the way in which the United States is approaching developing a missile defence system. The United States has taken outline decisions only, and has specifically indicated that it is important that there should be a test bed—for the moment, a Pacific test bed designed to provide emergency protection to the United States against the threat from North Korea. As a result, the United States has not taken specific decisions about the kind of system that it would ultimately like to deploy. Again, I have made the point to the hon. Gentleman and Opposition Front Benchers over many months that it does not make sense to anticipate decisions that have not yet been made in the United States. That remains the position. We are in close consultation with the United States about the development of these systems, but it simply does not make sense to anticipate decisions that it has not yet taken.

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): I thank the Secretary of State for the advance copy of his statement, but I must agree entirely with the view of the Conservative

[Mr. Paul Keetch]

spokesman, the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin), that we already knew what he would say today.

The decision, whether one agrees with it or opposes it, has seemingly been made with an astonishing lack of consultation. It is a major strategic decision, and to suggest that it should be debated in an Opposition-day debate is outrageous. The Government issued the public discussion paper only last month, and the request was issued only last month, yet the House of Commons has still not had a proper opportunity to discuss the matter. The costs, the strategic dimensions and the feasibility of the scheme are not well understood by those on either side of the argument. Many questions remain unclear—not least the question of why the Secretary of State chose to announce the decision today.

If Fylingdales is to be upgraded, will Britain be protected by the current US missile defence scheme? If not, why are we participating? How will participation enhance the security of Britain? What is the position of our allies in NATO and our partners in the EU on this programme? Will they be participating? Have the Danes agreed that their site should be used? How much does the UK need to invest to be able to keep the option of participating in the future? What could be achieved by spending that money on other defence issues? Is there a risk of further terrorist attack at Fylingdales? Will extra security be required there? In short, is this a good deal for Britain? [HON. MEMBERS: "You tell us."] If Conservative Front Benchers will hold their lines, I will.

If the Secretary of State says that his preliminary conclusion is to say yes—that he is minded to agree—what might make him change his mind and say later that he does not agree? At the moment, while the Secretary of State may be minded to say yes, many on the Liberal Democrat Benches would be minded to say no. The reality is that, today, the House of Commons is being presented with a fait accompli.

Mr. Hoon: To be fair to the hon. Gentleman, he is not noted for the kind of bluster that we have just heard from him—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] No, I think it is important to be charitable to the Liberal Democrats from time to time. But it was not clear from the hon. Gentleman's contribution, if I can call it that, whether he was for or against the proposal. I assure him that there is a very large fence around RAF Fylingdales on which he can sit for as long as he likes, and which will protect him and the occupants of the base against any kind of terrorist threat or rhetoric.

This is a good deal for the United Kingdom. If the hon. Gentleman listened to the explanations that I gave, he will have heard me set out clearly the arrangements as regards support to the United Kingdom and other allies, which would be the key test for our decision.

As regards the protection of the United Kingdom, I made it clear that the test bed that the United States is developing in the Pacific is specifically designed to deal with the threat from North Korea. Clearly, as the system evolves and the United States learns lessons from the operation of the test bed, there will be an opportunity for coverage that includes the United Kingdom, as the request from the United States suggests. That is why I said that we were preserving an option to protect United Kingdom citizens.

Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby): I thank my right hon. Friend for coming to my constituency after his visit to the RAF station at Fylingdales on 6 January. He listened to local people, who are perhaps most concerned about the subject. As promised, I kept a record of the exchanges and presented it to the Defence Committee for consideration. On behalf of my constituents, and especially the people of Whitby and the Esk Valley, I welcome the opportunity to put some of the issues on the record in next week's debate.

My right hon. Friend knows of my engineer's scepticism about whether the system will work in the long run. He heard the views of the people who spoke to him at the Inn on the Moor in Goathland, which is two and a half miles away from the RAF station. They clearly expressed concerns, not so much about a ballistic attack on the base and the area but about a terrorist attack. As well as giving help and information to North Yorkshire police, will my right hon. Friend review the status of installations such as the mothballed station at RAF Staxton, for the protection of the area?

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for organising several excellent meetings in North Yorkshire that produced useful and lively discussions that greatly assisted to clarify my thinking and the Government's decision.

As I hope I have made clear, the system that the United States is developing is evolving. Part of the reason for its request is to ensure the development of a comprehensive system. That will not be in place for several years. However, I have no reason to doubt the determination of the United States to make the system fully comprehensive and effective.

I have received no request from the United States about any other installations in this country.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): As the Secretary of State knows, Fylingdales is in my constituency. He also knows that, by and large, I have supported his position. I support his statement, as will most right-thinking people in North Yorkshire, let alone Ryedale.

I urge the right hon. Gentleman to do three things. First, he should take every opportunity to confirm that his comments today mean that we have signed up not to missile defence but to an upgrade of existing radar, which has happened previously. The previous upgrade put millions of pounds into the local economy, and I do not doubt that that will happen again.

Secondly, will the right hon. Gentleman acknowledge that many local people will fear that what he has announced today is only phase 1 and that phase 2, involving missile defence, will follow? Will he therefore continue to consult local authorities such as North Yorkshire county council, the North York Moors national park authority and Ryedale council, as well as local people? I urge him to take them with him.

Thirdly, will the right hon. Gentleman recognise that, although he has denied the more lurid descriptions of what may have been involved in the decision, the local tourist industry is worried? Apart from Fylingdales,

there is little else on the North York moors except sheep rearing and tourism. Will the right hon. Gentleman therefore urge his colleagues in the Government to help the local economy, tourism and our transport infrastructure? We are prepared to continue to accommodate the radar in our area, but we should like some Government recognition that we have other needs.

Mr. Hoon: I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman for his consistent approach. He has not ducked the difficult issues that are necessarily involved. I stress that we are discussing a specific request about the internal functioning of the radar and communications systems at RAF Fylingdales. As I learned when I visited the hon. Gentleman's constituency, local anxiety is sometimes about things that have not been determined and may never be determined. The United States is considering locating phase 2 largely at sea and may never require land-based X-band radars. The phrase, "X-band radar" was used regularly when I dealt with questions in North Yorkshire. It is important to deal with each decision at the stage at which it is presented. There is no need to go further at this stage and speculate as some perhaps less helpful commentators have done. I shall ensure that the hon. Gentleman's observations about the local economy are passed on to the appropriate Department.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): Given the weight of expert criticism of missile defence, the unanimous conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Committee, the extent of anxiety in the House, and, according to repeated polls, the opposition of more than 70 per cent. of the British public, will we have an opportunity for a specific debate and democratic vote on the issue in the House?

Mr. Hoon: I have outlined the nature of the debate that the Government propose. There will be an opportunity for my hon. Friend to contribute to it as he has done in the past. However, I do not accept his assertions about the weight of expert criticism. Even if it were overwhelming, my hon. Friend and other critics have to face the central point of my statement's conclusion. If a missile is in the air and targeted at the United Kingdom, threatening catastrophic consequences to the people of this country, does he seriously claim that we should not use every effort to try to protect them?

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): Would it not have been better for the Secretary of State to state clearly that, if the United States believes the system to be essential to its security and requests United Kingdom assistance, it would be politically almost inconceivable to deny the request given the importance of our relations? That would be more convincing than relying on the thin arguments in the consultation document and the serious doubts about the efficacy of the technology, especially the identification of decoy missiles, to which the document specifically refers. Can we be absolutely certain that subsequent developments, including any that involve Menwith Hill in my constituency, will be subject to a separate consultation and decision-making process?

Mr. Hoon: No one who holds a position such as mine is in any doubt about the importance of our political relationship and close friendship with the United States. I do not qualify that in any way. However, as I have said on several occasions, it is important to show that this matter is of interest and beneficial to the people of the United Kingdom and to our wider relationships in the NATO alliance. That is the test that the people of the United Kingdom want satisfied. I believe that it is satisfied and I therefore recommend accepting the United States request.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I have received hundreds if not thousands of letters, including some from constituents of the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway). They all oppose national missile defence and upgrading Fylingdales. I do not think that those people are stupid or misguided. They point out that they believe that it will make them more of a target, and that far from protecting them it endangers them even more. They have a right to express that opinion. I agree with them. It is absolutely dreadful that once again we are acquiescing to President Bush's requests, in opposition to the people who elected us. The last opinion polls showed that more than 70 per cent. of the people of this country were opposed. The consultation has been a sham. I repeat the request of the shadow Secretary of State that we should have a debate purely on the implications of our going down this very dangerous path.

Mr. Hoon: I dealt in my statement with the suggestion, which I recognise is made by those opposed to the proposals, that somehow certain parts of the country might become more of a target as a result of this decision. I dealt with those arguments. I do not believe that there is an enhanced specific threat to Fylingdales or the immediate area, or for that matter to North Yorkshire.

Equally, my hon. Friend must think through the implications of such concerns. There are, rightly, defence bases around the country. The armed forces are located in different parts of the United Kingdom. It is important that we recognise that the decisions that the Government take in relation to matters of this kind are in the interests of the country as a whole and of our national security, and it is right that each part of the country plays its part in contributing to that national security.

Mr. John Maples (Stratford-on-Avon): The Secretary of State has this absolutely right. I am sure he will agree that this is not the most difficult decision he will have to make this year. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) that it is inconceivable that we would have said no to the United States.

However, I think the need for British decisions is perhaps slightly closer than the right hon. Gentleman is letting on. The United States has made a great deal of progress—much faster progress than was originally envisaged—with its test programme. While it may not have decided what systems to deploy, I think it has taken a decision to deploy. At boost phase, missile defence benefits the whole world, because at that stage nobody knows exactly where the missile is going. The Secretary of State shakes his head, but I think that that is probably so. But if we are to defend against missiles in re-entry

[Mr. John Maples]

phase there is a need for locally based and probably ground-based interceptors. Does the memorandum of understanding with the United States to which the right hon. Gentleman referred effectively give us an option to use United States technology to base re-entry defence interceptors in and around the United Kingdom?

Mr. Hoon: I assure the hon. Gentleman that I have, in the words of the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman, been entirely candid with the House. We have not received any further requests from the United States. We recognise that there is a range of options that the United States is looking at. That is precisely the purpose of the test bed that the United States is establishing. I entirely accept from the hon. Gentleman that the United States has made remarkable scientific progress in the work that it has concluded so far, but in many respects that has led it away from a decision to site X-band radar on land. It has given it a range of options that will allow a system to evolve and develop that may not require any further basing in the United Kingdom. I assure the hon. Gentleman and the House that as and when any such decisions are required in the United Kingdom the House will be the first to hear of them.

Mr. Nigel Beard (Bexleyheath and Crayford): If the technology is successfully developed, what are the prospects of extending the missile defence umbrella to the United Kingdom and the rest of NATO?

Mr. Hoon: That is one of the aspects of the United States request that have led me to conclude that this would be in the security interests of the United Kingdom, because, unlike the situation with an earlier version of these proposals, which was specifically entitled national missile defence—"national" referring to the United States—President Bush has indicated his concern that missile defence and the programme being developed by the United States should be made available to the United Kingdom and other NATO allies, should that be appropriate, and should those countries decide on it at an appropriate stage. That is a remarkably helpful offer for the United Kingdom.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that even those of us who doubt the cost-effectiveness and utility of missile defence think that he is right to respond positively to a proper request by an ally? Would he remind the House of, and put a note into the Library explaining, the precise command allocations of responsibility as between the United States and the United Kingdom within the Fylingdales base?

Mr. Hoon: Those are matters that the right hon. and learned Gentleman is entirely right to raise. They are still the subject of further detailed negotiations. As regards the upgrade implications, the right hon. and learned Gentleman will understand that I shall not be able to inform the House of all the aspects, but I undertake to ensure that the House is properly informed of the general outline of those arrangements.

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): My right hon. Friend will be aware of the extensive press coverage that there has been, particularly in the defence press, about the development of X-band radar. Members of the Defence Committee this week received a document from Yorkshire CND raising concerns that the upgrade of RAF Fylingdales is part of the development programme for X-band. Can my right hon. Friend assure the House that it is not?

Mr. Hoon: What I can assure the House is that there has been no specific decision about the deployment of X-band radar. As I have already said, the developments so far in the United States indicate that in fact an X-band radar may not necessarily have to be located on land, and certainly not anywhere in the immediate vicinity of RAF Fylingdales.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): The Secretary of State's decision today is a wise and prudent precautionary measure that should have the full support of the House. Would the battle of Britain have been won in 1940 if Dowding had not been allowed to deploy radars around our coast from 1936? In these circumstances, surely vulnerability cannot be the best policy.

Mr. Hoon: Not for the first time, the hon. Gentleman makes an appropriate historical analogy. As someone who has looked carefully at the history of that conflict, I think that he is absolutely right to recognise that as our technology develops we must use it to provide greater security for our people.

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): I would have liked to give a personal perspective on Fylingdales, but unfortunately my written request to the Secretary of State to visit was refused, unlike that of the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch), I understand.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that his slavish devotion to American policy in this area adds further to global destabilisation? That destabilisation is evidenced by, for example, North Korea's alleged withdrawal from the non-proliferation treaty, a treaty that the United States never ratified, following on from its abrogation of the 1972 anti-ballistic missile treaty. It is also reflected in the Chinese military's plan to reconfigure its nuclear forces to overcome missile defence, as and when it is ever developed, and most recently lately by the Indians, who are developing an Agni-3 rocket and are discussing dropping the no-nuclear-first-strike option from their military planning.

In the Government's Gadarene rush to embrace every crackpot notion foisted on us by the ideologues in Washington, I should like the Secretary of State to point out where the independence of thought and the independence of policy are in the British Government, reflecting true British needs.

Mr. Hoon: I am sorry to hear my hon. Friend and former Ministry of Defence colleague make those observations. I am sure that he would have had the opportunity to visit RAF Fylingdales when he was a Defence Minister, had he chosen to take it. Indeed, I do not recall his making those kinds of observations at that time. I accept that his views have changed in the interim, but even allowing for those changes I would ask him to look carefully at, for example, the details of the Moscow

treaty. The views that he now espouses are the views of people who have long advocated the importance of reducing the numbers of offensive systems available to the then Soviet Union, now to Russia, and to the United States. The Moscow treaty, as a result of the confidence that the United States now has because of the potential developments of missile defence, has seen the most significant reduction of deployable defensive systems in history. That remarkable success is the result of the end of the treaty that he says should continue.

Again, looking at the missile defence situation, I simply do not understand—I am perfectly willing to hear any argument—why a purely defensive system attracts so much criticism. I could certainly understand my hon. Friend setting out criticism of the further development of offensive systems, but hardly of this kind of defensive proposal.

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): The Secretary of State should be aware that his statement will be greeted with dismay by many people in Wales, Scotland and other parts of the United Kingdom, not least among members of his own party. Given that the United States has refused to rule out the first use of nuclear weapons, will he not concede one fact; that missile defence is a misnomer—if it works, it might indeed be a defence, but it might also provide the very shield that the United States requires to launch the very first use of nuclear weapons?

Mr. Hoon: The United Kingdom has also consistently refused to rule out a no-first-use policy, for understandable and clearly well-established reasons. The hon. Gentleman is perfectly entitled to his views and to express them, but, if he is to put them in the context of wider defence policy and thinking, he needs to set out more clearly his objections to what is, as I have just said, a purely defensive system that threatens no one and can ultimately only protect people in countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States, which are fully functioning democracies.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): As the Government believe that what they have presented as the greatest threat to world peace—Iraq—can be eradicated by conventional military means, from whom do the Government believe that the threat will come that warrants an anti-ballistic missile system? It was not radar that won the battle of Britain, but Spitfires, so it is perfectly clear that radar alone will not act as a defence for this country. Are we considering a situation in which anti-ballistic missiles will be placed in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Hoon: I am now at risk of sparking a historical debate, but I accept for the avoidance of doubt that a combination of radar, Spitfires and other aircraft won the battle of Britain.

As for Iraq, I set out very clearly in my statement that we regard the threat from Iraq as the single most significant threat, particularly if Iraq is allowed the opportunity to continue to develop not only its weapons of mass destruction, but its means of delivery. I am somewhat puzzled by my hon. Friend's question because, understandably, for reasons that I well recognise, she has been among the most assiduous opponents of any proposal to deal with the threat from Iraq by conventional means. She cannot have it both ways: she cannot argue against conventional means of dealing with Iraq, as well as against the proposal to defend this country and other countries against the threat that Iraq poses. One or other must be a way forward.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): The Secretary of State and I have different ideas of candour. I do not think that it is particularly candid to come to the House on 17 December and say, "Surprise, surprise—we have just had a formal request from the Americans to upgrade the radars at Fylingdales" and then, eight sitting days later, come to the House and say, "We are minded to accept it." The fact is that this issue has been around for a very long time.

The Secretary of State's Parliamentary Private Secretary and I visited Washington and attended a briefing at the Pentagon in 1998, when it was made absolutely clear to us that the United States welcomed full British involvement in ballistic missile defence. It would have been much better had we been fully on board as early as possible, not least because the United States would have known in planning, preparing and designing the system that it could have relied on the United Kingdom as a full partner to base in the United Kingdom whatever would be required to make the system a success.

If the Secretary of State continues to insist that he will make decisions as he gets formal requests, he is, frankly, not being candid with the House. It is about time that he made it clear, as he did in making a strong case for the system, that the Government fully support it and are fully committed to it.

Mr. Hoon: Not for the first time recently, I would urge the hon. Gentleman to look carefully at what I have said and to reflect on whether he is suggesting that in any way I have not been candid with the House.

On timing, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be able to look at the relevant White House website, which will indicate precisely when the President took the decision on the development of missile defence for the United States. He will see that that decision was taken towards the end of last year and that the request to the United Kingdom followed shortly after. I would be perfectly content with any criticism that might be made from the United States if in any way the hon. Gentleman could verify it, but he is wrong to try to interpret that. There is no such criticism; the United States recognises the contribution that the United Kingdom is prepared to make, and I understand that it is extremely appreciative of the decision-making process in which the United Kingdom has engaged.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): If the technology works, why should it not be given to India and Pakistan?

Mr. Hoon: What is interesting about my hon. Friend's question is that, if the technology can be made to work, the United States has indicated that, in quite a short timeframe, it would be willing to go beyond simply protecting United States territory and consider making such a system available to NATO allies. I see no reason

[Mr. Hoon]

in principle why, if such a system can be made to work, it should not be extended further, but that is obviously a matter for the United States.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): I welcome the spirit of the Secretary of State's announcement this afternoon because it could have important benefits for the security of the United Kingdom and, indeed, for that of our NATO allies. In considering the whole issue, is it not important to recall that, throughout the cold war, the old Soviet Union maintained a BMD system of sorts—the ABM-1 Galosh system, which ringed Moscow—and that, even today under the new partly democratic Russia, elements of that system still remain in place? If it is all right for the Russians to have such technology in some form, should not we be thinking about it too?

Mr. Hoon: The hon. Gentleman makes an extremely accurate and well-informed observation, with which I entirely agree.

Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): Will my right hon. Friend acknowledge that this is an act of proliferation, that star wars technology, when eventually developed, can have an offensive capacity as well as a defensive one, that it will spur Russia and China to have serviceable nuclear weapons and that it will be another blow to arms control treaties? If, as the Prime Minister has said, the Government are passionately for non-proliferation, why were arms control treaties not even on his listen-back agenda for the United States that he announced last week?

Mr. Hoon: I have debated such issues before with my hon. Friend. I entirely accept his sincerity, but, if he will forgive me for saying so, given that he has long and understandably argued against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, which he has done in a very principled way, I do not understand why he regards the development of a defensive system as strategically threatening, particularly when Russia is cutting its deployable offensive systems as a result of agreements made with the United States.

If a missile defence system can be developed, it will not only act as a very clear deterrent to the development of long-range ballistic missiles, but, of course, encourage those countries—for example, North Korea—that could spend their hard-earned foreign currency much better on feeding their own people to do so. My hon. Friend could well apply the logic that he properly applies to such issues but reach an entirely different conclusion: that the development of missile defence systems was encouraging a reduction in proliferation.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): The Secretary of State will be aware that there are several key United States bases in East Anglia and that they contribute a vast amount to the local economy. The overwhelming majority of people in East Anglia will welcome this strategic move as a good way to cement the special relationship. In his statement, he mentioned a new technical memorandum of understanding. Surely British businesses want not just an MOU, but firm assurances that they will be able to bid for some of those key contracts.

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his observations. As I said earlier, such decisions are ultimately about ensuring national security, which includes East Anglia and other parts of the United Kingdom. Part of our approach is certainly to give opportunities to British industry, and there have already been discussions about the potential involvement of leading companies in the United Kingdom in missile defence. Obviously, we shall now wish to pursue that in the light of the decision that I have taken and the proposal that I have made to the House.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): Does my right hon. Friend agree that China's rational response to the development of missile defence would be to increase the number of its missiles and warheads—possibly including dummy missiles—to get through an American missile defence system? If that is China's rational response—I believe that it will be—does my right hon. Friend accept that that could have a serious knock-on effect on other regional neighbours such as India and Pakistan, and on into the middle east? Does he also accept that that is why these systems are potentially so destabilising for the whole world?

Mr. Hoon: As my hon. Friend will be aware from his time in the Foreign Office, China has had an extensive programme for developing ballistic missile defence systems for many years. Given that US proposals for missile defence have never been designed to deal with multiple missiles addressing a particular target, and that they are solely designed to deal with individual missiles from states of concern—which do not include China, as my hon. Friend will be aware—I do not believe that China would need to respond in any way to this proposal. Indeed, China has reacted in a very calm way to the United States' announcement, towards the end of last year, of its intention to develop missile defence systems.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): The Secretary of State will be aware that, outside the ranks of the Conservative party, there is very little support for our involvement in George W. Bush's national missile defence programme. That is partly because there are technical doubts as to whether the system will actually work, and partly because, although the Secretary of State may not deem this to be proliferation, some nation states, notably China, certainly do, privately, deem it to be proliferation and, as has been said earlier, may well step up their response, which would destabilise things internationally. It is also because the real and present threat to the people of Britain is not a long-range missile from North Korea, but the kind of terrorism that we saw so tragically on 9/11, and the kind of terrorism that was identified last night. The question that many people outside the ranks of the Conservative party will be asking is whether, when George Bush says "Jump!", our only response is to be "How high?"

Mr. Hoon: I fundamentally disagree with my hon. Friend. I have spent years travelling the country, visiting

not only Labour party organisations up and down the United Kingdom but other groups as well, and it has not been my experience that there is very little support for the proposals. Indeed, my experience is that, when the threat is discussed, there is a completely different response: people want to know what we propose to do about it. My hon. Friend needs to look a little more carefully at North Korea. I would not place any confidence in decisions being taken there, not least because, if it goes ahead and abandons its commitment not to test-fly longer range missiles, the United Kingdom would come within range of a missile from that country. I think that my hon. Friend's constituents would want to know, as would mine, what action the Government were taking to deal with such a threat.

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): Given that national missile defence was originally aimed at protecting the United States, are there no plans for facilities similar to Fylingdales to be established elsewhere in Europe, so that both the United Kingdom and an enlarged Europe can be protected?

Mr. Hoon: As I said in my statement, the United States made a parallel request to Denmark in relation to a radar facility in Greenland. As the US President has said, part of the process that the United States is undertaking involves the need to ensure that any deployable system would, as it is developed, protect not only the United States but its NATO allies.

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): May I urge my right hon. Friend to reconsider his interim decision? I acknowledge his duty to protect the citizens of the United Kingdom and that the system is a defensive system. Nevertheless, I believe that it will unwittingly add to proliferation. In his further assessment, will he look at the role of the military industrial complex and decide whether it is the real driver in this matter? May I also refer him to the then President Eisenhower's statement of 40 years ago, which highlighted the dangers of the military industrial complex being involved in just this kind of programme?

Mr. Hoon: I appreciate the sincerity with which my hon. Friend puts his case, but I would invite him to consider this point. He says that missile defence might unwittingly add to proliferation, but it will be developed to protect democracies. It will be developed to protect the United States, the United Kingdom and members of the NATO alliance—a fundamental prerequisite of which is that its members should be democratic societies. My hon. Friend is saying that if we do not develop missile defence to protect those democracies, we will be relying on countries such as Iraq or North Korea—neither of which could remotely be described as democracies at present—not to threaten the United Kingdom. If I went to my hon. Friend's constituency and discussed those issues with his constituents, I am pretty sure on which side of the line they would fall, because I suspect that they are not greatly dissimilar to my own. They would say, "Why shouldn't you protect us against the kind of threat that could come from countries like North Korea and Iraq?" With the greatest possible respect to my hon. Friend, I do not think they would say that those countries could be relied on not to develop a threat to the United Kingdom and its citizens.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): It is a very sad day indeed when a Secretary of State comes to the House 29 days after confirming that an application has been received from the United States to tell us that he is minded to accept it. Will he confirm that, in reality, the decision to go ahead with national missile defence was made a long time ago, and that it will mean that we are no longer able to support the ABM treaty? I suspect that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen) has said, in future, the Secretary of State will ask us to remove ourselves from a series of other disarmament treaties as well. Is this not the day on which the United States, with British support, has started proliferation again? This is not an interim or technical decision; it is a fundamental departure from the process of disarmament of the past 30 years in the direction of re-armament, and it is being done in a very dangerous way, which can only result in a similar response from China and other nuclear powers.

Mr. Hoon: I believe that I have already dealt with most of the arguments set out by my hon. Friend. He has referred previously to support for the ABM treaty—I have mentioned this to him before—as though somehow the treaty still existed. It no longer exists. It was a treaty between the United States and, originally, the Soviet Union—now Russia, as its successor—and both parties now accept that it has served its useful purpose. In place of that treaty we now have something for which my hon. Friend has long argued: a very substantial reduction in the number of offensive systems. Given the consistency of my hon. Friend's approach to these matters, I should have thought that he would welcome the fact that the ABM treaty has been replaced, and that the Moscow treaty has allowed for that significant reduction for which he has understandably and rightly argued.

Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): Will the Secretary of State concede that, had missile defence been in place, and had it worked, it would not have made a ha'p'orth of difference to the events of 11 September? Does he accept that it takes at least some explaining that, on the day on which the Prime Minister warned against weapons proliferation in an international context, we are signing up to something that will require us fundamentally to breach the outer space treaty, because missile defence will require the militarisation of space in ways that will take us not only into a vast territorial unknown but into a political unknown, allowing weapons use from space? To settle some of the wagering that has been taking place on the Back Benches, will the Secretary of State confirm just how many nanoseconds it took him to say yes to the United States' request for a further annexation of facilities in the United Kingdom—the 51st state of the USA?

Mr. Hoon: My hon. Friend always manages to put his difficult questions with a good deal of courtesy. I can assure him that, as yet, the Government have no plans to install any facilities in Nottingham, South, but I am sure that, if he requests it in his normally persuasive way, that decision could be reconsidered.

[Mr. Hoon]

More seriously, I do not understand the argument that the terrorist threat manifested in the appalling events of 11 September should take overwhelming priority in relation to any other threats that might happen in the world. I accept that there is an appalling terrorist threat—we have seen the tragic consequences of it in recent times in this country—but to suggest that that means that we should ignore all other threats, if that is what my hon. Friend was doing, is simply wrong.

We have a responsibility to protect the citizens of this country against all the threats that we reasonably detect and to take appropriate action. That is what we are doing. I shall report to the House regularly on developments that the United States proposes, including any that have implications for the outer space treaty. However, I do not approach the matter in the same way as my hon. Friend; I approach it in a way that I believe is in the interests and for the protection of the people of this country.

Confiscation of Alcohol (Young Persons)

2.21 pm

Bob Spink (Castle Point): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001; to make further provision relating to the confiscation of intoxicating liquor held by or for use by young persons in public and certain other places; and for connected purposes.

The Bill's aim is simply to restore to the police the power to remove all alcohol from young people in public places so that they do not consume it, get into trouble and cause mayhem in our communities. Let me first establish evidence of current youth drinking habits. The health and science section of the 11 January edition of *The Week*, under the heading "Teenage binge-drinkers", states:

"British teenagers are drinking more heavily than ever before—and they do it with the sole purpose of getting seriously drunk. Alcohol consumption among children aged 11 to 15 has almost doubled in the past decade. . . Of the 85 per cent. of 15-year-olds who drink, boys admit to consuming an average of 13.8 units a week—the equivalent of seven pints of lager—and girls 10.7 units. Most of this drinking occurs in just two nights."

Andrew McNeill of the Institute of Alcohol Studies said:

"What we're seeing is an epidemic of binge-drinking. By the time you're 15, getting slaughtered is a central part of your social activities."

I was inspired to do something about this partly by Peggy Grant, who sadly passed away on 23 December. When Peggy was Castle Point's mayor in 1995, she went on to the streets on dark, cold, wet nights at 9 and 10 o'clock, although she was 70, to meet, talk with and understand young people. She tried to solve the problems that we are all so vividly aware of to help the kids and the rest of the community. She found that alcohol was a major contributor to those problems. She had courage, enthusiasm and genuine warmth. She also had dedication, determination and great dignity as mayor of Castle Point. She cared for young and old alike, and was a role model for all politicians—a truly great Conservative mayor who will be much missed in Castle Point.

In 1995, there was, remarkably, no law to prevent young people and children from abusing alcohol in public places. So, with Peggy Grant's encouragement, I introduced a private Member's Bill to give the police powers to stop under-age alcohol abuse and take back control of our streets. My Bill was enacted in 1997 and it worked well across the nation, but then new Labour became the Government and the then Home Office Minister—not, I hasten to add, the Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety, who is in his place—issued a press release stating that the under-age drinking confiscation measure, which meant my Bill, showed

"Labour's determination to crack down on crime and disorder".

That was pure, unadulterated new Labour duplicity.

Last year, the Government's Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 removed the power that I had given the police to take unopened cans and bottles of alcohol from youngsters in public places. That was pure, unadulterated new Labour stupidity. The Prime Minister then claimed that he was giving all possible

powers to the police to tackle antisocial behaviour, street crime and drugs. That was pure, unadulterated new Labour hypocrisy.

To claim that my Bill was a new Labour initiative and try to take credit for it was a lie; to remove police powers to take alcohol from young children on our streets was stupid; and to claim that all is well and that all is being done on our streets is hypocrisy. So there we have it. New Labour says that it listens and that it acts to tackle crime. It says that it will protect our children and our communities, but it is simply arrogant, stupid and hypocritical—and the Prime Minister is personally responsible.

Let me set out some evidence on under-age drinking. A constituent who said that she would be honoured to be named in this place—I shall just call her Rosemary, however—bravely wrote to me to say:

"The recent change in law has undoubtedly confused youngsters in believing that it is now legal to smoke cannabis in public. I have observed over the past weekend two separate groups of youngsters in the bus shelter outside our house so doing . . . I wonder how many of them would actually indulge if they were not swigging alcohol at the same time.

It is my opinion that the overindulgence of alcohol is to blame for our youngsters experimenting in the first place . . . This does not only pertain to the 'odd joint' but harder drugs . . . crime, and mindless vandalism, the latter of which we see all too frequently . . . clear rules and laws must be set out to protect our youth and our future society from the somewhat soft approach of the left wing!

My husband and myself do not want to live in fear of street crime but it is always now in the front of our minds."

The House should listen to Rosemary's wisdom.

Let me set out what Basildon's *Evening Echo* said on 25 October. An article by Gary Pearson says:

"As many as 40 areas in Castle Point may be plagued with the problem of boozy youngsters, according to Tory councillor Bill Dick.

The St. Peter's ward representative voiced his concerns about drink-fuelled teenage nuisance after residents complained".

In another edition, the *Evening Echo* reported:

"Sgt Matt Bell, of Southend's Licensing Unit, said: 'We all know that there is a link between alcohol consumption and violence.'"

On 12 April last year, Inspector Steve Rawlings of Castle Point police wrote to me:

"Youth nuisance and associated damage is a major problem . . . In the last few months I have spent many thousands of pounds in police overtime to try to resolve the problems . . . I am sure alcohol will only fuel the situation again. It is unfortunate that the powers you fought so long and hard to get introduced have once again been watered down, to make them virtually useless.

I refer of course to the seizure of alcohol from juveniles. The power was used to good effect during last year . . . but now its effectiveness has been substantially reduced. As we can now only seize open containers, it will mean that if we find someone with a four pack of lager, and only one tin is open, that is the only one we can seize leaving them with the remainder."

Those may be children of nine, 10 or 11 who are out at 10 o'clock on a Friday night. Inspector Rawlings continues:

"Isn't it a wonderful use of police time making us return four times (and maybe more) to carry out what we used to be able to do on the first occasion."

Bournemouth's *The Daily Echo* ran a campaign called "Where are your children?", which was launched just after my private Member's Bill became law. It said:

"Children as young as 13 are hitting the bottle in an epidemic of under-age drinking in Bournemouth.

Now police—increasingly on the receiving end of violence and abuse from drunken teenagers—have begun a major crackdown using new powers to seize alcohol from youngsters."

They were using my Bill. The newspaper continued:

"In just two and a half hours, 51 young people aged between 13 and 17 were stopped and searched and alcohol with an estimated value of £110 seized.

A search of a 15-year-old boy also revealed a craft knife capable of inflicting serious wounds."

The hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Borrow) told me that his local police are ignoring new Labour's new law and continuing to take unopened cans and bottles from youngsters in public places.

Thus the Government have contrived to make criminals of the police and to help youngsters into crime and drugs. All of us in this place know that the first use of drugs by young people most often takes place under the influence of alcohol. Such is the reality of a bankrupt, arrogant Government who have simply stopped listening.

This raises the question of why the Prime Minister removed the police power last year. Did he think that the police were improperly harassing young drunkards and thugs on our streets? Or he is simply out of touch? Or does he simply not care?

Perhaps the Government will now revert to the common-sense law that worked so well: my original Bill. They may use the Licensing Bill, although I doubt that that would be terribly appropriate. In the meantime, I ask the House to support my new Bill giving the police powers to stop out-of control, dangerous under-age drinking on our streets.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Bob Spink, Mr. David Amess, Mr. Peter Lilley, Mr. Frank Field, the Rev. Martin Smyth, Mrs. Angela Browning, Andy King, Andrew Mackinlay, Mr. Henry Bellingham, Mr. Elfyn Llwyd, Sir Nicholas Winterton and Miss Ann Widdecombe.

Confiscation of Alcohol (Young Persons)

Bob Spink accordingly presented a Bill to extend and improve methods of electoral registration: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on 11 July, and to be printed [Bill 43].

Orders of the Day

Community Care (Delayed Discharges etc.) Bill

As amended in the Standing Committee, considered.

New Clause 8

FREE PROVISION OF SERVICES IN WALES

'The Assembly may by regulations made by statutory instrument make in relation to local authorities in Wales any provision which may be made by the Secretary of State under section 12 in relation to local authorities in England.'—*[Jacqui Smith.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

2.33 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Government amendment No. 38.

Mrs. Patsy Calton (Cheadle): I understand that the new clause would tighten up section 12(7), but would be grateful for confirmation from the Minister.

Will the new clause give the Welsh Assembly powers simply to emulate the statutory instruments from the Secretary of State under section 12, or will it have any powers itself to produce fresh statutory instruments, within the confines of the section?

Jacqui Smith: It depends how "tighten up" is defined, but the aim of the new clause is probably not to tighten up the position relating to Wales. The Government seek to balance the commitment to devolution of health matters to the Assembly with maintaining the original purpose of the new power, which was to make community equipment and intermediate services only free of charge. The new power in part 2 has been taken with specific services in mind, and with a clear purpose—to help reduce delayed discharge caused by services in which integration is hampered by charging.

The new clause, and the regulation-making power that it gives the Assembly, will allow the Assembly to decide how to use the new power in Wales. The present wording would require Wales to replicate the regulations set by the Government in England. The new clause gives the Assembly more flexibility.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): I have just received an answer from the Department of Health concerning the number of Welsh patients treated in English hospitals. More than 4,000 are treated just in the five hospitals most commonly used along the border—the Countess of Chester hospital, the Royal Shrewsbury hospital, the Hereford hospital, the Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt orthopaedic hospital, the Royal Liverpool University children's hospital, the Cardiothoracic centre in Liverpool, the Central Manchester hospital, the Walton Centre for Neurology and Neurosurgery, the Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen University hospitals and the United Bristol healthcare trust.

What reciprocal arrangements will be made in regard to charging for any patients from Welsh local authorities whose discharge from English hospitals may be delayed?

Jacqui Smith: I understand that the Assembly has decided not to introduce in Wales the incentives that we are introducing in the Bill. As for reciprocal arrangements, I understand that the discharge of fewer than three Welsh patients in English hospitals is being delayed. Because Wales has decided that it does not want to introduce reimbursement at this time, we currently have no plans for reciprocal arrangements. If Wales decides to implement reimbursement proposals, we shall need to consider the details then.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 3

MEANING OF 'CARER' AND 'CARERS' ASSESSMENT'

'(1) In this Part "carer", in relation to a qualifying hospital patient, means a person aged over 16 who—

(a) provided (prior to admission in hospital) or intends to provide a substantial amount of care to the qualifying hospital patient on a regular basis once they are discharged, and

(b) did not or will not provide this care—

(i) by virtue of a contract of employment or other contract with any person, or

(ii) as a volunteer for a voluntary organisation.

(2) In subsection (1), "voluntary organisation" has the same meaning as in the National Assistance Act 1948.

(3) The responsible authority shall inform any person where it appears to them that they may be entitled under section (1) of the Carers (Recognition and Services) Act 1995 and section (1) of the Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000 to request an assessment of their ability to provide and continue to provide care.

(4) The assessment of the patient's needs under section (3)(3)(a) must take account of the results of any assessment undertaken of the carer's ability to provide and continue to provide care for the patient under the Carers (Recognition and Services) Act 1995 or the Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000 or both those Acts.'.—*[Mr. Burstow.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

New clause 9—*Carers: duties*—

'(1) Further to fulfilment of the requirements under section 2(2) and (3) it shall the duty of the responsible authority to—

(a) inform any person where it appears to them that they may be entitled under section (1) of the Carers (Recognition and Services) Act 1995 and section (1) of the Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000 to request an assessment of their ability to provide and continue to provide care;

(b) ensure that the assessment carried out under the above provisions provide sufficient information in the care plan, or to make arrangements that a provider of services to the patient can carry out an appropriate

assessment, to satisfy Standards 3 and 4 of the National Minimum Care Standards for Care Homes and Standards 2 and 3 of the Draft National Minimum Care Standards for Domiciliary Care, as required by the Care Standards Act 2000.

(2) Where, for the purposes of satisfying the fitness for purpose of proposed accommodation under the Care Standards Act 2000, the assessment procedure exceeds three days, the delayed discharge period shall be disapplied.'.

Amendment No. 41A, in page 2, line 9, [Clause 2], after 'body', insert—

'to consult with the patient and his carer, if he has one, to ascertain their views and preferences, and—

(a) where informed consent is given, record that on the patient's file or

(b) in the case where a patient lacks the mental capacity to give such consent, record on the file what steps it has taken to ensure that the patient's best interests have been duly considered, and'.

Government amendment No. 27.

Amendment No. 5, in page 2, line 41, [Clause 3], at end insert—

'(3A) Before making a decision under subsection (3) the responsible authority must—

(a) consult the patient and his carer, if he has one;

(b) inform them of the cost of the proposed care plans; and

(c) obtain the consent of the patient and any carer and—

(i) where informal consent is given, record that on the patient's file, or

(ii) in the case where a patient lacks the mental capacity to give such consent, record on the file what steps it has taken to ensure that the patient's best interests have been duly considered.'.

Government amendments Nos. 28 to 30.

Amendment No. 3, in page 3, line 7, [Clause 3], at end insert—

'(6A) The responsible NHS body must consult the patient and—

(a) where informed consent is given, record that on the patient's file, or

(b) in the case where a patient lacks the mental capacity to give such consent, record on the file what steps it has taken to ensure that the patient's best interests have been duly considered,

before deciding what services (if any) it will make available following discharge.'.

Amendment No.4, in page 3, line 7, [Clause 3], at end insert—

'(6A) The responsible NHS body must take into account the views of the patient's carer, if he has one, before deciding what services (if any) it will make available following discharge.'.

Amendment No. 2, in page 3, line 9, [Clause 3], at end insert—

'(7A) The responsible NHS body must give the patient and his carer, if he has one—

(a) notice of the day on which it proposes to discharge the patient and—

(i) where informed consent is given, record that on the patient's file, or

(ii) in the case where a patient lacks the mental capacity to give such consent, record on the file what steps it has taken to ensure that the patient's best interests have been duly considered, and

(b) information about their right to request a review if they disagree with the decision to discharge.'.

Government amendments Nos. 32 to 34, 36 and 37, 39 and 40.

Mr. Burstow: This is far the largest group of new clauses and amendments with which we shall deal, and it enables us to explore quite a few of the issues we touched on in Committee. I hope we shall receive further clarification from the Government today, not least on issues raised by our amendments and those tabled by the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox), which deal with some of Opposition Members' most fundamental criticisms of the Bill. We hope that even at this stage the Government will be minded to accept some of the amendments.

New clauses 3 and 9, and Government amendments Nos. 27, 30, 32, 39 and 40, address a number of concerns that I raised in Committee. As drafted, the Bill says nothing about the rights of carers. They are seen as innocent bystanders who are left to pick up the pieces resulting from the discharge process.

Research by Carers UK has repeatedly demonstrated poor hospital discharge practice. The new clauses are intended to ensure that carers do not bear the brunt of poor practice and are not victimised by over-zealous implementation of the Bill across the country. Research published about a year ago by Carers UK showed that anything between 70 and 77 per cent. of carers said that they had no choice about taking on caring responsibilities when the person for whom they cared left hospital. In other words, seven carers out of 10 were effectively dumped on and left to get on with it. That cannot be a satisfactory outcome of the way in which discharge is currently being handled in far too many hospitals across the country.

The guidance published by the Government over the years says that carers should be consulted about discharge planning and that they should play an integral role at each stage of a patient's progress. However, all too often that does not happen in practice. The new clauses deal with that lack of consultation and assessment of carers' needs.

Carers UK has followed up the research that it has done over the years and monitored how things have changed over time, so it is educational to look more closely at its research. For example, it has found that there has been a near doubling in the number of people being readmitted to hospital within two months of discharge—from 19 per cent. in 1999 to 43 per cent. in 2001. When the most recent survey by Carers UK asked why the rise had occurred, 45 per cent. of carers said that they felt that premature discharge was the cause of what might be considered a revolving door syndrome that meant that people returned to hospital as emergency readmissions.

The problem of premature discharge from hospital was highlighted by last year's Audit Commission report entitled "Fully Equipped 2002—Assisting Independence". I referred to that report in Committee. The quotation that I shall read out now was referred to but the Minister did not then respond to the point that the Audit Commission was making. The report stated:

"In the case of community equipment services in particular, social services departments were finding themselves under increasing pressure to cope with the demand of people being discharged earlier from acute hospitals. The policy to support the immediate needs of the NHS was putting pressure on other parts

of social services' home-care budgets and driving up eligibility criteria for those who needed less intensive support to help them to stay at home—risking unnecessary hospital admissions and increasing demands on the NHS."

In other words, the policy becomes self-defeating: ejecting people prematurely from the hospital only results in them returning for additional care.

I raised the matter with the Minister in Committee, but on checking the record I found that she did not deal with the point in that debate. I hope that she will be able to do so today. By introducing a system of fines to bear down on delayed discharge problems in the NHS, new perverse incentives will be created elsewhere in the system that will distort priorities. The district auditors and the Audit Commission have found that that is already happening: the delayed discharge targets are already causing hospitals to become the priority of social services departments at the expense of others.

There is nothing in the Bill to prevent that from happening. In fact the Bill promotes it. Many people wait in their homes for assessment by social services departments, and are often in desperate need of an appropriate package of care and support. It is bizarre to discover that the Bill means that the quickest way for them to get what they need will be to get themselves admitted to hospital. The fine will cause social services to focus on their need once they are occupying a hospital bed. However, because there is no fine attached to the fact that those people are not being assessed at home, that will not be prioritised.

That is the perverse incentive that the Bill will create.

2.45 pm

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): I am following the hon. Gentleman's argument closely. Does he accept the Alzheimer Society's contention that the point that he makes about carers applies even more strongly to those looking after people suffering from that disease? Almost by definition, such patients are unable to give any input about what should happen to them. Carers often feel under enormous pressure to allow an inappropriate discharge and subsequent placement.

Mr. Burstow: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point about mental incapacity, and the amendments in the name of the hon. Member for Woodspring in part deal with that. I shall return to matters connected with dementia later in my remarks.

I want to follow up an undertaking that the Minister gave in response to an amendment that I moved in Committee that dealt with the question of charging carers for services. I pursued this matter in the previous Parliament in connection with the Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000. It remains a concern for many carers.

In Committee, the Minister acknowledged that it would not be right for carers to end up footing the bill for equipment. She said that the Government would return to the matter on Report. It is not clear which of the Government amendments under consideration deals with that point. I should be grateful if the Minister will make clear which amendment deals with the question of charging carers.

In Committee, the Minister said that she would deal with matters to do with the regulations, several of which directly affect carers. It was useful that the Minister wrote to members of the Committee setting out in summary terms the issues that the Government indented to cover through regulation.

My first question is about clause 2(4)(a), which deals with

"the form and contents of notices"

of likely need, and the manner in which they are to be given. The explanatory notes say:

"The intention is that the regulations ensure that the notice given by the NHS body is brief, but still contains necessary information. The notice only need contain the patient's name and location, the name of the NHS contact, the date of admission if this has not yet occurred, and the likely date of discharge if known."

However, I hope that the Minister will reassure the House about whether carers and relatives will be notified at that stage. Neither the notes nor the Bill makes that clear. Will they be part of the process? I hope that the Minister will confirm that the regulations will recognise and acknowledge the role that carers play.

The notes also stated:

"Notice does not need to be a formal letter but will most likely consist of a fax or an email, either providing the necessary information or alerting social services to an update on a shared database".

The phrase "shared database" reminded of last year's Audit Commission report entitled "Forget Me Not", which stated:

"Effective information sharing between health and social care practitioners is a prerequisite to successful co-ordination."

No one would disagree. The report continued:

"Joint working and the single assessment process would be weakened without it. However, auditors found that shared case files, or easy access to each other's files, only existed in a tenth of areas, and partly so in only a further third . . . In other words, case notes were not shared in three-fifths of areas . . . Many agencies have developed. Or are in the process of developing, computerised patient or service user records. But auditors reported that health and social services IT systems were compatible in only a few areas."

When one goes on reading the report to see what that meant in practice, one realises that in 89 per cent. of the areas surveyed by the Audit Commission there was no compatibility between the systems—yet the Government are planning to predicate regulations on such an ability. I hope that the Minister will say a little more about that, too. How will the proposal work in practice given that the systems will hamper the sharing of information?

We on the Liberal Democrat Benches welcome amendments Nos. 27, 30, 32, 39 and 40 because they make provision for some of the concerns that Carers UK, my hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle (Mrs. Calton) and I have been raising. However, the amendments seem to fall short of placing a duty on social services departments to inform carers of their entitlement to an assessment. Indeed, Government amendment No. 27 states that the carer must ask for the assessment. In other words, the onus is placed on the carer. Surely during the stressful time in hospital associated with the planning of discharge it would not be unreasonable to place a duty on social services departments to give the carer notice of the fact that they are entitled to such an assessment if they want one.

I look forward to the debate on the Opposition amendments on consent. The Liberal Democrats strongly support their purpose. The Bill is silent not only

on carers but on patients; there is absolutely no mention of patients. The provisions reflect an obsession with getting patients out of their beds as quickly as possible—and not necessarily in their best interests. The amendments are about ensuring that the interests of the patient are brought back into play. Under the Bill, the patient is seen as a passive recipient of whatever care or services the NHS or social services departments choose to supply.

The issue of consent is particularly relevant to patients with dementia, to which the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) referred. Indeed, when giving evidence last year during the Health Committee's excellent inquiry into delayed discharge, Professor Ian Philp, the national director of older people's services, made the following relevant point:

"dementia is a principal cause of delayed discharge because of the complexity that having dementia plus a physical illness produces in terms of developing a good discharge plan."

He went on to make the point that 70 per cent. of occupants of ordinary nursing homes are elderly mentally infirm patients—people with dementia and other problems. There are serious pressures on services currently available to provide support for people with dementia and for their carers.

We know that from the Audit Commission report, "Forget Me Not", in which there are some important findings on home care services, to which the hon. Gentleman also referred. Last year's report said:

"Home care is one of the key services for supporting older people with mental health problems at home, provided it is given flexibly and sensibly. However, auditors found home-care workers with additional training in mental health in only one in seven areas."

Only one in seven areas have people who are equipped with the skills to provide the services necessary to promote confidence in the fact that those with dementia will be safely discharged from hospital and will receive the support at home that they need. Surely that ought to concern the Government, although it does not appear to have been factored into the time scale for implementation of the Bill. Indeed, the Government have been hasty in introducing the legislation.

Is the Minister confident that matters have been remedied since the Audit Commission's finding just last year? Surely the patchiness of provision of services for people with dementia ought to be addressed. Even the extra resources, which are welcome and for which I and my hon. Friends voted, will not deliver from day one the extra EMI-trained staff to provide such home care and other much needed support.

Amendment No. 5, which was tabled by the hon. Member for Woodspring, would rightly ensure that patients and carers are informed about the costs of the proposed care. That raises some questions for the Minister. First, clause 3 sets up the process of partial assessments—what package of community care services ought to be provided for the carer. The assessment is not of the carer's financial circumstances, so how on earth can social services departments complete a financial assessment in the time scales proposed, especially given the intrusive nature of such assessments?

My second question is about consistency in NHS continuing care. As the Audit Commission found, there are wide variations in how the Government's guidance on continuing NHS care provision is implemented. Over the past months there have been some very damning health ombudsman inquiry findings against strategic health authorities that have acted unlawfully in saying that someone is not entitled to free NHS continuing care and therefore must instead be means-tested by social services departments. As a result people have given up resources to which they are entitled, whether by selling their home or running down their bank balance. Given such evidence, will the Minister ensure, if and when the Bill is enacted, that we can be confident that there will be an assessment of a person's entitlement to such care from the outset?

In Berkshire, the strategic health authority has been told as a result of the health ombudsman inquiries to trawl through records of the past few years to find when people have been wrongly pushed down the social services route and subjected to means-testing rather than receiving free continuing NHS care. That is the case not just in Berkshire but in Dorset, Wigan and Cambridgeshire. Will the Minister ensure that strategic health authorities will conduct those trawls, which have been requested by the health ombudsman; otherwise many people will feel that the guidance issued by the Department and the way in which it has been interpreted by health authorities run contrary to the decisions of the courts and rob people of money? People are having to pay for what is fundamentally NHS care.

Clause 3(8) deals with the circumstances for the withdrawal or cessation of the effect of a notice, where someone is awaiting discharge from hospital. If that person is told that they are not entitled to free continuing NHS care and they appeal, will the Minister confirm that the clock-on fines imposed on the local authority will stop?

We hope that the Government will be able to offer answers to some of the issues raised by the amendments that I have highlighted. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle will be able briefly to address Government amendment No. 37 to which I have not spoken. Unless both carers and patients are covered by the Bill and their rights are properly protected, the measure will not be satisfactory and should not pass through this House.

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): I will speak to amendments Nos. 41A, 5, 3, 4 and 2, which deal with empowering patients and particularly carers. In many ways, as has been said, the amendments complement and add to the new clauses moved by the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow).

It is right to say from the outset that it is extraordinary that throughout what the Opposition regard as a nasty and counterproductive measure there are no references to carers and patients or any powers and entitlements granted to them. Yet it is patients who are at the receiving end of the Bill, as are the carers, who are, as no one in the House would disagree, the unsung heroes of our society because of the tremendous work that they do in looking after loved ones and family members.

3 pm

Clause 3 highlights the fact that all too often carers are ignored—taken for granted—and there is an assumption that they will do their duty and look after

[Mr. Simon Burns]

their relatives or those whom they care for. I consider that situation to be the wrong way round, which is why I believe it so important that these amendments and new clauses put on the face of the legislation protections and aids and assistance to patients and, particularly, to carers.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that some of the amendments that he is speaking to are completely unnecessary, that some of what he has said is an insult to the social work profession, and that we cannot simply lay down in the House what social care professionals should do in every aspect of their work? Will he celebrate with me the fact that we can rely on the professionalism and ability of social workers in local authorities?

Mr. Burstow: What complacent rubbish.

Mr. Burns: Unusually, I am inclined to agree with the Liberal Democrats. I think that I am right in saying that the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) was a social worker, so may I first say that, despite his cheap jibe, what I have said so far in no way criticises or attacks social workers, because they also have a very difficult job to do, and are often not given the credit for the work that they do? I think that carers' organisations and carers will be slightly surprised by the hon. Gentleman's comments, because they do feel aggrieved, and if he has bothered to take the time to read any of the briefings on the Bill from carers' organisations he will know that they do feel very aggrieved that the Bill makes no mention of carers or the role of carers.

Mr. Waterson: Does my hon. Friend agree that the point here is not the dedication of individual social workers but the pressures that social services departments will feel under? Indeed, the Bill is designed to make them feel those pressures, which will in turn distort the priorities that they might otherwise have in terms of care and packages for individual patients?

Mr. Burns: My hon. Friend has picked up an extremely relevant and important point. I wish the Government had better appreciated the implications of what the Bill seeks to do, because, as the Minister knows, it will be carers who bear the brunt of poor discharge procedures, and we believe that those will arise as a result of the Bill.

Ms Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Burns: No, I will not; I want to make some progress.

We tabled the amendments because between 1999 and 2001 readmissions of patients within two months of being discharged nearly doubled, from 19 per cent. to 43 per cent. The proportion of carers who felt that early discharge was at fault rose correspondingly from 23 per cent. to 45 per cent., and 77 per cent. of carers said that they were not given a choice about taking on caring responsibilities. That is why—

Andy Burnham (Leigh) *rose—*

Ms Munn *rose—*

Mr. Burns: I will not give way.

We need to have the new clause and the amendments on the face of the Bill to enshrine in law the proper procedures.

Andy Burnham: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Burns: I am sorry; I want to make some progress.

I want to deal in order with the amendments that the official Opposition have tabled. Amendment No. 5 is intended to ensure that the patient—and, where applicable, the carer—is aware of what will be provided on discharge, so that they know whether they would wish to accept that plan. The amendment also addresses issues where the patient lacks capacity. As clause 3(3) currently reads, there is no involvement with the patient, only agreement between the national health service and social services—

Ms Munn: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Burns: No, I will not.

The amendment would ensure that the patient and, just as important, their carer were fully aware of the cost of their continuing care and aware that they had consented to it. The importance of such knowledge and consent is emphasised by a case that my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) drew to my attention. He has a constituent who has been confronted with what I think the House would rightly agree is a grave injustice with regard to free care under the Coughlan case. A Mrs. Airey, who is the mother of my right hon. Friend's constituent and holds power of attorney, was suddenly sent a bill for £7,000 by the care home to which her mother had been transferred from hospital by social services in Yorkshire. She had made no agreement, written or verbal, to pay anything. When she replied that the contract with the care home had been made by social services, and that her mother could not be asked to pay, she received a telephone call last Sunday week from the home manager, who said that he had consulted social services and that her mother would not be able to continue in the home if she did not pay. Social services wrote last week to say that my right hon. Friend's constituent must pay "to protect her mother's place in the home", and that she had made the contract with the home. Mrs. Airey is adamant that she had done no such thing. As the House will appreciate, there is now a major dispute as to who placed the contract and who is financially responsible for paying the bill.

I believe that an amendment like amendment No. 5, with the plans in the new clause and the other supplementary amendments, would overcome that sort of confusion and argument, because there would be greater clarity at the point of discharge.

Ms Munn *rose—*

Mr. Burns: I will give way, but then I shall make progress.

Ms Munn: I thank the hon. Gentleman for being so generous. He obviously has a different copy of the Bill from the one that I had. Perhaps he could point out where in the Bill it repeals legislation that already requires care plans to be in place and legislation that gives every carer the right to an individual assessment.

Mr. Burns: The hon. Lady is missing the point because—

Mr. Dawson: No, she is not.

Mr. Burns: She is. If I could explain for a minute, perhaps the hon. Lady will understand. The trouble is that, regardless of the legislation that the hon. Lady is referring to, the Bill will, in effect, cause serious problems by putting pressure on local authorities to ensure that patients are often wrongly or inappropriately discharged from hospital and inappropriately placed in alternative forms of care, so as to avoid a fine under the Bill. That is why I, my hon. Friends and, I think, the Liberal Democrats believe that to protect against that occurrence and to minimise that possibility, the Bill, if it reaches the statute book, should have clearly defined rights and protections for carers and for patients, so as to seek to avoid an unpleasant and unfortunate by-product of a piece of legislation that is deeply flawed.

Mr. Dawson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Burns: No. I told the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Ms Munn) that I would take one intervention and then would make progress.

Amendment No. 3 ensures that national health bodies will consult patients as well as local authorities before it is decided what services, if any, will be made available following their discharge from hospital. The amendment ensures that the patient is informed and consents to whatever NHS services are to be provided. It also aims to deal with those people who are unable to give such consent in the absence of mental incapacity legislation.

Amendment No. 4 would place a further duty on NHS bodies simply to ensure that the views of the carer are considered when making arrangements for health services following the discharge of a patient. The wording is deliberate. The NHS body must simply take into account the views of the carer. It need not necessarily agree or act on those views, but it will have a duty to take them into account.

Amendment No. 2 would introduce a new subsection to ensure that patients and carers are also aware of when they are likely to be discharged and can ask for a review. It also aims to deal with people who are unable to give consent due to mental incapacity.

The amendments and new clauses are needed in the Bill. For that reason, and given that we discussed the subject at considerable length in Committee, I hope that the Minister has had time to reflect and is now minded to accept this strengthening of the legislation. I am sure that she will not doubt, as I certainly do not, that carers and patients need to be protected under this part of the Bill.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): If memory serves me correctly, the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) has surely come somewhat late to concerns about carers. I cannot remember one piece of Conservative health service legislation between 1992 and 1997 that enshrined the rights of carers on the face of a Bill. In that five-year period, they may have introduced the possibility of the carer's needs being assessed, but no statutory duty was placed on local authorities and they did not have to deliver.

I frankly acknowledge to the Minister that my reason for speaking to this group of amendments is anecdotal, but some of my constituents have expressed concern to me. They perceive that, as carers for someone who is frail or, in one instance, suffers from dementia, pressure could conceivably be placed upon them, as social services could be fined under the Bill if the NHS facility that is caring for their loved one says that he or she is ready to leave hospital but no alternative facilities can be provided. Even though Camden is an excellent authority in that respect, there are difficulties with finding available facilities locally. That is the overriding concern of my constituents.

In some instances, the carer is as frail as the individual who is in hospital, as I pointed out when we discussed the Bill in the House before. One such case involves a wife whose husband was in hospital. She became ill and, even though he had recovered, there was no one at home who could care for him. No interim placement was available in the locality and the couple had no relatives who could visit him in the place where he was to be temporarily cared for.

Those are the sorts of issues that are causing concern among carers and patients. They believe that undue pressure will be placed on their local authority to move their loved one from an NHS facility. In some instances, they know that the loved one will be returned not to their home, because no one there is capable of caring for them, but to a facility outside the local area.

My constituents are also concerned about what will happen when someone is to be cared for at home but the home requires a great deal of work to make it feasible for the carer to care for them, or for a carer with additional domiciliary care to do so. There again, some of my constituents believe that unnecessary pressure will be placed on local authorities as a result of the fines in the Bill and that the authority will in turn put additional pressure on them.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to say something to calm the fears of my constituents.

3.15 pm

Mr. Waterson: I speak in support of the majority of the amendments in the group, but in particular those tabled by my hon. Friends, especially my hon. Friend

[Mr. Waterson]

the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox)—amendments Nos. 41A, 5, 3 and 4 on the consent of patients and their carers.

Those of us who were members of the Committee and who tried to improve the Bill were disappointed not least at this important—indeed, central—flaw in the legislation. The Bill is a consent-free zone. Patients are treated as a sort of commodity, or as counters to be moved around the board to the best advantage of the agencies involved. It does not ensure that they or their families or carers will be consulted, let alone have their views taken into account when it comes to the timing of their discharge and the sort of care that they will be discharged into.

We will return to that issue, but as hon. Members on both sides of the House said on Second Reading and in Committee, it is extraordinary that the Government want to introduce this sledgehammer measure at a time when there are encouraging signs throughout the country and in east Sussex in particular—part of which I represent—of closer working between the different agencies. There have been problems. I do not think that any sensible observer of that aspect of the care scene would argue otherwise. However, there is now much greater evidence of better organisation within the different bodies and of greater co-operation. For example, although there continues to be a problem with bed blocking and delayed discharges in my area, the figure is much lower than it was a year ago. Indeed, my local hospital, Eastbourne District General, recently opened a discharge suite that is designed to ease the transition of patients out of beds that they no longer need to occupy earlier in the day and to the form of care to which they are to move.

Mr. Dawson: Does the hon. Gentleman regard those new levels of co-operation as a new Labour achievement? They were certainly not evident in any Tory legislation or policy during the 18 years for which the Tories were in power.

Mr. Waterson: The hon. Member for social workers, or whatever his constituency is, misses the point again. If the Government are going to try to take credit for solving the problem, they should certainly take the credit for creating it in the first place. In my part of east Sussex, the problem can solely be placed at the door of the Government.

There has been closer working between the agencies, in particular since control of the county council changed hands. The Tory administration has gone to great lengths to work more closely with the NHS and so forth. If blame is to be allocated locally—perhaps an element of consensus may spring up across the Chamber on this—the eight years during which the Liberal Democrats ran the county council contributed to the problem.

Ms Munn: Opposition Members have short memories. I was first introduced to the term "bed blocking" during my social work training back in 1985–86, under a Government of the political persuasion of the current official Opposition. The problem has existed for many years. Why, after all this time, are the Conservatives so concerned about the fact that the Government have decided to do something about it, especially in areas where the progress made is not as it should be?

Mr. Waterson: I have not had the benefit of social work training—I am sure that that is a massive failing on my part. Two things need to be said. First, there has always been bed blocking, although the title attached to it has changed over the years. However, my constituency experience during the past 10 years is that whereas it used to be largely a winter phenomenon, it has become an all-year-round phenomenon of substantial proportions. At different times in the past couple of years, my local hospital has had the equivalent of two or three wards full of people who should not be in hospital. It is one of the lasting monuments to the Labour Government that they have created waiting lists not only to get into hospital but to get out.

Secondly, the Government appear to be convinced that the Bill is the solution, even though what they propose flies in the face of the conclusions reached by everyone else with any experience of the problems—not only Conservative Members of Parliament, but the Local Government Association, the Association of Directors of Social Services and the NHS. The Bill has not a friend in the world, apart from some Labour Members, and quite a few of them have expressed disquiet since the idea was stumbled across. It is another example of the Government's knee-jerk reaction to problems. All I can say to them is, "Welcome to Government." Normally, there are no simple solutions to complex problems.

If the hon. Lady is saying that the Bill is the answer—that some genius boffin at the Department of Health has produced a wonderful solution to the problem—why not pilot it? Why not follow the advice of bodies such as Age Concern and not implement the Bill across the board until 2004? Why not try it first in one or two areas? By all means choose those areas where the problem is perceived to be chronic. The Minister will concede, if she has not already done so in previous debates, that good progress is being made in east Sussex, but if there are pockets where the problem is extremely bad, why not pilot the provisions of the Bill in those areas and wait and see, rather than wasting the time, effort and resources of hard-pressed social services departments and NHS staff throughout the country?

Moving on to the practical details, I have already said that the Bill has no friends, but in an intervention on the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) I mentioned what the Alzheimer's Society has to say. The society is extremely worried. It makes the point that

"There are over 700,000 people with dementia in the UK",

and that

"Three-quarters of people in long term care have Alzheimer's or another form of dementia."

In its briefing, the society rightly states:

"The Bill makes no reference to issues of consent",

and adds that

"the proposals place undue pressure on unpaid carers."

The concerns that were rightly expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) and the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam about

carers generally apply in spades to carers of people with Alzheimer's or other forms of dementia. The Alzheimer's Society briefing continues:

"Many carers feel pressured into moving a person with dementia into a care home that they feel is unable to care appropriately for the needs of the person with dementia."

The briefing ends:

"The Alzheimer's Society is concerned that the proposals will increase pressure on people with dementia and their carers to accept care that is inappropriate."

Andy Burnham: The hon. Gentleman talks about what carers have to fear from the Bill. Surely carers in this country have far more to fear from a 20 per cent. cut in public spending, proposed by Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen just before Christmas? What would that do to social services budgets and what could carers expect as a result of such cuts?

Mr. Waterson: The hon. Gentleman is behind the game. Despite the assurances of the Prime Minister, it has been made clear that no Opposition Member is suggesting a 20 per cent. across-the-board cut, or anything like it. I am talking about the Labour Government's loony proposal to charge fines—the Minister was careful not to use the word "fines" in Committee; she used various other, somewhat cuddlier, expressions—

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): Incentives.

Mr. Waterson: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend—I think that that was the word the Minister used. There would be charges to "incentivise" people, although I doubt that any criminal who is fined regards himself as being incentivised. In any event, the game was blown when the Secretary of State used the old term "fines" in the Chamber the other day. The Government are erecting a tremendous bureaucracy to fine social services departments—but may give back the fines because they are also setting up various appeal tribunals—to deal with a problem that in some places is visibly being tackled by the agencies themselves.

The next brief we received is from Help the Aged, which makes similar points. It says that the Bill

"fails to recognise the involvement of the patient in determining their future care."

As I pointed out in Committee and on Second Reading, the Bill cuts right across the requirements of the NHS plan and the national service framework for older people. I do not know why Ministers publish all those worthy documents if they have no intention of paying any attention to them in legislation.

Age Concern provides a powerful voice for the sort of people who will be most adversely affected by the Bill and whom the Opposition parties are trying to help by amending the Bill. The organisation does not pull any punches, stating:

"We believe that there is a stark omission from the Bill of the rights of the patient."

It refers to the finding of the Select Committee on Health inquiry into delayed discharges, that

"it is essential that patients should as much as possible be partners in the discharge process."

There is no talk of partnership in the Bill—patients will not necessarily be told what is to happen to them, and neither they nor their carers will be asked about it. Age Concern talks about the need for the consent of the patient and their carer, for the provision of adequate and proper information, for consultation and advocacy, for the patient to have the right to dispute the discharge decision, and for details of what will happen to the patient when there is a dispute—a subject that we will discuss later.

I return to what I have said throughout our consideration of the Bill. Consent of the patient, let alone the carer, is entirely absent from the Bill. We can only assume that it is a wholly Treasury-driven measure. It has nothing to do with the care of patients. It is designed to save money. As I have also said, in the area that I represent the problem is very much one that has been created by government.

Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): We should all welcome the recognition of the problems that are faced by carers, however late it has come. We must also recognise that legitimate points are being raised by organisations representing older people as well as by organisations representing the interests of carers.

The specific concerns that I would like the Minister to address do not revolve around personnel issues in terms of a care package but relate to the circumstances in which people were admitted to hospital in the first instance and to the place to which they will be returned. Those points were made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson). I would welcome a reference from my hon. Friend the Minister to the way in which these matters fit in with our approach to a fuel poverty strategy that will tackle the root cause of many elderly people's admission to hospital. No matter how much personal care we build into a return package, fuel poverty will be the cause of further readmissions.

3.30 pm

For a long time, many of us have been concerned about the revolving-door syndrome in terms of hospital admissions for older people. Much of the blocking of discharges relates not to the specific illness but to home conditions that may make it almost certain that the illness will recur. Will the Minister clarify whether she will be issuing fresh guidance about home circumstances. I think that the issue is covered in amendment No. 27, which refers to the need to identify "any services" that

"need to be made available to the carer in order for it to be safe to discharge the patient".

We have been the first Government ever to introduce statutory targets for the elimination of fuel poverty in the home. Home warmth, home conditions and home safety are central to the health interests of older people and to safety when discharging older people from hospital to return to their homes. The amendments that were tabled in my name and in the names of other Members on a cross-party basis have not been selected, but perhaps the Minister will be kind enough to set out her proposals in the context of recognising that it is not only the human care package but the physical care package that needs to be considered in removing or addressing the bed-blocking problem?

[Alan Simpson]

I would hate us to find that we had merely moved the problem from one location to another. I would not want us to replace the revolving-door problem with a pass-the-patient problem that surfaced in temporary locations to which a discharged patient was moved, not least because the people concerned may have been asking for a long time what help they can get from the Government or the responsible agency to make their life-long home a safe place in which to live.

Mrs. Calton: My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) and I support the remarks of the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Alan Simpson). We added our names to the amendments to which the hon. Gentleman referred, which sadly have not been selected. We would have liked them to be debated as well. We hope that the Minister will take notice of the hon. Gentleman's comments and take them up when she replies.

We shall press amendment No. 37 to a Division, because it has the effect of ensuring that accommodation and personal care do not have to be free for more than six weeks. Effectively, that means that responsibility is thrown back to local authorities after six weeks. Liberal Democrats disagree with that approach. We believe that personal care should be free for as long as it is necessary. We have never pretended that it does not have to be paid for, but comments about charging that were made in Committee should be addressed.

In May 2000, the Audit Commission's document "Charging with Care" said that 94 per cent. of councils were charging for care compared with 72 per cent. in 1992–93. The charges were raising £225 million and funding 12 per cent. of the costs of care, compared with 8 per cent. in 1993–94. It is acknowledged that that income helps councils to maintain and improve services and target subsidies. It is also acknowledged that demand is increasing. Much is made also of the differences in the amount of care that people could expect to get for the same money throughout the country.

Councils have had the power to charge for social services care since the enactment of the National Assistance Act 1948. The current powers to charge were set out in the Health and Social Services and Social Security Adjudications Act 1983, which was introduced by a Conservative Government. It gave wide discretion to councils, but they had to be reasonable, and reasonably practicable, in what they brought in. In 1994, an advice note from the social services inspectorate provided further clarification, and a series of legal challenges established case law.

The Government's current funding formula assumes that a proportion of costs can be recovered through charges. A note from the Library makes it clear that, for the first time, in 1999–2000—under a Labour Government—the way in which the revenue support grant was distributed to local authorities took into account the fact that they have different capacities to cover costs by raising charges for domiciliary services. In other words, councils were expected to make charges if they could do so.

Until 2000, only 6 per cent. of councils—

Jacqui Smith: Is the hon. Lady suggesting that distribution should not take into consideration councils' ability to raise charges, given that, as she said, that has been the legal position since 1948? Is she suggesting that we should not bear that in mind when we are distributing—in other words, that we should disadvantage those local authorities whose communities are poorer and less able to pay charges?

Mrs. Calton: I thank the Minister for her intervention, but I would have much more sympathy with her point of view if she acknowledged the level of unmet need throughout the country—in local authority areas considered affluent, and in those considered less affluent. The level of need is simply not being met because the indicators used are not sensitive enough to recognise it.

Against the background of grants allocated on the basis that charges would be made, and of reductions in grant to that end, 94 per cent. of councils were clearly not in a position to avoid charging.

Ms Munn: This time last year, my father needed care at home, and because of his level of disability at that time he was entitled to claim a higher rate of attendance allowance. Both my mother and father considered it only right that that allowance be used to contribute towards the services that they received, and it is clear that many people are in that position. Is the hon. Lady suggesting that that is not a legitimate way for the Government to proceed?

Mrs. Calton: I am grateful for that intervention, but I need to make progress as we want to press several of the amendments tabled to a vote. Obviously, there will be those who feel able to pay, but I am talking about the most disadvantaged, who are not able to do so.

Andy Burnham: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Calton: No. As I said, I intend to make progress. I have taken several interventions.

Successive Governments have been disingenuous on this front. It suited them to blame local councils, whereas in reality they were pulling the strings. We should remember that we are talking about services that involve assisting people in going to the toilet, using a bedpan, keeping the skin around catheters and stomas clean, changing incontinence pads, and keeping their skin clean because of their incontinence; assisting people with food; dealing with immobility; and medical treatments such the application of creams, lotions, eye drops and dressings. At the moment, people have to pay for all those things. Dressings, surgical appliances, prostheses, getting up and going to bed—all of those count within free personal care.

The Liberal Democrats have never suggested that such care could be provided without funding, and it was covered in our last costed manifesto. Given that it is a priority for us, it will undoubtedly be costed for the next manifesto as well.

In Scotland, all parties—Labour, the Conservatives, the Scottish National party and the Liberal Democrats—universally supported that move forward.

It is a great pity that the Government have not used this opportunity to ensure that free personal care is provided for those who need it in England and Wales. Indeed, they have made it impossible for themselves to do so without further primary legislation.

Jacqui Smith: Opposition Members have made much of their concern for individuals and carers, but perhaps I should return to the very principle of the legislation, which they oppose. We introduced the Bill precisely because we recognise that the prime concern of many older people who are trapped in hospital—they tell us this when they come to our constituency surgeries—is that they want to get out, but that the facilities that they need to do so are not available. I am afraid that when it comes to concern about individuals and carers, talk is cheap for Opposition Members. As my hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) pointed out, it has to be cheap for the Conservative party, given their plans to cut the public spending that we are pledging.

As we shall see later, the Liberal Democrats seem to think that the problem can be solved with a few more plans. I am sorry, but every single older person who is trapped in hospital and wants to get out is an argument for a change to the system. Opposition Members can talk as much as they like about individuals, but if they are willing neither to invest nor to reform in order to make the necessary difference, that talk is hollow.

Andy Burnham: When I intervened on the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson), he responded that he was not aware that any Opposition Member was suggesting public spending cuts. I draw my hon. Friend's attention to a comment made by the Opposition's Treasury spokesman:

"I am digging through current spending, finding opportunities for cuts. It is too early to say how much but it could be up to 20 per cent."

That was what he told *The Daily Telegraph* on 28 December.

Jacqui Smith: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. That is why I say that talk is cheap for Opposition Members.

There has been much talk about carers and issues relating to consent. I should like to address some of those issues, and I hope to provide some reassurance. My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) said that the Government's attitude to carers was different from that of previous Governments. We are committed to supporting carers in the vital care that they provide. Between 1999–2000 and 2001–02, the number of carers' assessments carried out increased. The carers grant introduced by the Government in 1999 provided an extra £140 million over three years to increase the number of breaks for carers. It has now been extended to provide £85 million this year and £100 million next year, and will continue to 2006. During that time, it will more than double to £185 million to provide extended care and 130,000 further breaks for carers.

This is a Government who are willing to put resources behind concern about carers. However, I understand the concern that the Bill may not have taken into account some of the previous legislation that we introduced in relation to carers' rights. We tabled Government amendments Nos. 27, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 34, 39 and 40 to remedy an omission from the Bill that would have meant that carers and carers' services were not fully provided for. As the Bill is drafted, the financial incentive promptly to carry out an assessment and provide services will apply to individuals in hospital, but not to their carer.

It was never our intention that the services that need to be provided to the carer to ensure safe discharge should be considered a lesser priority than the services to be provided to the individual. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate rightly pointed out, there may well be important cases where services provided to a carer are crucial in order to enable the safe discharge from hospital. Carers' needs are important in ensuring that an individual receives the services that he needs when he needs them and in the most appropriate place.

3.45 pm

The amendments add the carer's assessment—upon request from the carer—and decision about provision of services to the carer to the duties of a local authority when it receives a notice under section 2. Amendment No. 27 states that a carer's assessment should be carried out either when it has been requested by a carer—in response to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow), I can say that we have issued section 7 guidance, alongside the Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000, which outlines carers' entitlement to be informed about their right to assessment—or when a carer has had an assessment in the previous year, in order to check whether the carer's needs have changed or to identify those services specifically necessary for the safe discharge of the person cared for.

The amendments therefore mean that if any carer's services necessary for a safe discharge are not in place by the end of the relevant day, the local authority will incur a charge in the same way as if community care services were not in place, and provide a strong incentive for local authorities to ensure that the needs of the carer are given priority when the patient discharge from hospital is being arranged.

I am pleased to say that the amendments are strongly supported by Carers UK, which rightly raised the concerns that I have outlined. It believes that they will do much to improve current practice with respect to carers and hospital discharge. The amendments will ensure that carers' needs are taken into account, looking holistically at what they realistically can and cannot manage, and that services are put in place to meet those needs prior to the patient's discharge from hospital.

The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam raised a point that I made in Committee: that, although services are provided free to individuals, under the Bill as drafted equivalent services provided to a carer would not also be free. Amendment No. 36 rectifies that error, which has the effect that, although local authorities will no longer be able to charge individuals for the provision of certain community care services, they will still be able to charge their carers. It was never our intention that local authorities should remain able to charge carers for the same services that could be provided free of charge to

[Jacqui Smith]

the individuals themselves. The amendment will ensure that those services, whether provided to carers or to individuals, will be free in a similar way.

Given those Government amendments, I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) that new clause 3 is otiose. It seeks to overload the Bill with unnecessary definitions. The definitions in the first two subsections are taken into consideration by Government amendments. Subsections (3) and (4) place further duties on local authorities that are unnecessary and achieve nothing over and above what the Government have achieved through their amendments.

The Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000 already provides that carers are entitled to request assessment of their ability to provide care, and I can assure hon. Members that statutory guidance on the Act will state that carers are entitled to be informed that they have that right.

Similarly, section 1 of the Carers (Recognition and Services) Act 1995 already provides that the local authority is under a duty to take into account the results of any assessment of the carer's ability to provide care when deciding what community care services it will provide to the person cared for. It is unnecessary to repeat that duty here. The single assessment process and the hospital discharge workbook will also reinforce that good practice.

Mr. Burstow: On the publication of the workbook, it has been almost two years since the Government first said that they were working on revising it. Is it the case that the Department has not done the necessary work to enable the workbook to be published sooner because it has been distracted by drafting this Bill?

Jacqui Smith: No, that is not the case. Secondly, legislation that ensures that older people get out of hospital more quickly and get the care that they need when they need it is not a distraction. I consider it a rather important part of Government business.

The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam repeated quite a few of the discussions that we had in Committee. First, on the concern about levels of readmission, may I emphasise for hon. Members the points that I made earlier? While the Government have had considerable success in reducing levels of delayed discharge, levels of readmission have remained pretty stable. We also know, for example, that more than a third of local areas have below average rates of delayed discharge and below average rates of emergency readmission. That shows that it is possible to perform well on both indicators. As I have said before, however, we take that potential risk seriously, which is why we will be covering it in the hospital discharge workbook and the statutory guidance that we will publish alongside the Bill. Both will make it clear that discharge must be properly planned, patients must not be discharged until it is safe to do so, hospitals will be judged, and, therefore, rewarded on the basis of their ability to control readmission rates, and, under new financial flows, acute trusts will not receive funding for patients who are readmitted to hospital within a certain period. A financial incentive therefore exists for those trusts to ensure that a patient is genuinely ready for discharge before leaving an acute hospital bed.

The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam also raised concerns about whether patients in the community will be disadvantaged. Perhaps I could remind hon. Members of the context within which the Government propose to introduce this legislation: one of significant extra funding for older people's services. That will provide additional carer services, as I have spelled out, 500,000 more pieces of community equipment, 70,000 more social care intermediate care services, and 30,000 more home care services of five or more hours a week. If the hon. Gentleman's point is that, given the inheritance of the previous Government's spending on local authority social services, social services departments have had a difficult job, I agree. This Government, however, are significantly increasing investment in ensuring that social services departments can provide precisely the sort of community alternatives and support necessary for people to come safely out of hospital and to be where they tell us that they want to be—in their own home or in extra care supported accommodation. In that context, it is also right to ensure that the responsibilities of local authorities are carried out in a timely fashion and that older people are placed at the centre of care and not relegated to being trapped in hospital, a practice that Opposition Members would seem to want us to continue.

My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Alan Simpson) made some important points about the need to ensure that action is taken on fuel poverty for older people in particular, and that people have the kind of changes made to their homes that enable them to continue living in them and to keep well. I assure him that, for example, my Department's "Keep Warm Keep Well" campaign, in partnership with Help the Aged, Age Concern, National Energy Action, the Women's Royal Voluntary Service, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Department for Work and Pensions, which was launched again this year, provides an advice line, a free winter guide and advice about financial assistance available, such as that offered by the warm front team, which helps people to heat and insulate their homes.

I also assure my hon. Friend that the Department of Health is, for the first time, investing more money in home improvement agencies precisely to make some of the changes to housing that will enable people to leave hospital more safely. We are also investing in intensive home care packages and extra care accommodation, which may well provide a safer and more secure environment for older people while allowing them to maintain their independence.

Let us consider consent and involvement. It is important to involve and inform patients and carers and obtain consent when appropriate. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Ms Munn) rightly pointed out, the Bill does not alter existing legal or good practice requirements for social services or the NHS to inform, involve and, when necessary, obtain patients' or carers' consent.

Amendment No. 41A proposes that local authorities should consult patients and carers before informing social services of a possible community care need and obtain their consent to that notification. When

exercising their functions, the NHS and social services must give people all proper information to enable them to decide whether to accept care or services. Those fundamental duties stem from their status as public bodies that exercise public functions. Of course, good practice dictates that the patient should be kept informed and consulted at all stages of the assessment process. The statutory guidance for the Bill will also make it plain that patients, carers and families should be kept fully informed and consulted at every stage of the discharge process.

The revised hospital discharge workbook includes a chapter specifically on patient and carer involvement. We expect the NHS and social services staff to follow it. However, the Bill does not alter the existing right of the NHS to notify social services of a person's need of such services. I do not believe that giving people a veto over the ability of the NHS to notify social services will help us either to provide the sort of care that people need to leave hospital safely or to plan better the care that especially older people require. The Committee accepted that that early notification of social services would help everybody to plan such care better.

Mr. Burstow: Will the Minister confirm whether the regulations under clause 2(4)(a) that deal with notification include carers? Will carers and patients be notified?

Jacqui Smith: I assure the hon. Gentleman that we believe that the need to involve carers is crucial. That will be spelt out in the statutory guidance and the hospital discharge workbook. However, it may not be possible to give carers the same legal right as patients when patient confidentiality is involved.

Glenda Jackson: Could a carer or a patient veto a plan that cannot be provided locally? If there is no carer and the patient is incapable of making a decision, will there be an advocate? There should be an advocate for an individual who cannot make decisions. Will the advocate be informed of the plan?

Jacqui Smith: My hon. Friend raises several issues. Circumstances in which people cannot get the care that they need locally are partly due to existing provision and investment. A key purpose of the measure is to ensure investment in providing local alternatives. Of course, carers' rights to ask for an assessment of their needs, and to have that taken into consideration when the care plan for the older person is prepared, remain in place. In fact, as I suggested, the position will be improved by some of the Government amendments.

Of course, individuals' rights to raise concerns about the package put together by a social services department remain through the complaints system as well. Therefore, while I am not sure I can give my hon. Friend all the reassurance that she wants, I can reiterate that nothing in the Bill removes rights that currently exist, and in fact the Government amendments will improve the position of carers with respect to their role in discharge.

4 pm

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Will the regulations covering the form and content of notices be subject to the affirmative procedure of the House or to its negative counterpart?

Jacqui Smith: As I said in the letter that I wrote to members of the Committee, in all of those cases they will be subject to the negative procedure. We had quite a lengthy discussion about this matter in Committee.

I move on to Opposition amendments Nos. 2, 3, 4 and 5.

Amendment No. 2 is unnecessary. It would require the NHS to inform the patient and carer of the proposed discharge date. This of course should be covered in guidance and is not something that it is necessary to state in the Bill. Throughout guidance to the NHS, since *Patient and Public Involvement in the NHS*, published in 1999, and including the new hospital discharge workbook, we have made it clear that that sort of information should be provided to both patients and carers. Any guidance for the Bill will make it clear that the patient is to be provided with information and advice throughout the discharge process.

Amendment No. 3 seeks to place on the NHS a duty to gain a patient's consent to services being provided following discharge. Just as with any treatment provided by the NHS, a patient has the right to withhold consent to services that the NHS plans to provide when the patient leaves hospital. The Bill does not alter the existing requirement for the NHS to gain this consent when discussing with the patient his or her future care.

Amendment No. 4 seeks to place on the NHS a duty to involve carers. I have covered that in the points that I have made so far.

The proposals in amendment No. 5 are already standard practice, most recently emphasised in statutory guidance on the single assessment process and fair access to care services. The amendment proposes that social services must inform patients of the cost of care plans—presumably, the cost to the individual. Social services must already, in exercising their functions, give all proper information to the person so that he or she can make an informed decision as to whether or not to accept services. That includes information about the costs of any care that they will receive. That has been part of statutory guidance to councils since at least the 1991 community care changes.

I have outlined where existing legislation remains to safeguard the position with respect to the consent and the rights of both patients and carers, and I have outlined how the Government action being taken today will improve the position of carers. I hope that I have provided some reassurance to hon. Members. I have also outlined the position with respect to both the hospital discharge book and the statutory guidance to be published alongside the Bill, and the emphasis that that will place on ensuring that patients and carers are fully consulted.

The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam raised specific points about continuing care that I think we covered in Committee. As to his question whether someone involved in a dispute over the right to continuing care would be able to remain in hospital,

[Jacqui Smith]

I think I gave that assurance in Committee. I would add that of course, as we have made very clear, the first decision that should be made in the assessment process is whether patients are eligible and entitled to NHS continuing care, and clearly if they are there will be no responsibility on the social services department. If patients want to dispute that, they can appeal to the continuing care panel. We are currently producing directions to strategic health authorities to outline the need to ensure that they produce continuing care criteria and that any such decision is taken very quickly, within two weeks.

Mr. Burstow: I want to ask the Minister two questions. First, can she confirm therefore whether there will be a charge, or fine, to the local authority during the appeal process on continuing care? Secondly, can she confirm whether the Department will follow the health service ombudsman's requirements for individual health authorities to carry out trawls to find those people who have been wrongfully denied access to free continuing care?

Jacqui Smith: On the first question, the Bill makes it clear that a charge would apply only if there were no social services provision in place; therefore, if health service provision were also not in place, a fine would not exist.

Mr. Burns: A fine.

Jacqui Smith: The hon. Gentleman has succeeded.

Clearly, to reinforce a point that I made earlier, people also have the right to stay in hospital while decisions about the continuing care criteria are made.

On the question about health service ombudsman cases, my understanding is that those final judgments have not yet been produced. Clearly, it would be important to take those judgments into consideration as strategic health authorities determine their continuing care criteria.

Government amendment No. 37 will make it clear that personal care may not be provided free for more than six weeks. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley made clear in her contribution, this is a matter of choice. As a Government, we have made a choice to spend significant new resources on improving the equality and range of care services provided to older people, providing services that deliver what most older people say that they want: independence, support in their own homes, services tailored to their needs and not to remain in hospital unnecessarily when they can be cared for elsewhere.

When I suggested that this is about choice, the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam said from a sedentary position that the Liberal Democrats have made a different choice from that of the Government, so he has a responsibility to explain to his constituents that they would not therefore benefit from what we have decided to spend the extra £1 billion on: 130,000 additional carer services, 500,000 more pieces of community equipment, 70,000 more intermediate care places, 30,000 more home care places, 6,000 more residential care places supported by councils and nearly 7,000 extra care housing places.

I am afraid that government is about making choices. The Government have chosen to extend choice, opportunity and services. The Bill will ensure that that extra investment is spent for the benefit of older people, so that they receive the right care at the right time and in the right place.

Mr. Burstow: Having listened very carefully to what the Minister has had to say in response to this group of amendments, I wish to say briefly that it is our clear view that the Government have not addressed our main concern: the onus should be on social services departments to ensure that assessments are given to carers; they should not have to ask for them. We do not accept the Government's argument, so we wish to press the motion to a Division and, later, to vote on Government amendment No. 37.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 195, Noes 334.

Division No. 50] **[4.09 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barrett, John
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Curry, rh David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Dodds, Nigel
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael

Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Redwood, rh John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Richard Younger-Ross and Mr. Andrew Stunell

NOES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, hon. Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher

Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Milburn, rh Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Straw, rh Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(CWyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nick Ainger and
Mr. Fraser Kemp

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 5

ACTION PLANS AND JOINT LOCAL PROTOCOLS

'.—(1) The responsible NHS body and responsible authority are required to agree the following as regards the discharge of qualifying hospital patients as defined in section 1 of this Act—

(a) action plans to prevent and reduce delayed discharges;

(b) joint local protocols on the administrative and practical arrangements for the implementation of the legislation to ensure that all parties are clear about their respective roles and responsibilities;

(c) local targets for reducing delayed discharges;

(d) joint administrative arrangements for the local implementation of the duties in sections 2, 3, 4 and 5 in this Act.

(2) An action plan under subsection (1) above is a document drawn up by the relevant bodies specifying action intended to reduce delayed discharges, and to change procedures and arrangements which may cause or contribute to the failure to comply with duties under section 3.

(3) Joint local protocols will include named persons responsible for coordinating all stages of the patient journey up to and beyond discharge, and ensuring that all necessary arrangements are put in place at the right time.

(4) Local protocols may include joint agreement on how payments made under section 4 are used to encourage a whole system approach to services for older people, and to ensure that all stakeholders are involved in deciding how the payments are spent.'.—*[Mrs. Calton.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mrs. Calton: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: new clause 6—*Written discharge plan*—

'.—(1) Further to the fulfilment of the requirements under section 3(3)(a) and (b) a written discharge plan shall be produced and taken to include—

(a) an assessment of community needs within the meaning of section 47 of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990, and arrangements for aftercare; and

(b) where the patient has an intending carer, within the meaning of section 1(1)(b) of the Carers (Recognition and Services) Act 1995, an assessment in compliance with section 1 of that Act.

(2) Regulations may prescribe the form of a written discharge plan.'.

Government amendment No. 26.

Amendment No. 42, in page 2, line 19, at end insert—

'(1a) The form of a written discharge plan.'.

Government amendment No. 31.

Amendment No. 43, in page 3, line 11, at end insert—

'(2a) The form of a written discharge plan.'.

Mrs. Calton: New clause 5 is intended to enhance joint working. The thrust of the Bill has been to disturb absolutely everyone who has anything to do with this area of work. All the organisations have expressed the view that the Minister's planning measures will worsen joint working arrangements. We want joint action plans, joint protocols between social services and other agencies, joint targets and joint administration arrangements. The new clause would ensure that there would be a named person to co-ordinate the patient journey, and that joint planning would take place on how fines or payments were used to encourage a whole-system approach.

Subsection (2) of the new clause states:

"An action plan under subsection (1) above is a document drawn up by the relevant bodies specifying action intended to reduce delayed discharges".

Let me ask the Minister a question to which I have still not had a reply so far, although it was asked in Committee. Has the Secretary of State or the Minister assessed the success of plans that had to be submitted by social services departments last August to reduce delayed discharges? A special grant report was produced in July 2002, and we heard then that money was being made available. We still do not know whether the plans made then have benefited the situation. We believe that the Bill is premature, given that measures introduced only in this financial year remain to be properly assessed.

New clause 6 would require the preparation of a written discharge plan that would include an assessment of community needs, arrangements for after care, and carers. I listened to what the Minister said earlier, and have been somewhat reassured, so I shall not rehearse all the points raised by carers organisations and Age Concern. However, those organisations have been in touch with all hon. Members and have made it clear that they are unhappy with what is being proposed.

Government amendment No. 26 deals with the bodies that appear to the NHS to be the ones to which notice is supposed to be given. We are concerned that all decisions will rest, arbitrarily, with the NHS. Because the amendment allows for no give and take, the process will be all one way.

Amendments Nos. 42 and 43 are consequential on new clauses 5 and 6. Government amendment No. 31 would require consultation to ensure safe discharge, but does not say when the consultation should take place. Would it be before the section 2 notice is served, or after?

I look forward to the Minister's responses to the questions that I have raised.

Mr. Burns: One of the main problems that Opposition Members have with the Bill is that we believe that the imposition of fines would have a damaging impact. I am glad that the Minister has come to accept that the word "fines" properly defines what the Government propose. The Secretary of State used the word "fines" in the House on 11 December so perhaps, after that slap on the wrist, the Minister decided that she would have to swallow her pride and accept that fines are what the Bill is all about.

The Opposition have always argued that the introduction of fines would disrupt and have an adverse impact on the discharge process, and that it would seriously damage the partnerships built up over the past decade or 15 years, when the NHS and social service departments have worked more closely together. That closer working has been a genuine and positive step forward, and has helped to create a seamless service that will be undermined and adversely affected by the fining proposals in the Bill.

I appreciate the motives behind new clauses 5 and 6. They are meant to protect and encourage joint working, but they are far too bureaucratic and costly to warrant inclusion on the face of the Bill. For that reason, I believe that more work needs to be done. I support the broad aims and aspirations of the new clauses, but the clauses themselves are the wrong vehicles, for the reasons that I have given. So I warn the Government that we will certainly want to look at the issue in another place and try to come up with proposals that will advance and enhance joint working, but not in such a bureaucratic and costly way. For that reason, I fear that I shall not be able to support the new clauses.

4.30 pm

Jacqui Smith: That was a pretty short-lived consensus between the Opposition parties.

I agree with the analysis by the hon. Member for West Chelmsford of new clause 5 in particular. It is designed to impose another layer of bureaucracy on the NHS and social services; it is a planner's charter. The sum total of the Liberal Democrat approach to the matter is to come up with the idea that producing a few more plans would somehow help us to ensure that older people received the care that they deserve. I do not believe that that will do the trick, and it is of course just what staff on the front line do not want.

We in the Department have worked hard to reduce and streamline the planning requirements on the NHS and social services. We have been removing the requirement for social services to submit plans to central Government as part of grant conditions or other monitoring, so that the number of plans submitted will reduce from 13 to two between 2001–02 and 2002–03. A new gateway procedure was introduced in December to reduce the planning burden on the NHS and ensure that the focus is on core priorities.

The hon. Member for Cheadle asked what assessment we have made of the plans. My definition of success is the difference that we have made to the people who depend on the service. For that reason, the fact that we have been successful in reducing the number of delayed discharges of patients of all ages from 7,065 in September 2001 to 5,385 in September 2002 is much more important than whether somebody has produced an elegant plan.

Mrs. Calton: I am somewhat surprised to hear that the Minister does not think that plans are such a good idea, given that they were precisely what social services departments were asked to produce last July. I agree

[Mrs. Calton]

that the proof of the pudding is in the eating. I suspect that September 2002 was too soon to make a judgment, but I shall leave that to her.

Jacqui Smith: The hon. Lady has reinforced her position as planning supremo for the Liberal Democrat party.

Suggesting that we can solve the problem with planning is very much at odds with the approach that we are trying to take. In "Delivering the NHS Plan", for example, we pointed out that, although ring-fenced grants—the £300 million—and close central monitoring had brought about a significant drop in the number of delays, such top-down targeting was not sustainable. It does not fit with the new approach in the NHS and local government of devolving responsibility and earning autonomy through good performance.

The publication in October of the priorities and planning framework for the NHS and social services set clear priorities for the next three years so that local partnerships can plan with confidence.

Mr. Burstow: Has the Minister withdrawn the guidance, "Reflecting the True Patient Experience", issued by the Department in 2001, which did require NHS chief executives and directors of social services to draw up joint protocols around discharge, to minimise waiting times and so on? Given that that requirement was part of the guidance then, what was wrong with that? Why have the Government withdrawn it? Have they withdrawn it?

Jacqui Smith: I do not think that I am wrong when I say that we have not withdrawn that. If the hon. Gentleman is saying that at a local level it is a good idea for partners to work together and develop protocols, I have no argument with that. I do have an argument with the Liberal Democrat approach, which appears to consist of opposing what the Government propose in the Bill and supposing that we shall solve the problem merely by asking for a few more plans and protocols. I identify that as a weakness of new clause 5.

The hon. Members for West Chelmsford and for Cheadle both mentioned partnership between health and social care. I agree that partnership is an essential element in delivering the right care for an individual. At the moment, delays can occur because health and social care partners have not communicated very well or because they are unclear or are arguing about responsibility, or even because one is trying to shift costs to the other. The Bill gives areas where partnership is not very well developed the incentive to get all these things right, and to ensure that locally the partnership is totally clear about procedures—who is responsible for which actions.

Much has been said about the Bill damaging partnership, as though partnership was an aim in itself. In fact, the Bill will strengthen partnerships, and strengthen them in order to deliver results. Strong partnerships are based on shared priorities, clearly agreed roles and responsibilities, and a joint commitment to progress, all of which the Bill will strengthen. However, we do not want partnerships for partnership's sake; we do not want partnerships simply to be able to produce a plan. The real test of the partnership is: what is it delivering? Have local people noticed the difference in the services that they receive? The proof of partnership is in delivery, not in planning.

For that reason we have made older people's services a core priority, not by increasing the planning burden but by making this area one of the priority areas for investment and reform. Over the next three years there will be £1 billion of new resources for older people's social care services and for the reform to the system that the Bill will enable us to bring about with respect to delayed discharge.

I address the following point to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow). If people locally want to make further detailed local arrangements, that is up to them, but we are introducing the reimbursement system and the new resources because a system of incentives backed up with resources should be more effective than a further raft of plans and protocols. We need to take a proactive approach; the Bill enables us to do so. New clause 5 should be opposed, because it does not fit the need to make a difference or the new approach to devolving responsibility and developing earned autonomy.

New clause 6 would place a further requirement on social services to produce a written discharge plan that must take into account two assessments, once the NHS has notified them of likely patient need for community care services. I suspect unintentionally, the new clause is so drafted that failure by social services to meet those new duties would also act as a trigger to the reimbursement charge if a patient was delayed. I do not believe that we want to create that additional trigger for the charge.

The biggest problem with the amendment is that it is unnecessary. In the first instance, written records of the results of assessments are already standard practice as part of carrying out an assessment under section 47 of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990. Clause 3(9) of the Bill already provides that assessments undertaken by social services in receipt of a section 2 notice must be regarded as part of a section 47 assessment, and the section 47 duties still apply. So we expect people to get a written plan outlining what needs to be in place for them to have a safe discharge.

The requirement to include a carer's assessment in the written discharge plan is also not necessary. It is already the case that carers are entitled to request assessment of their ability to provide care, and existing good practice already directs that carers will be fully consulted in the patient's assessment process.

I was a little disappointed by the reason given by the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam for pushing new clause 3 to the vote. I think that I said specifically that statutory guidance issued around the Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000 had pointed out to local authorities their responsibility to inform individual carers of their right to request an assessment. Local authorities are already required to take account of the results of such an assessment of the carer when deciding what community care services they will provide to the patient.

The provisions of new clause 6 are already covered by current arrangements and new clause 5 would do nothing more than introduce planning requirements with little emphasis on what those would achieve, so I hope that the hon. Member for Cheadle will feel able to withdraw the new clause. If not, I hope that hon. Members will vote against it.

Mrs. Calton: I thank the Minister for tackling some of the issues that I mentioned. Perhaps this was just an omission, but I am concerned that she did not mention our proposal that a named person should co-ordinate the patient journey. The Government have said that they would be in favour of that in other respects and it would be useful if it were a part of the Bill.

I am also concerned that the opportunity to provide for joint planning on how to use payments or fines to encourage a whole-system approach has also been missed. I accept what the Minister says about the preparation of a written discharge plan and I am pleased if that is already expected. Clearly, we think that it is important.

On the assessment for carers, I agree that carers can already request a separate assessment, but all too often that does not happen and the Minister should have some regard to the question of ensuring that it does. It is clear from reading all the evidence from carers that they are not being consulted and assessed every step of the way as they should be.

The Minister said that the Bill would strengthen partnership. In one respect, I think I can agree that it may do so in the sense that it provides a common enemy. Sometimes, a common enemy in the form of the Government may well be what is needed to bring organisations together when they are warring with each other.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): Will the hon. Lady give way on that matter?

Mrs. Calton: I have almost finished. That remark was made with tongue in cheek; I hardly think it needs to be taken too seriously.

We would have liked to press the new clause to a vote, but, with your permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we will withdraw it, as we understand that time is limited this afternoon and we expect our arguments to be revisited in the other place.

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Government amendments Nos. 26 to 34 agreed to

Clause 4

LIABILITY TO MAKE DELAYED DISCHARGE PAYMENTS

Mr. Burns: I beg to move amendment No. 7, in page 4, line 30, at end insert—

'(10) The amount prescribed under subsection (4) shall not exceed—

(a) £120, in the case of a social services authority in, or adjacent to, Greater London, or

(b) £100, in any other area.'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 8, in page 4, line 30 [Clause 4], at end insert—

'(10) The amount prescribed under subsection (4) shall not exceed—

(a) £12, in the case of a social services authority in, or adjacent to, Greater London, or

(b) £10, in any other area.'.

4.45 pm

Mr. Burns: I want to make it clear at the outset that although I will speak to both amendments in the group, I will press only amendment No. 8 to a Division. Before the Minister has fun at my expense, let me make it clear that the reason why both were tabled is, first, that I do not have the advantage of having the Government's lawyers and draftsmen at my disposal and, secondly, that those in opposition never know in advance which amendments will be selected. To be frank, I thought that even though amendment No. 8 is far more important and relevant to local authorities throughout the country, it would be pushing my luck to presume that it would be selected. You cannot imagine my unbridled joy, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when I noticed yesterday evening that it had been selected.

The nub of the Conservatives' opposition to this nasty and unnecessary Bill is the concept that the Government are introducing fines on local authorities—fines that are across the board in their application, regardless of whether there is any justification for them. As we said in Committee, circumstances will quite frequently arise in which for various reasons it will not be a local authority's fault that a person does not leave a hospital bed and go to either domiciliary or residential care, whichever is the most appropriate, yet the Government are to impose fines of, we understand, £120 per day for those living in London and the south-east, and £100 for those living elsewhere.

We believe that that is wholly the wrong way to try to overcome the problem of bed blocking. Like many outside the House, we believe that the Bill will set the national health service against social services and vice versa, and undo the great strides forward accomplished in the past decade or so in terms of those agencies working together to provide a seamless service for patients. Regardless of the announcement made by the Secretary of State on 11 December of extra money for three years, we believe that the legislation will result in local authorities being penalised financially. Anyone who asks social services departments in England for their estimate of the potential cost to them of the fines will be given a figure that far exceeds the £100 million that the Government are making available.

The departments' estimate also far exceeds the results of the calculations done on the back of an envelope by the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow), who is no longer in his place. All of us who know the Liberal Democrats know that they never let a fact get in the way of a "Focus" or a press release, especially if that press release can be got into a national newspaper by conning some journalist who does not want to do the research himself—after all, the Liberal Democrats,

[Mr. Burns]

with their clipboards and their anoraks, are the font of all accuracy in surveys and calculations of a mathematical nature.

Claire Ward (Watford): There is a man who has been scarred.

Mr. Burns: Too right, I have been scarred. I have had to deal with that party for 10 years. Fortunately, the people of West Chelmsford saw through the Liberal Democrats long ago. From getting within 378 votes of capturing Chelmsford in 1983—I might add that that was before I was the candidate—they are now a very poor third behind Labour. The clipboard experience has disappeared from our streets.

Mrs. Calton: I can only think that a figure like 25 per cent. is making a difference. Would the hon. Gentleman like the Liberal Democrats' support for the amendment? I think that it would be useful and perhaps entertaining for us to know.

Mr. Burns: I shall answer the hon. Lady in two ways. First, on the mathematics, the hon. Lady has proved my point, although I may be arguing unwisely in a way, given that Liberal Democrats can never get any mathematical calculation right. The hon. Lady said 25 per cent. The Government say 20 per cent. I think that the hon. Lady meant 20 per cent. rather than 25 per cent.

Secondly, the hon. Lady asks whether the Conservatives want the hon. Lady's support on the amendment. The Conservative party, for reasons that I am outlining, has produced a first-rate amendment to minimise the damage that the Government can do to social service departments with their fines. I would advise not only Liberal Democrat Members but Members of any Opposition party—and any Labour Member who has listened carefully to their social services department, although given those Members who are in their places, I suspect that they have not—to join us in seeking to help social service departments and other organisations throughout the country so as to ensure that we minimise the damage that the Bill would do to social service departments.

Mr. Kevin Hughes: The hon. Gentleman may recall that on Second Reading I produced the figures for Doncaster, which has been working really well on this issue and has an extremely good record. These matters start at the front end, not the back end. Instead of trawling round social service departments looking for negatives, the hon. Gentleman might be better trawling round looking for positives, and asking what will be done to ensure that our constituents receive the treatment that they deserve in hospitals and get out when they no longer need medical treatment.

Mr. Burns: If the hon. Gentleman were correct in his assumption, his point would be valid, but I can assure him that I did not trawl social services departments for bad news stories. Instead, and at random, I telephoned social services department after social services department. Amazingly—or not amazingly, given the damage that the Bill will do—they all had the same complaint, which was that there would be a problem with fines to some degree.

As for the hon. Gentleman's second point, he is absolutely right. We all want a system whereby people do not have to remain in hospital for a day longer than they otherwise should. Unfortunately and regrettably, owing to a number of circumstances including the crisis in long-term care—the closure of more than 60,000 beds and of 2,000 homes since 1997 and the fact that in certain areas there are not enough beds available—there are bound to be some delayed discharge cases.

None of us wants that. Of course social services departments and the national health service have been seeking to minimise delayed discharges for a considerable time. However, factors beyond their control have thwarted them in achieving anywhere near a 100 per cent. success rate in eliminating the problem. I am saying, as my party is saying—

Mr. Kevin Hughes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Burns: No.

We want to come up with positive and sensible ideas to seek to overcome the problem. We do not believe that the best way to achieve that is through fines. That is why to my mind amendment No. 8 is the most attractive alternative within the scope of the Bill. We believe that it will deal with the problem. Bringing down to a more or less nominal level the fines that the Minister is seeking to introduce and including that figure in the Bill would prevent the Chancellor from using the proposals as a new form of stealth tax. Without primary legislation, he could not seek to increase the level annually, or whenever the Government wanted to raise more money.

Mr. Kevin Hughes *rose—*

Andy Burnham: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Burns: I am sorry, but I cannot.

It is for those reasons that I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends will join me in the Division Lobby. I further hope that any other hon. Members who care about coming up with positive solutions to the long-term care crisis, and who have said consistently on the Floor of the House and in Committee that they oppose the fining system, will join us in seeking to thwart the Government's intentions.

Mrs. Calton: I shall be very brief. The Liberal Democrats will support the amendment, but in spite of, rather than because of, the arguments advanced by the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns). I should correct him on one point—I realise that I did not make myself clear: the figure of 25 per cent. referred to the opinion polls, rather than to whatever it was that he thought it referred to.

Jacqui Smith: I was glad to see some of the Opposition harmony return at the end of the debate. The hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) was a little unfair. After talking about Liberal Democrat clipboards and anoraks—amusing though that was—he proceeded to talk about his own survey. I do not know

whether he used a clipboard; it is more likely that he got someone else to carry out the survey, and perhaps they used a clipboard.

Mr. Burns: Perhaps I can help the Minister. No, I did not use a clipboard, because I try to distance myself from the Liberal Democrats as much as possible. Directors of social services were telephoned in their offices, and they provided the information. I put it on a piece of paper and added it up, and I got a total. *[Interruption.]*

Jacqui Smith: As has just been pointed out, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would never be seen wearing an anorak, either.

The Bill seeks to provide an incentive for local authorities to supply prompt onward care for patients who are ready to leave hospital by introducing a charge that broadly reflects the cost to the hospital of providing a bed for a delayed patient. We had some lengthy discussions in Committee about the justifiable basis for expecting that, where the responsibility rests with social services departments to provide for a person's needs—usually, it is an older person—it is not unreasonable to expect them to take responsibility for payment as well, given that they will receive the necessary funding from the Government. The alternative is a system that is effectively a fine on the NHS, because the NHS is expected to pay the costs of people whose needs would be better served out of hospital, but who remain in hospital because alternatives are not available in the community. Anybody who opposes that principle must answer the question of whether it is justifiable for the NHS to bear costs for which it has neither legal nor practical responsibility. Nor, indeed, is it best suited to provide that particular form of care.

Sir George Young: Let us accept for one moment the principle that the Minister has just enunciated. Why does it not work the other way around? When the NHS imposes costs on social services, why does it not pay them?

5 pm

Jacqui Smith: I would be interested to know what examples the right hon. Gentleman has in mind. We explored in detail in Committee the principles of some of the financial incentives that are being introduced into the NHS. I made the point that it is possible to introduce financial incentives through the sort of financial flows work that we will be introducing into the NHS, some of which I spelt out earlier, without legislation. However, the interface between social services and health is such that we need to legislate in order to introduce financial incentives in that context.

I return to my original question, which has not been satisfactorily answered by anybody who opposes the legislation. The incentive is that the daily charge that we propose is higher than the daily costs that the local authority would otherwise incur in providing either residential or domiciliary care for the person in question. I hope that hon. Members will understand that there are very good reasons why the Bill makes no mention of the actual reimbursement charge.

We have chosen to set out the charge in regulations rather than in the Bill, as that will give us greater flexibility to amend the rates in line with inflation or other cost pressures. The hon. Member for West Chelmsford was either on a flight of fancy or lacks understanding about the nature of the charge, which is a transfer from one part of the public system to another reflecting the costs that have been borne. It is not raising money for the Government, but focusing the attention of social services departments on areas in which they already have responsibility and ensuring that they spend the extra investment that the Government are making available to them on the sort of alternatives that older people want to enable them to get out of hospital more quickly.

In the letter that I sent to members of the Standing Committee about the regulations, I spelt out that the charge will be based on the cost to the NHS of providing bed, board and personal care in an acute environment, but having removed indirect overheads and the cost of capital medical input and specialist nursing in order to reflect the lower costs of caring for a patient at the end of a hospital stay when medical needs have been reduced. In most cases, the figure will also represent a higher charge to the local authority than the daily costs of providing community care in a residential setting or in the person's home. Our intention is to remove what sometimes operates as perverse incentive in the system, enabling local authorities not to live up to their responsibilities, with the NHS bearing the costs of people's care because the necessary alternatives are not in place.

In our consultation, we asked whether a charge of £100 a day and £120 in London and the south-east would be appropriate. Responses suggested that that seemed about the right amount to create the incentive that we want. We will issue the regulations for consultation and consider any further responses about the amount of the charge and the boundary for the higher rate.

The hon. Member for West Chelmsford made clear what the amendments are about. They are not a serious attempt to consider the incentive effect or the appropriate level for the charges that will justifiably be put in place. They are simply wrecking amendments that continue for the Opposition the approach on which I commented during the debate on the previous group of amendments but one. Opposition Members are keen to oppose our proposals, but have no ideas about how we can cut delayed discharge. I am afraid that they are therefore letting down the older people who depend on all of us to provide a better system to ensure that they get the right care in the right place.

Mr. Burns: I listened carefully to the Minister, and it will come as no surprise to the House that I was not convinced by her arguments. Moreover, her comments towards the end of her speech were absolute and unadulterated rubbish. Therefore, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment and I ask my right hon. and hon. Friends to join me in the Lobby in support of amendment No. 8.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

[Mr. Burns]

Amendment proposed: No. 8, in page 4, line 30, at end insert—

'(10) The amount prescribed under subsection (4) shall not exceed—

(a) £12, in the case of a social services authority in, or adjacent to, Greater London, or

(b) £10, in any other area.'.—*[Mr. Burns.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 188, Noes 317.

Division No. 51] **[5:05 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Curry, rh David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Dodds, Nigel
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Redwood, rh John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Wilshire and Mr. Mark Francois

NOES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, hon. Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*

Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, rh Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woodward, Shaun
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nick Ainger and
Mr. Phil Woolas

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 6

Dispute Resolution

Mr. Burns: I beg to move amendment No. 6, in page 4, line 42, leave out clause 6.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this, it will be convenient to consider Government amendment No. 35.

Mr. Burns: Because of pressure of time, I shall not detain the House for long.

[Mr. Burns]

Clause 6 deals with the appeals procedure. I think that seeking to delete it is the right way forward, but not because I believe that there should not be an appeals procedure. I believe that there should, because, given what the Government are doing with fines, there is an urgent need for it; I fear that, as a result of the breakdown of partnerships and working together, the arguing between the health service and social services over whether a fine will be paid will be so intense that an appeals procedure needs to be in place.

What I do not find attractive about the Government's proposal, as many of my right hon. and hon. Friends said in Committee, is that unfortunately the way in which they are going about it is to set up the procedure though the strategic health authorities, so that in effect the health service will be both judge and jury. That cannot be right, in the interests of fairness and justice.

What we have always argued, and what I remain committed to, is that there should be an appeals procedure, but that it should also include social service departments or local authorities on an equal footing with the health service, with an independent chairman—or chair, in the current politically correct language. The Bill would be greatly enhanced by that. Unfortunately, because of the lengthy discussions in Committee, it would not have been in order to re-table the amendment that we proposed in Committee, and regrettably this is the only way in which one can seek to persuade the Government to think again and adopt a more even-handed approach.

I am sure that the Minister will say that it would be nonsense to take the whole appeals procedure out of the Bill, and I would agree. But I should like to persuade her and the House that removing the clause from the Bill now would give the Government time to reflect further on our eminently sensible suggestions of an even-handed approach to an appeals procedure, so that they could reinstate in another place a clause that was more acceptable to my right hon. and hon. Friends and, I suspect, many social service departments, which see this as potentially a fix where justice will not be seen to be done.

For those reasons, I hope that the Government will accept the amendment, solely as a temporary measure while they reflect on introducing their own amendment. If they do not, my noble Friends in another place will be in a position to do so instead.

Mr. Burstow: We rehearsed a lot of these concerns and arguments in Committee before Christmas. The Liberal Democrats fundamentally share the Conservative position: the arrangements for setting up the dispute panels under strategic health authorities do not guarantee the independence of those panels. Indeed, I noticed that, in Committee, the Minister acknowledged the need to reconsider the independence issue. Simply keeping on saying that the chairmen should be independent does not make them independent. She said that she would consider how to secure such independence and

"how we guarantee that in the regulations which, like all regulations, will be subject to consultation."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 12 December 2002; c. 88.]

I want to dwell on that issue.

The notes that the Minister has circulated, which give a glimpse of what might be covered in the regulations under clause 6, raise a couple of issues, and I hope that she might be able to give us some further information on them. The first point relates to clause 6(2)(a) on the constitution of the panels. Paragraph 24 of the notes says:

"The regulations can provide that local authority and PCT are represented in equal numbers and that representatives of any organisation involved in the dispute(s) to be discussed at any meeting of the panel are excluded from the panel."

Why has the Department used the word "can" in drafting that document? I hope that the Minister can assure us that the regulations will provide for equal numbers of members from local authorities and primary care trusts. It is important to get that confirmation from the Minister today, as that document gives us the opportunity to test further whether that is the intention behind the policy.

The second issue relates to paragraph 22 of the notes, which says:

"The local authority which received a section 2 notice from the NHS will still need to put in place arrangements for an individual's on-going care within the time frame set out in the legislation, even if a dispute is in progress, or face a payment."

It is not unreasonable to say that someone who needs a package of care should have one arranged. However, if there is a dispute about whether a package of care is needed and that matter goes to the dispute panel, what happens if the panel upholds the social service department's position? Who will reimburse the social services department for the expenditure that it incurs to avoid the fine? If it chooses to pay the fine, will the money be repaid to the department? That is not clear in the details that the Minister has given to us, and it would be helpful if she could clarify that.

Having said all that, we wish to support the Conservative proposal to delete clause 6 simply because that clause will not be effective in ensuring that dispute resolution is fair and free of the bias that will exist if such issues are vested in the NHS.

Glenda Jackson: I should like to make a brief contribution. I cannot support the argument to remove the clause that relates to appeals panels, nor do I share the somewhat cynical view, voiced by the hon. Members for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) and for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow), that strategic health authorities or primary care trusts are so single-minded and blinkered that they believe that they have to preserve their vested interests, if that is what they perceive their responsibilities to be, to the exclusion of all else. My experience of the individuals in my strategic health authority or, indeed, PCT is that they are more than aware that there has to be particularly close working with social services on such issues to ensure that the patient drives the reforms in the NHS.

5.30 pm

I wish to ask my hon. Friend the Minister a question, and I hope that she can reassure me. It would be good if the chairmen of the panels were independent, but whomsoever serves on them, it is important that someone must speak for patients and carers. One of the

problems that I have come across in my constituency is that—with the best will in the world—medical professionals often speak to an individual about their illness, or their care requirements once they leave hospital, in a language that is totally foreign to them. It is entirely understandable that they often speak in a form of professional shorthand. There must be brought to bear in the dispute panels an informed perspective of what is being discussed, from the perspective of the health professionals and of those who work within social services, but it is important that the individual or carer at the centre of the discussion should have someone who can speak a language that everyone understands and who can understand the concerns of the individual in the case. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to reassure me on this.

Mr. Waterson: I find myself agreeing with much of what the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) has just said. I hope that that will not cause too much damage to her socialist credentials. She is absolutely right. If nothing else, the Bill is consistent, and anyone with any optimism turning to a clause headed "Dispute resolution" is going to be severely disappointed because all that the Bill is concerned about is arguments between two or more public authorities. The words "patient" and "carer" are simply missing again. This provision involves two faceless bureaucracies fighting it out in front of a panel. That disappointment is reflected in the comments of Age Concern, which states that

"our concern remains that the Bill does not offer a speedy dispute resolution process for the patient, if they disagree with the discharge plan being offered."

No such process is being proposed here.

I want to raise a few points about the practicalities of the proposals, particularly in view of all the bureaucracy involved, and I endorse some of the points already made on that by the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow). The proceedings of this panel have the smell of something that could go on for a long time, with all the arguments going on between the public authorities, so there is no prospect of any quick decisions being taken. There is certainly nothing here for the patient or carer who says that what is being proposed for them for today, tomorrow or next week is inappropriate, and who wants someone else to appeal to. I do not believe that that kind of time scale is being envisaged, although if the Minister thinks otherwise, she will no doubt say so.

Amendments were also tabled in Committee at the behest of Age Concern and Help the Aged about having a fast-track complaints process for just this kind of situation, but, as is so often the case nowadays, they did not get debated due to time constraints. Age Concern also reflects concerns that have been expressed by at least two hon. Members in this debate when it asks whether

"a panel established by a strategic health authority can be independent in resolving disputes between the health service and social services."

It asks the Government

"to clarify whether the proposed panel's decisions will be binding, or simply for advice only."

It was helpful, up to a point, to have the Minister write to us following the Standing Committee about the likely contents of some of the regulations under the Bill. It was helpful, but it raised a whole series of other questions. Her document talked about the constitution of the panels under clause 6(2)(a), saying:

"The panel will seek information from the relevant professional staff (hospital, social services, PCT) and from the patient and family"—

here come the key words—

"if appropriate."

Who can imagine a more damning comment, albeit one buried in the small print, on this legislation? How can any reasonable person envisage a situation in which it would not be appropriate to get information from the patient, the family or any other carer? Will a patient or carer be allowed to address the panel? Will they be allowed to be represented? What sort of evidence will be required? What standards or burdens of proof will be required? How is all that going to be dealt with? If people are still unhappy at the end of these proceedings, will the process be subject to procedures such as judicial review or other complaints procedures within the NHS, or could those procedures take place in parallel with the new arrangements for a panel?

How many layers of dispute resolution are we talking about? Ostensibly, we are discussing a panel hearing, but the document on the likely regulations also says:

"The regulations could provide, for example, that a panel should not be established to hear a particular case unless the staff involved . . ."—

again, that reflects the Bill's philosophy, which is that it is all to do with the staff and nothing to do with the patient—

"cannot reach agreement on an informal basis".

There we have alternative dispute resolution, as the lawyers would call it—an informal way of trying to establish a solution to a dispute, although one would hope that that would happen automatically in the real world. The document goes on to talk about the dispute being resolved at

"a higher management level between the relevant healthcare provider and the local authority."

Those seem to be steps to be addressed before the panel is even convened.

Finally, the document says:

"The regulations will provide that neither party can take the dispute to court until they have attempted to resolve it via the panel."

What is "attempted" supposed to mean? How far does the panel have to go in considering all the evidence and all the arguments to allow parties to go on to the next stage of a legal challenge? When we read the small print, we see that we are being asked to establish not only a new bureaucracy and a new panel to determine such matters, but, on the face of it, a series of hoops through which people have to leap, none of which will happen in a hurry.

Jacqui Smith: I am pleased that the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns), in moving the amendment, recognised that it is right and responsible to have in place a system for dispute resolution, because, of course, disputes can already exist between health and social services. In fact, it is sometimes precisely because of such disputes that people are delayed inappropriately in hospital. Through the Bill, we are trying to ensure

[Jacqui Smith]

that the relative responsibilities of health and social services are clearly understood and that there is a process to ensure that individuals are not stuck in hospital, losing out because disputes cannot be sorted out.

I am not quite clear whether the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) was suggesting that people should not try to settle disputes before they reach the panel. Of course, that is the obvious way to settle them. Many disputes are settled between the staff concerned in an individual case of discharge or by managers from health and social care. Disputes do not inevitably need to be discussed formally by a panel and the guidance will point out that, for reasons of time and resources, it is desirable to have a system under which two public bodies are encouraged to reach an amicable agreement rather than have constant recourse to the panel.

Senior health and social services managers want to resolve matters, wherever possible, before spending time on dispute mechanisms, but we need a body that can arbitrate to achieve a satisfactory resolution if informal attempts to resolve problems are unsuccessful. In England, we think that the right body for that is the strategic health authority. The hon. Member for West Chelmsford repeated some of his concerns about whether that will create a bias to the NHS. I do not believe that it will. It is a practical response to the situation and the system.

Strategic health authorities are, as the House would expect, strategic bodies. They do not have operational responsibility and they will not be running the acute hospital trusts that may be involved in a dispute. They have a performance management function one step removed from the day-to-day workings of the NHS. There is no equivalent strategic body for councils, so it makes sense for strategic authorities to be the bodies with responsibility for setting up the panels. They also have an interest in ensuring that acute trusts and PCTs meet their obligations, but not through rewarding the NHS at the expense of local authorities.

I hope that I can reassure Members that the intention is that the panel will be composed of a local authority and an NHS representative with an independent chair. I have confidence in the integrity of the people who will be appointed to that panel. Being charged with such a function, the panels will of course have to act properly and in accordance with the rules of natural justice . The regulations will ensure that panel members are not from the bodies that are in dispute, and that the chair is independent of both NHS and local authority. There is no reason to suppose, therefore, that the panel will look more favourably on the NHS than on local councils.

The regulations will also cover situations in which not all the bodies in dispute are located in the same strategic health authority. They will probably follow a simple rule, such as the rule that a dispute should be heard by the panel of the strategic health authority in whose area the hospital is situated.

Several Members have asked about the particular rights of individuals. Clause 6 does not affect an individual's right to complain to either the NHS or social services about the care he or she has received, using the normal complaints procedures already established, or to take legal action in the courts. The panels are not being established to divert individuals from the complaints procedures—although when they or their families have information that may help to resolve a dispute, they may be involved.

Perhaps I can give some reassurance, at least to my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson), by describing some of the improved safeguards—especially those relating to advocacy, about which my hon. Friend was concerned. Individuals wanting to know whether they should receive fully funded continuing NHS care should be informed as part of the assessment process. As I said earlier, the single assessment process and all other guidance make it clear that that is the first question NHS and social services need to consider when assessing the ongoing needs of someone who, potentially, has a primary need for health care. If an individual wishes to dispute an NHS decision that he or she is not a case for fully funded NHS care, the decision should be made within two weeks, and the individual can remain in hospital while the continuing care panel considers the case.

If individuals wish to complain about the services offered by social services departments, that should be dealt with by the social services complaints system, which was established to enable individuals to make such representations. If they are not satisfied with the local authority's response, they can go to the local government ombudsman. If they are concerned about the whole care package and about whether it is safe for them to return home with that package, they should be able to raise that at an early stage with both NHS and social services representatives.

The current system requires all trusts to have patient advocacy liaison services to give exactly the kind of support demanded by my hon. Friend. People raising what will clearly be difficult issues may well need such support. The representatives I have mentioned may be able to change the package, or to reassure patients and their families about its adequacy. There may be further recourse to the complaints provision, which will depend on the nature of the concerns involved.

I hope I have reassured Members that our proposals are logical and sensible. I am not suggesting that the complaints procedure should be biased in favour of the health service; I am saying that the strategic health authority is the appropriate body to convene the complaints panel, which itself will be represented equally by the NHS and local authorities. It will also have an independent chair. Nothing about the panel will undermine what I agree is the important ability of individuals to raise concerns and complain when that is necessary.

5.45 pm

Mr. Burns: I listened carefully to the Minister, and I appreciate that she is seeking to reassure the House, but I remain unreassured. I get the impression that she is talking about an idealised world, but things do not work out that way in the real world. We should improve the Bill now rather than repent when it is too late.

No one doubts that dispute panels are needed. Heaven knows, we will need them if the Bill becomes law. However, I am still worried about making them the responsibility of the strategic health authorities—in

other words, the NHS, which has half of the vested interest in the problem. Even if every panel reached a judgment of Solomon in 100 per cent. of cases, the suspicion would remain among individuals and social services departments, if they did not like the decision that was reached, that a fair decision was impossible because of the way the panel was set up.

I do not believe that there is a major difference between us on this matter, but I do not understand why the Minister has not agreed to bring the local authorities in to work on an equal footing with the strategic health authorities on the panels, subject to the regulations to be issued by the Minister. No accusation that the Government had fixed the system—and made the NHS, through the strategic health authorities, the judge and jury in a dispute—would then have an iota of justification.

I should have thought that the Minister would welcome my advice. I am only trying to help to improve and enhance a rotten Bill. Despite my entreaties, it seems that the Minister is not going to budge. I am hurt about that, but it is an unfortunate fact. As a result, I intend to press the amendment to a Division. I invite my hon. Friends to join me in the Aye Lobby in an attempt to save the Minister from herself.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 198, Noes 318.

Division No. 52] **[5:48 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Curry, rh David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Dodds, Nigel
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, rh Michael
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Redwood, rh John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Wilshire and
Mr. Laurence Robertson

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barron, rh Kevin
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret

Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, hon. Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, rh Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.

Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woodward, Shaun
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Phil Woolas and Mr. Nick Ainger

Question accordingly negatived.

It being after Six o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded to put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that hour, pursuant to Standing Order No. 9 and to Orders [29 October and 28 November 2002].*

Clause 12

FREE PROVISION OF CERTAIN COMMUNITY CARE SERVICES

Amendment proposed: No. 37, in page 7, line 32, leave out from 'require' to end of line 33 and insert

'any of the following services to be provided free of charge for a period of more than six weeks—

(a) the provision of accommodation under Part 3 of the National Assistance Act 1948;

(b) the provision of personal care to a person in any place where that person is living, other than accommodation provided under that Part of that Act;

(c) a service provided to a carer under section 2 of the Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000 which consists of the provision of personal care delivered to the person cared for (in accordance with subsection (3) of that section).'.—*[Jacqui Smith]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 464, Noes 50.

Division No. 53] **[6:03 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allen, Graham
Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Arbuthnot, rh James
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Austin, John
Bacon, Richard
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bell, Stuart
Bellingham, Henry
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Bercow, John
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Borrow, David
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bryant, Chris
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Cabom, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Cameron, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Cash, William
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clelland, David
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Collins, Tim
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Cranston, hon. Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curry, rh David
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dodds, Nigel
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flight, Howard
Flint, Caroline
Flook, Adrian
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
Garnier, Edward
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Grieve, Dominic
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Gummer, rh John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hammond, Philip
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Healey, John
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hendry, Charles
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hunter, Andrew
Hutton, rh John

Iddon, Dr. Brian
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkin, Bernard
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lammy, David
Lansley, Andrew
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leigh, Edward
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Loughton, Tim
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McIsaac, Shona
Mackay, rh Andrew
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Malins, Humfrey
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Maples, John
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Mercer, Patrick
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, rh Estelle
Moss, Malcolm
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norman, Archie
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
O'Hara, Edward
Organ, Diana
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Paterson, Owen
Picking, Anne
Pickles, Eric
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Portillo, rh Michael
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Redwood, rh John
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rooney, Terry
Rosindell, Andrew
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Ruffley, David
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sayeed, Jonathan
Sedgemore, Brian
Selous, Andrew
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simmonds, Mark
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steen, Anthony
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Streeter, Gary
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Tredinnick, David
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Viggers, Peter
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Walter, Robert
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Whittingdale, John
Wicks, Malcolm
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Wilshire, David
Winnick, David
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woodward, Shaun
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Phil Woolas and Gillian Merron

NOES

Allan, Richard
Baker, Norman
Barrett, John
Beith, rh A. J.
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Carmichael, Alistair
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Doughty, Sue
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*

Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Holmes, Paul
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Keetch, Paul
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Moore, Michael
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
Öpik, Lembit
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Annette L. Brooke and Richard Younger-Ross

Question accordingly agreed to.

Government amendments Nos. 35, 36 and 38 to 40 agreed to.

Order for Third Reading read.

6.18 pm

Jacqui Smith: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

Throughout Second Reading, in Committee and during today's deliberations, we have given this Bill fair and measured consideration, and I want to thank all who were involved in Committee for that. Combined with a significant package of extra funding for older people's services, the Bill will bring an end to widespread delayed discharges, and ensure that older people get the services that they need when they need them. It is a Bill that is about the approximately 5,000 mainly elderly people who are delayed unnecessarily in an acute hospital bed. We know that an acute ward is very much the wrong place for someone to be when they are no longer in need of acute hospital care. To be delayed on an acute ward is demoralising for the individual; it can damage their confidence and their prospects for living independently or returning home in future. It is worrying for their families and carers, and bad for the taxpayer and the NHS, and that is why we are determined to tackle the problem.

We have made progress. Fewer people are delayed in hospital now than in 1997, but each person stuck in hospital when they want to be out is an argument for change. Throughout the passage of the Bill, Opposition Members have been quick to oppose but slow to suggest alternatives. As we have heard this afternoon, the Liberal Democrats propose lots of plans, but they have been short on solutions. We know that the Conservatives, who we have learned are the new-found friends of local government, oppose the extra investment that the Government propose—they voted against it—but they cannot even claim to be reformers. In their opposition to the Bill, they certainly cannot claim to be the friends of older people.

The Bill reflects our determination to match our extra investment with reform of the system to ensure that the needs of older people come first. It will do that, first, by creating a strong financial incentive for local authorities to comply with their existing duties to assist the needs of individuals who are likely to need community care services on discharge from hospital and to provide services to those individuals.

Secondly, the Bill strengthens partnerships and brings about increased co-operation between the NHS and local authorities by introducing new duties for them to consult each other in assessing the patient's needs and deciding what services they will make available within set time scales.

Thirdly, by removing local authorities' power to charge for community equipment and intermediate care, the Bill simplifies the existing charging system, making it easier for users to understand and easier for local authorities and the NHS to provide those vital services jointly. Contrary to the concern that has been expressed today about partnership between health and local authorities, I believe that the Bill will lead to increased co-operation and joint working. For the first time, there will be a strong incentive for partners to get together to ensure that their discharge procedures work.

In certain ways, the Bill is already having a positive impact. Local authorities and their NHS partners are coming together in order to find common solutions to common problems and acknowledging the different parts that they have to play in achieving success. We know that planning for the implementation of reimbursement has led many partners to agree, for example, that they need to speed up their plans to implement fully a single assessment process. I feel confident that with so much good work and innovation already going on around the country, by the time reimbursement is implemented later this year, many local authorities and their NHS partners will have been able to find new and creative solutions to the problem of delayed discharge.

Opposition Members have worked hard during the Bill's passage to paint local authorities as victims. In fact, there is only one victim—the older people who are stuck in hospital when they should be out there getting the sort of services and support that we know they want and deserve. Let us be clear: the Bill does not place new responsibilities on local authorities. It simply seeks to add maximum time scales for the assessment and provision of services for which local authorities already have responsibility and places communications between a hospital and a local authority about a patient's case on a formal legal basis.

Of course, the Bill places new responsibilities on the NHS to inform local authorities when someone may need ongoing care in order to leave hospital and when people are fit to be discharged. We know that the NHS has not always taken its responsibilities to communicate with social services departments as seriously as it should. The Bill rectifies that and places the responsibility for payment where the responsibility for provision already lies.

As I have said already, these are not new responsibilities. Councils have had 18 months and £300 million in building care capacity grant, which has provided vital funding for councils to invest in the services and capacity needed to prevent delays. That investment has brought results. Almost 7,000 older people were trapped in hospital in March 1997, but by September last year that level had been reduced to 4,147. However, we have recognised that there are funding pressures for social services. That is why, in addition to the £1 billion package for older people announced on 23 July and the local government allocation announced on 5 December, on Second Reading my right hon. Friend

[Jacqui Smith]

the Secretary of State announced that an extra £100 million per full year of the scheme will be transferred from the NHS budget to local authorities in order to help them to build the capacity that will help them to avoid the costs of reimbursement and, most importantly, ensure that people will get the services that they need.

There has quite rightly been a focus during our debates here and in Committee on the needs of individual patients and their carers. That is right, because it is that focus that is at the centre of the Bill.

As I have explained this afternoon, the Bill does nothing to weaken a patient's right to consent or not to treatment. By creating a financial incentive for local authorities to carry out their duties, it will help to ensure that the needs of individual patients are met more quickly, and it will increase the choice that is available to them in terms of the services that they receive.

In the amendments that we have tabled today we have recognised the concerns about the needs and role of carers. We have also ensured that carers' services for discharge will need to be in place and that carers can benefit from free community equipment where they need it for their caring.

Reimbursement and other proposals in the Bill will lead to increased quality and choice for older people. If local authorities are to avoid delays, in the long term they will need to use the extra investment made available by the Government to invest in a wide range of services and capacity so that they can respond flexibly to an individual's needs, not just with residential care but also with intermediate and interim care, extra sheltered housing, equipment and adaptation services, and packages of intensive support at home, among other provisions.

The Bill presents an important opportunity to end widespread delayed discharge and to ensure that thousands of older people do not wait needlessly on an acute ward every day but are provided with a range of high quality community care services to meet their needs as soon as they are ready to leave. Ultimately, a safe transfer from an acute ward to a place where their needs can be more appropriately met is the minimum that older people should be entitled to and expect. That is what the Bill will ensure happens and I commend it to the House.

6.26 pm

Mr. Burns: To listen to the Minister, one might think that the Bill, which has almost completed its passage through this House, had emanated from a group of young Labour researchers meeting in some chi-chi wine bar in Islington, who, as the chardonnay got to them, thought they had come up with the most wonderful wheeze to deal at a stroke with the problem of delayed discharges. More worryingly, it seems that when they awoke the next morning they did not realise that the hazy wheeze of the night before was not such a good idea, and proceeded to pass the idea on to Ministers who, desperate for a quick fix, immediately embraced their ridiculous proposal and got the parliamentary draftsmen to produce a Bill which the Minister tells us is a series of incentives. We all know that the Bill is not a series of incentives: it is a straightforward system to fine local authorities.

On 11 December 2002, the Secretary of State gave the game away when, in answer to an hon. Member's question on a statement in the House, he referred quite blatantly to fines. The Minister, heroically—partly, I suspect, because she does not read *Hansard* on a daily basis—continued to maintain the myth that the Bill was an incentive measure. Even she finally slipped up today. She saw truth staring her in the face and the F-word passed her lips. She admitted that the Bill was a series of measures to fine local authorities.

What is so deeply disturbing about the Bill and the complacency of Ministers in the Department of Health is that the Bill in no shape or form recognises the crisis in long-term care in Britain—a crisis that has been gathering speed since 1997. Nowhere does the Bill address the problem of the loss of more than 60,000 care home beds, the closure of more than 2,000 care homes, or the fact that 100,000 households are no longer receiving domiciliary care compared with five years ago. That is what is so disgraceful about the Bill. It is a wasted opportunity.

By creating a system in part 1 that will effectively bamboozle local authorities into ensuring that patients are discharged from hospitals to avoid a fine, the Government think they have found a panacea, whereas in fact it is a short-term fix that will end in disaster. I predict now that in the next two years readmission rates for elderly people leaving hospital will increase at a higher level than the current rises. People will be taken from hospital and placed in what is not necessarily the most appropriate care for their needs because the local authority may be charged a fine.

The Government have got it wrong; that is not the right approach. As hon. Members have said, it will undo and damage partnerships between the health service and social services, which have taken a long time to achieve because of natural problems and jealousies in relation to who is responsible for funding. Under the previous Government—and, to their credit, this Government—the process of breaking down the barriers between the health service and social services has moved significantly forward, which is to be welcomed. This Bill will do great damage to that process, as it will create tensions between the two sides and reintroduce a blame culture that we all hoped was being banished as a thing of the past.

Although the Government have made money available for three years for local authorities to try to offset, in theory, the impact that the fines will have on social service funding and spending, there are also problems with that, as the fines are to be introduced on 1 April this year, as is the money. If we had had more time on Report we could have debated this matter, but if the money is to come in on 1 April 2003, and if the legislation is passed and the Government proceed with their cock-eyed scheme, the policy should have been to introduce the fines in April 2004 to give local authorities a 12-month breathing space to seek to resolve further the problems of delayed discharges. Bringing in those measures at the same time is a mistake. In addition, I believe that the money that the Government are making

available will not match the level of fines that local authorities think they may incur, particularly in the early stages of the new policy.

For all of those reasons, I remain implacably opposed to part 1 of the Bill. I am disappointed that the Government have not been prepared to listen more carefully to those who oppose the Bill and who have highlighted its failings. I am a realist—I know my lot in life—and I understand that the Minister of State, charming as she is, will not necessarily listen to my helpful advice. But she does not have to listen to my advice: from her point of view, there are far more credible critics of this policy. There are Back-Bench Labour Members with great experience of social services and local government or the health service who are gravely concerned about this aspect of the Bill. There is the Local Government Association, whose leader, Sir Jeremy Beecham, unless I am wrong, is the Labour leader of Newcastle city council. There are most of the voluntary groups and charity groups in the long-term care sector. The care home owner associations and operators also believe that the Bill is a disaster. Many local authorities throughout the country genuinely believe that the Government are wrong and that the Bill will not solve the problems that they expect it to tackle.

I do not know whether the Minister has had an opportunity to phone social services departments in England and Wales. My office had a charming conversation with her social services department. We also contacted that of the Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Salford (Ms Blears) and of the other Minister of State. We even spoke to the social services department in the Prime Minister's constituency. Not one had a smidgen of enthusiasm for fines, and they were worried about the amount that they might have to pay in fines in the next 12 months. Despite that, Ministers have not been prepared to reconsider.

We are now beginning the last 25 minutes of debate in the House on this nasty and flawed measure. Of course, it will leave the House with a majority in the next hour and go to another place. I assure the Minister that we shall continue to oppose it there, because we believe that there is a serious problem that needs tackling. I agree with her that the real losers are the patients who experience delayed discharge from hospital. However, the Bill is not the way in which to help them and minimise the problem. I therefore urge my hon. Friends to join me in vehemently opposing Third Reading.

6.37 pm

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): The Government deserve much credit for the steps that they have taken and the measures that they have introduced to improve collaborative working between health and social services departments. However, the Bill does not deserve credit and I agree with some of the points that the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) made and the anxieties that several hon. Members have expressed.

The Health Committee examined delayed discharges, and we did not receive evidence from any source—health departments, social services departments or voluntary organisations—in support of the principles at the heart of the Bill. Not even Department of Health officials appeared especially enthusiastic about it. I made my anxieties known on Second Reading, but the Minister did not respond to them. She is a competent Minister, for whom I have a high regard, but I remain convinced that the Bill does not tackle those concerns.

The model is based on the policies that were applied 10 years ago in Sweden. It was interesting to visit that country shortly before Christmas and discuss with political colleagues in the Swedish Parliament whether the measure could work. I admit that some improvements have occurred in Sweden, but colleagues were concerned about the number of people whose discharge from hospital was delayed. In Sweden, county councils run hospitals and municipalities run social services, and integration is being considered.

I humbly suggest that the Government may eventually want to consider that the lack of an integrated health and social care system is the genuine problem. An increasing number of Labour Members who have examined the matter are beginning to agree that integration is the way forward.

I cannot support the Bill. It is a bad measure that has not been thought through. It will damage the good, positive relationships between health and social services departments that the Government have created in some areas. I hope that, even at this late stage, they will see sense and take advantage of opportunities in another place to withdraw the measure.

6.40 pm

Sir George Young: I hope that the Government will take to heart the very measured comments that we have just heard from the Chairman of the Select Committee on Health.

I preface my brief remarks by saying that, given the terrible hand the Minister was dealt in being asked to take the Bill through, she did so with competence and patience, both in Standing Committee and on Report.

I said on Second Reading, which seems very recent, given the speed at which the Bill has gone through the House, that the Bill was one of the worst I had seen in some 30 years. Despite the heroic attempts by the Opposition parties and the welcome amendment that we have just passed on carers, I think that it is one of the worst Bills to go through the House in those 30 years. If there is one discharge that should be delayed, it is the discharge of this Bill from the other place.

I hope that the Government will find that their ambitions to get the Bill through quite quickly, by April this year, are dashed by the very serious consideration that those in another place give it. We have not had proper time to consider it. There were chunks that we did not debate in Standing Committee. We lost an amount of time on Report because of the statements that, understandably, were made.

Not only has the Bill been rushed through, but the timetable for implementation is very challenging. The Minister has ignored the many pleas from those who have to implement the Bill to delay it until April 2004. That was a concession that she might well have made.

Of course, the Bill is unwanted by local authorities, but it is also unwanted by the health service. We heard in Standing Committee of representatives of the NHS Confederation and of the medical profession saying that

[Sir George Young]

they did not want it either, because it will damage the relationships that they value between them and social services.

The Bill has been condemned by all the voluntary organisations. Just today, we heard from Help the Aged, Age Concern and the Alzheimer's Society. I cannot think of a single voluntary organisation that has welcomed the Bill. The point made by those to whom I have referred is that the Bill is misguided, because it focuses on one very narrow part of the problem—the discharge from hospital to care in the community, a care home—instead of standing back and taking a holistic look at the problem from start to finish.

The Bill is unfair and unilateral. It involves a unilateral fine by one part of the public sector on another, with no opportunity for that other sector to obtain reimbursement when it faces costs because of delays by the NHS. If there is a dispute, as we heard earlier today, the jury is not wholly unbiased.

The Bill ignores the role that the Government have played in reducing the capacity in the care home sector, which is one of the strategic reasons behind delayed discharges. It will distort local government priorities. Local authorities will spend less time and energy on prevention to avoid the fines. As we heard today, if one wants to get somebody into a care home, the best way to do it now is to get them into hospital first. The law of unintended consequences and perverse incentives will apply.

On Second Reading, the Bill was virtually friendless on the Government Benches. Indeed, the only contribution from Labour Members on Third Reading has been deeply hostile. At a time when the NHS needs less bureaucracy it will get more, with invoices flying backwards and forwards between social services and the NHS. I know of no right-wing economist in this country who ever proposed an internal market of this nature to deal with the problem.

I believe that the Bill is flawed in concept and will be divisive in its consequences. I shall walk through the No Lobby with a spring in my step to register in the only way still available to me my deep-rooted objection to this legislation.

6.44 pm

Mr. Kevin Hughes: I welcomed the Bill on Second Reading, and I assure my hon. Friend the Minister that I shall support her in the Lobby tonight.

The Bill is an instrument, albeit a blunt instrument, as described by the Select Committee of my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), to concentrate people's minds.

The hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) and my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield, for whom I have a great deal of time and respect, seem able to see only the negative points. They seem to think that the Bill will create a combat atmosphere between social services and the health services. I do not see it that way. The Bill will concentrate people's minds on better co-operation.

Sir George Young: Like the Whips Office.

Mr. Hughes: No, not like that.

We are talking about people, mostly old people, being trapped in hospital, and some social service departments and health authorities are doing very little to tackle that. Fortunately, in my constituency, they are doing something. Planning for discharge starts before patients are admitted for elective surgery, and that is how it should be. The team that works in Doncaster can call on a range of options. If necessary, it can use an intermediate care ward, which has been provided by joint funding, as well as aids, adaptations and all the rest of it. The proposals need not be combative at all; they can lead to more co-operation.

Let us not forget that the Bill is about getting people out of the hospital beds in which they are trapped even though they no longer need health care treatment. That is why I shall walk through the Lobby tonight in support of my hon. Friend the Minister and the Government.

6.46 pm

Mr. Burstow: I note that the hon. Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes) will not walk through the Lobby with a spring in his step, unlike the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young).

I thank the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) and his Select Committee for the report on delayed discharge that they published last year. It is an invaluable piece of research, which I found very useful in Committee, and many of the questions put to officials during the inquiry provided useful answers. As I read through the evidence given to the inquiry, it suggested to me that there was a great lack of enthusiasm among officials and, indeed, anyone who gave evidence about this approach. Indeed, officials said that delayed discharges are a symptom of a wider, whole system problem and that we are lacking in capacity, in planning and in preventing admissions in the first place. Four Committee sittings and consideration on Report later, nothing fundamental has changed in the Bill.

Rather than building on and continuing to encourage the partnership between the NHS and social services departments that hon. Members on both sides of the House would wish to develop, the Bill will create an adversarial approach of game playing and cost shunting between the two. Worse still, it will turn the patient into a commodity to be haggled over by social services departments and the NHS. There is no room in the Bill for informed consent.

As the Bill has progressed through the House, I have been drawn to the conclusion that it is about beds, not the needs or interests of patients. It is a strange sort of partnership that gives one partner a stick to beat the other. That sounds rather more like domestic violence than addressing the real needs of the health service.

The Bill, as it leaves the House, will put in place a system of fines, as the Minister has confirmed from the Dispatch Box today, that will distort the spending

priorities of local social services departments. Those departments will have to prioritise hospital patients for assessments and services, because a fine is attached, at the expense of those who are hidden, frail and isolated, in their own homes and who count only when they wind up in hospital because of a fall or some other mishap.

In Committee, the Minister talked about the introduction of financial flows—she did so again today—that will lead to hospitals picking up a penalty if emergency admissions take place. She conveniently did not mention that that reform would not start until April 2004. She did not tell us that the single assessment process will not start until that date; nor did she tell us that, although some extra cash for some councils will arrive in April this year, councils did not know the details of those budgets until December and are only now beginning to find out what they mean for them and their communities in terms of council tax rises and investment in services. It is hardly surprising that the services to bridge the gap in capacity have not yet been put in place. The Minister has remained blind to the issues of capacity throughout this debate.

When the Bill makes its way to the House of Lords, I can assure the Government that my colleagues on the Liberal Democrat Benches will do all that they can to ensure that it does not have a safe passage through the other place. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle (Mrs. Calton) and my staff for their hard work on the Bill. This is a bad Bill, and the Liberal Democrats reject it. It puts beds before patients and sets the NHS up against social services. It makes it much more likely that, in future, more people will get the wrong care in the wrong place at the wrong time.

6.50 pm

Andy Burnham: I have sat here all afternoon listening to an unending stream of negativity and doom from the Opposition Benches. I feel compelled to rise to speak, because the Bill offers two major benefits to which the two Opposition parties have given no regard whatever. First, it will lead us, as a society, to support more people at home and lead to much less reliance on institutional care than at present. Secondly, it will bring down the average length of stay in acute beds, which will allow more patients to be treated on the NHS. All Opposition Members agreed that it would bring down the average length of stay, yet they seemed to suggest that that was purely negative. I put it to them that it might actually be positive.

Why will the Bill help more people to live at home for longer? My own family experience tells me that, once a patient has been deemed fit for discharge—that is, once a clinical decision has been made to discharge them, so there is no question of their being forced home too early—it is in the patient's direct interest that that discharge should happen as soon as possible. We have all seen examples of people who have languished in hospital for too long, then drifted into residential or nursing care and lost the opportunity to go back home and be supported there. The Bill will expedite the discharge process and, together with the provision of free aids and adaptations, get more people home once they are able to cope.

Unlike some on the Conservative Front Bench, I do not believe that nursing homes are a good place to be. I saw my grandmother deteriorate rapidly after she went from a long stay in hospital to residential care and then to nursing care. Her personal possessions were stolen while she was in residential care, and her wedding ring was ripped off her finger in the last days before she died. Nursing homes are not a good place to be. We need to encourage more people to live independently at home, which is what I believe the Bill will allow us to do.

The Bill will bring down the average length of stay in NHS beds, which will allow us to treat more NHS patients. Like the Health Committee Chairman, I, too, went to Sweden. We visited the Huddinge university hospital and heard from Dr. Lars Collste.

Mr. Burns: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Andy Burnham: The hon. Gentleman did not go to Sweden, so I will not let him intervene.

Dr. Collste told us that, before the cross-charging system was introduced in Sweden, the average length of stay for an in-patient episode was seven to eight days. After the system was introduced, it went down to 4.8 days. His view was that the system worked.

Mr. Burns: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Andy Burnham: I will not, because other Members want to speak.

We also heard, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) said, that the system was being reviewed by the Swedish Parliament. That is true. It is looking at ways in which the cross-charging system can be reconciled with more co-operation. It is not ditching the system; it is simply looking at how municipalities and counties can co-operate more when the system is introduced. I do not think that that is a bad thing, and the Department might like to look at the experience in Sweden before the measures in the Bill are finalised.

I congratulate the Minister on her skilful steering of the Bill through Parliament, and I look forward to it bringing the two major improvements that I have outlined to my constituents.

6.54 pm

Mrs. Joan Humble (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood): I welcome the opportunity to speak on this important issue. I shall preface my remarks by saying that I fully support the aims of the Bill. I have listened to my hon. Friend the Minister speak with some passion about the needs of elderly people trapped in hospital beds who ought not to be there and who need an appropriate form of care. It is absolutely vital that those people get the care appropriate to their condition or illness, whether that be a hospital bed, a nursing home bed, a place in a care home or intermediate care home, or support in their own home.

I rehearsed some of my concerns on Second Reading, and I still have concerns about the implications for local authorities, but one aspect of the Bill that I welcome is the introduction of new, robust joint assessment procedures. As I have said to my hon. Friend the Minister before, in my local area we have good working between health and social services, which I want to continue, but I am aware that the situation nationwide

[Mrs. Joan Humble]

is variable, so it is vital that we have a new and comprehensive assessment procedure to benefit patients in hospitals.

Will my hon. Friend the Minister look carefully at the implementation timetable and listen to the concerns of local authorities, the health service and, especially, those elderly people who all need caring for? Will she carefully consider the comments that she is getting back to ensure that she is properly monitoring the implementation timetable so that local authorities, health services and, above all, the elderly people we represent are not disadvantaged?

6.56 pm

Dr. Desmond Turner (Brighton, Kemptown): I echo the plea of my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) for clemency for local authorities such as mine, which have been doing their damnedest to do exactly what the Government have asked. They are producing the close working, but, none the less, they face problems and circumstances that are totally beyond their control, such as shortages of nurses and elderly mentally infirm beds as well as trained care workers to provide domiciliary care services. That means that punitive measures in clause 4 will cost them about £1 million a year if they are implemented this spring.

The authorities need more time, and it would be folly and very sad if the £100 million that the Government are giving to extend care capacity for this purpose were simply taken back in fines. That would achieve nothing. Therefore, sensitive timing of the implementation of the more difficult measures is essential.

6.57 pm

Glenda Jackson: On Second Reading, I paid tribute to the absolute commitment of Camden, my local authority, to creating a multi-faceted, properly integrated, high-quality service for elderly people. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Minister paid tribute to Camden and, I believe, Croydon on Second Reading and in Committee for their abilities in reducing delayed discharges, but I must tell her that my local authority's concerns are by no means stilled or quieted. I add my voice to those of my hon. Friends who have urged the Government to pay particular attention to the timetabling of the introduction of these measures.

On going into the fine detail, my local authority discovered that, far from getting a 6 per cent. increase, it is receiving only a 3 per cent. increase in social services funding. Certain authorities suffer from a shortage of available places, because the majority of elderly people undoubtedly want to remain in their locality, which can be a particular difficulty for an inner-London authority such as mine. There are also concerns in my local authority over the costs of implementing the examination of throughput on the issue. It urges the Government to allow it time properly to track how it can better integrate the more-than-one service required to ensure that elderly people are not left in hospital past the point required by their medical care.

I urge the Government to delay, if possible, the introduction of the measures until all local authorities have properly examined such questions. I accept that not all local authorities are as effective or committed as Camden, but I do not believe that the effective and committed local authorities should be punished because others have still not got their act together.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 323, Noes 188.

Division No. 54] **[7:00 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cabom, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, hon. Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet

Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morris, rh Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Joan Ryan and
Gillian Merron

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Curry, rh David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Dodds, Nigel
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Gummer, rh John
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady

Hinchliffe, David
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, rh Michael
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Redwood, rh John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Wilshire and Mr. Mark Francois

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

PETITIONS

Ethical Investment

7.15 pm

Mr. Iain Coleman (Hammersmith and Fulham): I have a petition of approximately 1,200 signatures, which has been compiled and organised by Chelsea Financial Services, a business located in my constituency. The petition urges the Government to take further action to support and assist those companies and organisations working in ethical investment. The petition has my complete support and I would very much welcome the support of the House for it.

To lie upon the Table.

Natural Health Products

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I have a petition from Consumers for Health Choice from the Ribble Valley and other parts of the United Kingdom who use health shops, with 3,700 signatures on it. It declares that

consumers in the United Kingdom have for many years maintained good health by choosing to take safe vitamin and mineral supplements and Herbal remedies; and fears that the European Food Supplements Directive on Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products would severely restrict the number and range of such products on general retail sale in the future.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons requires the Secretary of State for Health does all in his power to protect the rights of UK consumers by ensuring that such European legislation does not unnecessarily and unacceptably restrict the availability of natural Health Products.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Food Standards Agency

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

7.16 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Outside very large urban areas there are still some small towns that manage to maintain a number of specialist shops. I am rather spoilt in my constituency because we have one or two very good ones, and one of the particular favourites of my constituents is a family firm of bakers called Chatwins, which has in its time done considerable damage to my hips and waistline but is much appreciated by those who enjoy its products. Since it is now, I believe, run by the fourth generation of that family, it has a long tradition of supplying very high quality goods. I therefore was considerably surprised when, in the summer, we were struck by a very upsetting incidence of salmonella and I received a letter from Chatwins, setting out a series of circumstances that I thought rather worrying.

Let me begin by saying that I believe that in this day and age we have very many more manufactured foods than we used to, which frequently contain every known chemical on the face of God's earth, and the circumstances in which food is sold to the public seem to me to be in need of considerable and careful monitoring. I in no way resile from the position that in public health we need not only very high standards but standards that everyone appreciates and accepts. As a very young doctor's wife I knew a senior partner who was then medical officer of health in a Devonian borough where I lived at the time and who once, when I ventured to say that I had seen the kitchens of the local hotel and they left a little bit to be desired, informed me, "Yes, dear, but the food is absolutely marvellous."

We have moved on since those days, but it is very important with any kind of public body that is undertaking the role of a statutory body—which is what the Food Standards Agency is—that it should be not only aware of the impact of what it is doing but absolutely certain that it does it in a manner that can not only be defended to the general public but supported by the general public. I was therefore very concerned when I received a letter, saying that after the recent salmonella outbreak, the business received unfair treatment from the Food Standards Agency.

"After our name was mentioned in about half the cases, the local Environmental Health Officers carried out tests in our bakery and shops on Tuesday 8th October. We also followed all"

their

"recommendations . . . including only using pasteurised eggs.

We had a follow-up meeting with the EHO on Friday 11th October where we were informed that all tests carried out . . . proved to be negative, and that they would try and keep our name out of any press release.

On Tuesday 15th October we were informed . . . of the sad news that one man had died over the weekend. They also faxed us a copy of the press release from the FSA . . ."—

in which the name of the bakery was mentioned, which appeared not only in the local but in the national press—

"From this point on it appeared to be fair to link Chatwins with the death of the first and also the second gentleman. The front page of"—

one of the local papers—

"was most damaging . . . By saying tests were carried out at the bakery AFTER the second man had died, it implies that we were the cause of death. The facts were that the tests were carried out over a week ago, and from my understanding"—

that is, a senior member of the firm—

"the second man hadn't eaten a Chatwins product."

It is important that we consider the series of events that affected Chatwins bakery. First, it was aware of its involvement only when it became clear that there was a problem. Secondly, I wrote directly to the head of the Food Standards Agency, as a constituency Member of Parliament, and as I would do with any transport question to a stand-alone agency, to inquire exactly what had happened, who was taking responsibility and whether the agency was aware of the impact on a particular firm. I think that I had every justification for doing so.

The firm was not trying to shift blame in any way, nor did it run away from its responsibilities at any point, or do anything other than to accept that salmonella is an extremely dangerous disease for many people. Of course, the firm was so concerned that it was not passing on any form of infection to its customers that it undertook to do whatever was necessary.

I received a silly letter back from the Food Standards Agency, which said in effect, "Don't speak to us. We're tremendously important. Speak only to the Under-Secretary". Frankly, it was such a bureaucratic and silly letter that I am sorry to say that I sent rather a nasty reply. I have been known occasionally to express myself with some vigour and in fairly straightforward English. I said:

"Your inadequate, yet fastidiously bureaucratic response to my letter of 24th October arrived this morning. I think it might be helpful for me to remind you that I am a Member of Parliament, and that I wrote to the Chairman of the Food Standards Agency on behalf of one of my constituents, who felt that his business had suffered due to press releases issued by the Food Standards Agency. Given the foregoing, I expected a courteous and prompt reply from or on behalf of Sir John, ideally explaining how the FSA came to damage my constituent's reputation, perhaps apologising and maybe even offering some kind of amends.

What I did not expect, and what I will not accept . . . is an irrelevant summary of the FSA's internal administrative procedures."

Frankly, we must have some sense in this case.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary then sent me a long reply in which she set out what the Department regarded as the official answer. I found that as worrying as some of my original contacts with the agency—for example, the fact that it stated:

"Turning to the question of lack of evidence, the negative test results from Chatwins are not proof in themselves that the bakery did not supply food contaminated with salmonella."

I am from a family that contains five doctors. I have the strange idea that a negative result to a test probably means that there is not infection there. Obviously, that is the view of an outsider.

The letter from the Under-Secretary continued:

"A detailed case control study undertaken by the Public Health Laboratory Service has provided clear statistical evidence implicating contaminated bakery items".

Let us be clear what happened. There was a problem. When the bakery was made aware of the problem, those who ran it said that they were very concerned. They

[Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody]

co-operated with the environmental health officers in every possible way and were told that, at that point, because the results had not been obtained, the name of the bakery would not be used—and the next thing they knew was that they were all over the papers. It is not surprising that an announcement to the general public that there may be salmonella in cream buns has some effect on sales. I do not know why it happens—perhaps it shows how unimaginative customers are. Whatever the reason, the announcement had a direct and immediate effect.

What happened then? Did we get any response or explanation from the FSA? Did we get even a gesture of apology—"We're sorry. We had no intention of damaging the business before we had the evidence to back it up."? Not at all. We got only a letter saying, in essence, "Well, tough. This is what we do, this is how we behave, and as far as we're concerned, you'd better get on with it." That is not good enough from a Government agency, not in this day and age and certainly not in the United Kingdom. I notice that today the FSA issued a press notice saying that the consumer would face considerable difficulties because expansion of the European Union will bring in many new countries that do not have the standards of food hygiene that we in the UK have. Perhaps so, but I note that the FSA made no recommendation on what to do about that; nor, as far as I can tell, did it use the same techniques as it used on a poor little baker in Nantwich, so I am not impressed.

I have looked carefully, not only at the FSA's website, but at the vast number of reports it has turned out. Although the agency has been in existence for only a year, like many Government Departments it appears to advocate the turning out of a great deal of paper. Whoever else's friend the FSA is, it certainly is no friend of trees. The report states that the FSA wants to

"earn people's trust by what we do and how we do it . . . Although the FSA is a Government agency, it works at 'arm's length' from Government because it doesn't report to a specific minister"—

oh, no? That is not what I was told in its long and boring epistle—

"and is free to publish any advice it issues."

Under the heading "Who is the FSA accountable to?" it declares, "We're accountable to Parliament"—well, that is me. I am Parliament. I am Crewe and Nantwich in this place and I have something to say about the way in which the FSA behaves. The report adds that the FSA is also accountable to the devolved Administrations.

The report contains some interesting facts. I found, much to my astonishment, that the FSA has three parts, but the second biggest, which is almost as big as the part that does the job that the FSA is supposed to do, is the bit that deals with both legal matters and communications. Indeed, that part's budget spending is almost as big as that of the part that monitors health. I am sure that that is a sign of the FSA's efficiency and its desire to spread information around, but that is not what it looks like.

We in this place have a special responsibility. No one representing any constituency in the United Kingdom does anything other than support public health. I have spent my entire life battling against those who want to smoke, insisting on better conditions for people in poor accommodation, and doing what I can to improve public health generally and the quality of life enjoyed by the people of this country. We must remember occasionally that Government Departments exist because the electorate want them to exist, but the powers that we give them in legislation passed in this Chamber must be used responsibly and sensibly. What they must not do—this group of people who, despite having studied them extremely closely, I do not recognise at all—is take unto themselves the powers of economic life and death by failing to understand what they, by making public a set of circumstances before they are absolutely sure of the facts, can achieve without any real thought.

I am concerned about the way in which the Food Standards Agency has behaved in the case I have described. I am concerned because if a firm is at risk, the least it has the right to expect is a responsible attitude on the part of those with whom it is dealing. If it is being open, not making any difficulty for the environmental health officers and seeking to protect its interests, but not doing so in a way that damages the interests of customers, it has the right to expect that a Government agency will at least consult it and talk to it, and not through a sudden blaze of information and openness that might be considered essential but will do something to ruin the business.

It is because the firm is well known that it is beginning to recover. It has a good reputation. The people concerned will continue to be extremely successful bakers and they will give much pleasure to my constitutents. They will do even more damage to my hips in future.

The reality is that the House does not frame legislation for those who are bureaucrats or people who are outwith the economic situation, who are not answerable in real terms to the House. The House does not give them powers to exercise without care and without thought, and with astonishingly little awareness of the impact of their behaviour. These people must learn that they are there because we give them powers and because we want them to exercise control. The next time that they want to say that there is a real responsibility and a real problem in public health such as the expansion of the European Union, which will involve taking in the products of many more firms when we have no evidence that they will comply with our food laws, they should say what they will do and not spend all their time seeking to cause enormous problems for others who have no way of hitting back.

7.31 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): I am genuinely grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Crew and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) for raising this issue. As she has said, we have been in correspondence. It is important that we try to reflect on public health issues, how they are handled and how we get the right balances between openness and transparency while being sensitive to the important issues that she has raised about the local business in her constituency.

I am delighted that my hon. Friend has given her deep and genuine support for measures that have been taken to protect public health in this country, and has

acknowledged how important that process is. She makes the point that the actions of agencies in this sensitive area must be defended and have the consent and support of the public. They are more effective agencies if they have that backing from the community at large.

I hope to be able to address some of my hon. Friend's concerns. I am sure that at the end of what I have to say she will remain disturbed about the effect on the business in her constituency. However, I shall do my best to outline how the Food Standards Agency reached the decision that it did and the balance that it drew between a series of competing interests in this instance.

It is important to remember that this was a serious outbreak of infection. The Public Health Laboratory Service has described as unprecedented the series of outbreaks of salmonella infection that have taken place recently. Many of them have involved unusual strains of the bacterium, and many have shown an association with eggs.

Salmonella is a fairly serious infection. It causes diarrhoea, fever, vomiting and severe stomach pain lasting up to three weeks. In some cases it can cause peritonitis or blood poisoning, and occasionally it can be fatal. Almost 1,000 people have become ill in 18 recent outbreaks, and there have been at least two deaths. This is far above the normal reported levels of salmonella that we would expect.

The first evidence of a real problem emerged towards the end of September, with the reporting of an increased number of cases due to an unusual strain of salmonella, which was enteritidis type 14b. Cases initially occurred mainly in London and the south-east, with a cluster of cases in Basingstoke. However, within about a week, cases were beginning to be reported in the north-west, from the Sandbach area, around my hon. Friend's constituency. Local public health officials investigated that cluster of cases. They went to see the people who had been infected. They had with them a lengthy questionnaire. They asked people where they had recently bought products, what sort of products they had been eating and where they had travelled. They tried to obtain information about where the infections might be originating from.

The local public health officials who were carrying out the investigation identified products from two bakery chains as a common link between the cases. This was subsequently confirmed in a study carried out by the Public Health Laboratory Service.

The bakeries are in different parts of the country—one is in the south-east and the other is in the north-west—so investigations concentrated on what they had in common, which proved to be a common source of supply of eggs. When the bakeries were visited, it was discovered that both were using pasteurised eggs, as recommended, but both were also using ordinary shell eggs. In the bakery in the north-west—the one in my hon. Friend's constituency—fondant icing was being made with raw eggs. So in addition to clear evidence of people who ate products from the bakery becoming sick, there was also a clear risk that salmonella could be present in the fondant icing, because it was made from raw eggs. Advice was immediately given to the bakery that it should stop using raw eggs in this way, which it indeed followed. As my hon. Friend said, it co-operated with the environmental health office officials involved. After the bakery acted on that advice, there was a rapid fall in the number of cases occurring in the north-west, with an eventual total of 96 cases and one death owing to the outbreak.

The investigations highlighted a problem in the way in which commercial food businesses such as bakeries were using or handling eggs. They did not seem to be aware of the longstanding advice that raw eggs should not be used in foods that will not be cooked before being eaten, or that there is a risk of cross-contamination in kitchens where eggs are handled. As the investigation proceeded and eggs supplied to the businesses were tested, it became apparent that some of the eggs used had very high rates of salmonella contamination. The vast majority of those eggs, although not all of them, had come from Spain.

In view of my hon. Friend's tremendous personal support for public health issues, I am sure that she will agree that an outbreak such as this does require that action be taken swiftly by the Food Standards Agency. It has a remit to protect public health, and it was clear that public health was being seriously affected by these outbreaks. A picture emerged of a problem with food hygiene practice in the use of eggs, and with Spanish eggs in particular.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Forgive me—I know that I should not interrupt my hon. Friend. Is she about to tell me that the Spanish provider of these eggs has been prosecuted?

Ms Blears: No, and as I understand it, nor has the bakery in my hon. Friend's constituency. It has been given advice by the relevant officials, which it has followed.

The FSA has reiterated its advice to businesses through various press releases. It has raised the concern about Spanish eggs with its counterpart in Spain, and it has reported the matter to the European Commission. The FSA is not the body that would prosecute in these circumstances. It has also issued advice to egg importers and wholesalers that all Spanish eggs should be heat-treated before use. So action has been taken on the Spanish eggs that seem to have caused the problem.

On the naming of this bakery—Chatwins—it is my understanding that it was not in fact named in the press release that was issued by the FSA. I have been supplied with a copy of it, and it states:

> "Efforts have been made to identify the source or sources of the outbreaks by local Environmental Health Officers and the Public Health Laboratory Service, centring on London and Cheshire. This work is still underway. A common thread in both outbreaks relates to the use and handling of ordinary eggs by a local food business in each of the outbreak areas."

It further states:

> "In Cheshire, a bakery was using ordinary eggs in products that were not cooked."

That is a fact, and the bakery has acknowledged that and has since changed its practice. However, neither bakery was named in that press release. My understanding is that, after the press release was issued, further inquiries were inevitably made by the media to try to find out where the companies were based. It was at that point that the FSA considered this matter carefully,

[Ms Blears]

and it decided that the interests of the individual businesses did not outweigh the public interest in making that information available to them.

I am told that that decision was not taken in a cavalier fashion, without regard to the interests of the businesses concerned; indeed, those interests were a very relevant consideration for the FSA. However, it does have a code of openness in terms of its operation. If my hon. Friend casts her mind back, she will remember that the FSA was established at a time when public trust in food production, manufacture and sale was almost at an all-time low. People were becoming increasingly concerned that they could not rely on the information that was available about their food. I understand that since the establishment of the Food Standards Agency, which has openness as a key plank of its operation, the proportion of the public who have confidence in information about their food has risen from about 25 per cent. to about 50 per cent. Some 50 per cent. now feel that they can rely on the food information that is provided by the FSA. Public confidence is very important and openness clearly plays a role in that respect. Equally, that needs to be weighed against the interests of businesses and commercial operations and the effect that statements could have on them.

I am informed that those considerations were taken into account at the highest level in the Food Standards Agency and that the decision was reached that the businesses would be named in response to further media inquiries. When they were named, however, the media were made well aware that each had co-operated fully with the Food Standards Agency and local environmental health officers. This was not a case in which a local business was seeking to avoid its responsibility, as was made clear at the time.

My hon. Friend has given us an opportunity to consider afresh some of the issues that she raised and to look at the way in which such decisions are made and the balance between the competing interests of openness and the commercial considerations of the businesses concerned, and I am grateful to her for doing so.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Is the Minister also considering the way in which the Food Standards Agency responded in this case? Will she issue guidelines stating that when a Member of Parliament writes to it about a matter, it should ensure that they get a proper and full response?

Ms Blears: I sign an awful lot of correspondence from the Food Standards Agency and it is certainly my experience that when Members of Parliament contact it, an immediate response is given. That usually happens through me, as I am accountable to Parliament for the agency's actions. In my experience, the issues raised by Members of Parliament are treated with seriousness and are certainly not dismissed. I would be very concerned if any Member of Parliament thought that the agency was not taking the matters that they raised extremely seriously indeed. As my hon. Friend said, Members of Parliament give agencies powers, so it is right that those agencies should respond properly, promptly and in considered detail to the issues that they raise. I shall certainly undertake to monitor that issue in my dealings with the agency.

One aspect of the way in which the case was dealt with has caused me concern. I understand that the business was not informed by the Food Standards Agency that it could be named in response to the further inquiries. It was not named in the press release, but if there is to be openness for all the parties involved in such a case, people should be informed if that is likely to happen or if there is any such intention so that they are apprised of the full facts. In this case, as I understand it, it was only when the business contacted the FSA that it found out that it had been named. I think that the FSA may have a responsibility to be more proactive in letting people know how a case may pan out. I shall take up that issue with the agency.

My hon. Friend raised another important issue in saying that I had stated in my letter that negative tests do not necessarily show that there is no infection. I stand by that statement. I understand that microbiological samples are often taken some time after the contamination that led to an infection has occurred. If there is a time lapse, the microbiological evidence may well have come and gone by the time that samples are taken, so the fact that there are negative tests does not necessarily mean that a particular location was not the source of the contamination that led to the infection. I ask her to consider that the fact that the tests are negative does not automatically mean that there has been no infection. Certainly, the use of raw eggs at the bakery in products that were not going to be cooked was against longstanding Government advice, and I am delighted that the company has now changed its process.

The FSA has done everything that it can to reiterate its advice to food businesses. It is longstanding advice and it is important that all companies be made aware of it. The agency has produced a leaflet targeted at caterers and has produced 400,000 copies for distribution throughout the country, so it has certainly tried to ensure that it gets the message across in order to protect the public's health. The agency has a responsibility to consider the evidence and act appropriately. In this case, the evidence showed that raw eggs were not always being used or handled properly by caterers, and it may be too easy to forget that a raw egg poses a health risk, which is important particularly for vulnerable members of the community such as the elderly, pregnant women and young children.

In this case it was the genuine intention of the FSA to try to balance the competing interests of openness and transparency and of the business concerned. I understand that the business has followed the advice that was issued and that, happily, the infections have abated considerably. This was an important matter and I am pleased that my hon. Friend has raised the issue in Parliament in the way that she has. I undertake to consider the points that she has made to see if there is any more general application in this case.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fifteen minutes to Eight o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 16 January 2003

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

The Secretary of State was asked—

Energy White Paper

1. **Dr. Stephen Ladyman** (South Thanet): If the White Paper on energy will take account of energy sources for transport. [90932]

The Minister for Energy and Construction (Mr. Brian Wilson): The energy White Paper will be published shortly and will take account of energy sources for transport.

Dr. Ladyman: The Government's figures suggest that 12,000 to 24,000 people a year are killed as a result of burning hydrocarbons, at least half of them by motor cars. Although shifting to liquid petroleum gas will help in the short term, that is still derived from scarce fossil fuels and will not eliminate greenhouse gases. Will the White Paper plot a clear course towards a hydrogen economy, and will it be brave about where that hydrogen will be made?

Mr. Wilson: I very much agree with the thrust of what my hon. Friend says. He is right about LPG, which is useful in the short term. I am very anxious to encourage its use. It is better environmentally, and can be a cheaper fuel, especially for people in peripheral areas. For that reason I support LPG. There is no doubt that hydrogen has much more to offer, if not in the immediate term then perhaps by 2020, when vehicles using hydrogen fuel cells might be in commercial production. In the meantime, we can do a lot to encourage the technology. For instance, some buses using hydrogen fuel cells will be introduced in London next year through the green fuel challenge. In addition, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has announced that hydrogen will be exempt from fuel duty for a limited period. We are doing a lot already, and although I do not want to pre-empt the White Paper, I assure my hon. Friend that what we are doing is very much in the spirit of what will be proposed.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): The White Paper has been subject to the most inordinate delay. First it was going to be published last year, then at the turn of the year, then in the new year. Last week, Lord Sainsbury, the Under-Secretary of State in the other place, said that it would be published in the spring, and now the Minister has told the House that it will be published shortly. Are we to take it that both those statements are correct and that they represent the current position? Is the Department's definition of "spring" the same as its definition of "shortly"? If Lord Sainsbury represents the official position, will the Minister say on exactly what date the Department thinks that spring begins? Is not it the case that all the procrastination that I have set out means that the White Paper will not be comprehensive, and that the Government's energy policy will continue to be marked by muddle, confusion and short-termism?

Mr. Wilson: Where I was educated, spring is normally defined as February, March and April. I do not know whether that helps the hon. Gentleman. The Tories might work to a different calendar, as well as belong to a different planet. The White Paper will be with us shortly. There has been no inordinate delay. It deals with very important issues, as we are looking at the future of energy supply in this country up to 2050, not just for the next few years. It is better to get that right than to worry too much about in which month of spring the White Paper will be published.

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Will my hon. Friend say whether the White Paper will set out a sustainable future for the indigenous deep coal-mining industry? Will that sustainable future be based on an aid package that will focus on investment? There is a rumour that the package may be based on regional selective assistance. If so, that would not be appropriate for the coal industry.

Mr. Wilson: We are committed to an investment aid scheme in principle. We went to Europe to get permission for such a scheme, which would benefit the indigenous coal industry. We would not have done that if we did not intend to introduce the scheme. The future of what remains of the indigenous coal industry is not entirely in our hands, for geological reasons as much as any other. However, I assure my hon. Friend that I am acutely aware of the importance of the deep-mine coal industry, and indeed of the surface coal industry, to those communities where the industries still exist. I have no doubt that that importance will be reflected in the White Paper.

Magazine Covers

2. **Andrew Selous** (South-West Bedfordshire): What recent representations she has received about the regulations governing covers of magazines displayed in shops. [90933]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Miss Melanie Johnson): None.

Andrew Selous: Many of my constituents with young children are very concerned about the increasingly lurid covers of magazines such as *FHM*, *GQ* and *Maxim*. As those magazines are not deemed to be pornographic, they are often displayed at children's head height. Will the Minister assure the House that she will ask all

magazine retailers to put such magazines well out of the eyesight of young children, as it is difficult for families to avoid those displays, especially when calling at petrol stations?

Miss Melanie Johnson: The teenage magazine arbitration panel monitors the sexual content of teenage magazines, 25 per cent. or more of whose readership is made up of girls under 15 years of age. I think that that is relevant to the hon. Gentleman's point. The guidelines that it produced are the publishing industry's own standards, but they were produced in co-operation with magazine publishers, editors and retailers, and approved by the Home Office. I hear the hon. Gentleman's point, and I shall refer his concerns to the relevant parties and ask them to address them.

Mr. Andy Reed (Loughborough): My hon. Friend will also be aware that it is not just children who are offended by these things, but many hon. Members and constituents, who ask why on earth magazines such as *Stuff* and *T3*, which are about technology, have to have women on their front covers. I dare not buy them in shops for those very reasons. Perhaps those concerned would sell more magazines if they took women off the front covers and concentrated on the issues inside the magazines.

Miss Johnson: I share my hon. Friend's concerns. We are particularly concerned that the young and more vulnerable members of society should be protected from potentially harmful material. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is responsible for the legislation and voluntary agreements in that area. I hesitate to be slightly cynical, but I am sure that it has something to do with the fact that it still sells magazines, unfortunately.

Wind Energy

3. **Mr. David Borrow** (South Ribble): What actions her Department is taking to support the expansion of wind energy in the UK. [90934]

The Minister for Energy and Construction (Mr. Brian Wilson): Last April, we introduced the renewables obligation, which provides an assured market for renewable energy, including wind power, for 25 years. In October, I announced capital grants of £10 million each to the first two offshore wind farms to be given consent. In November, the Department launched a consultation document, which set out options for a major expansion of the UK's offshore wind potential both within territorial waters and beyond.

Mr. Borrow: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. I wish to raise a particular problem that will arise if we seek to increase massively the amount of energy derived from wind power. Most of the parts of the UK that are most suitable for wind power are those furthest from centres of population, requiring major investment in the national grid to ensure that the electricity generated in that way can be used. Will my hon. Friend examine ways to ensure that that investment takes place, whether by fiscal means or by direct subsidy?

Mr. Wilson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There is no point in generating electricity if it cannot be taken to the markets where it is required. We have a very strong infrastructure, but it is based largely on the old coal and steel economy. If we are to have a much more distributed range of generation, we must have an infrastructure to match. It is an essential part of the overall package that that infrastructure is put in place.

Mr. Andrew Mackay (Bracknell): Does the Minister accept that not all of us are enthusiasts for wind farms? Many of us think that they are pure vandalism, ruining beautiful parts of our country, and that there should be very strict planning controls on them.

Mr. Wilson: I accept that such a point of view exists, although I regard it as extreme and unreasonable.

Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): Is it not the case that two thirds of planning applications for wind farms are withdrawn because of planning difficulties? When the White Paper is published—soon, shortly or in the spring—is this an issue that my hon. Friend intends to tackle?

Mr. Wilson: A balance must be struck between the legitimate rights of people to object and the country's legitimate needs for renewable energy. The White Paper and the ongoing work by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister have to look at whether we have that balance right. People in all parties and none who pay lip service to renewable energy as a good thing should implement that view by supporting renewable energy projects, rather than joining the right hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. Mackay) in his somewhat one-dimensional opposition.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): Following on the point raised by the hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Borrow), given that the Government have been prepared to invest massive amounts of money to bail out British Energy, are they prepared to put similar direct public investment into the national grid to ensure that we obtain the full benefit of wind and wave power in the future?

Mr. Wilson: I am puzzled by the first part of the question. The Scottish nationalist candidate in my constituency, where there is a nuclear power station, wrote to the local press last week to say that the nationalists are fully behind what the Government have done for British Energy, but whereas there are two nationalists and two opportunities, there are at least four different points of view.

There is no such comparison. I personally think that someone would have to be particularly foolish to draw that analogy. The one thing that people cannot do with nuclear power stations is turn the key and walk away. The Government have not poured money into British Energy; we have loaned money to British Energy to ensure security of supply and the safe operation of nuclear power stations. We are pouring money into renewable energy sources for excellent reasons, which is why there is such an upsurge to meet our targets for 2010.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): I welcome my hon. Friend's statement on the development of wind power,

but does he accept that 10 per cent. is only a part of the need for the generation of energy? Will he consider giving the same support to the coal industry as he has given to British Energy and wind power? We need to have a balance, and the coal industry is part of that balance.

Mr. Wilson: I agree entirely that coal is part of the balance. That is why we have had the operating aid scheme during the past few years, since the Government came to office. It is also why we have now put in place the potential for an investment aid scheme—we have won that argument in Europe—and, as I said earlier, I do not think that anyone believes other than that there is a place for coal in this country's energy mix. There is also full recognition of the continuing importance of coal in those places where it continues to be mined.

Rural Post Offices

4. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): What recent representations she has received on the rural postal network. [90935]

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): DTI Ministers and officials regularly receive representations from a wide range of people and organisations about postal services and the network, including rural post offices.

Miss McIntosh: I understand that a rural post office is defined as one that serves a community of fewer than 10,000 people. As the right hon. Lady will be aware, the Vale of York has a number of post offices serving such communities. Royal Mail has written to me this week and assured me that there is a downward trend in post office closures, from 125 in the same six-month period last year to 65 this year, but that is still a very high figure. Will she take a personal interest in reopening post offices in villages, such as Sessay, where a young couple operates a farm shop—appropriate premises and people—and take a favourable view? Will she also give the House an assurance that the red post box in rural communities will continue for ever?

Ms Hewitt: I am sure that, like me, the hon. Lady will welcome the fact that post office closures in Yorkshire have fallen from 50 a year to just 21. The £450 million of new funding for rural post offices recently announced to the House will ensure that we can continue to reduce the number of rural post office closures—something that the Conservative Government never did—so I hope that the hon. Lady will welcome that. She referred to a village post office in particular, and of course I will ensure that Post Office management take a very close look at that because the fund that they are already making available, along with more of the £450 million that we are putting into rural post offices, is precisely designed to help to keep open and, in some cases, reopen rural sub-post offices by combining them with village shops, pubs or other community facilities. We have had a great deal of success already, and I will look specifically at the village that she mentions.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): Successive generations of my family ran our village post office for most of the 20th century, I am particularly disappointed by what I view as a breach of faith, which has led to the closure of about 1,000 village offices in just three short years. Will the Secretary of State reassure the House that, when the £450 million lifeline ends in 2006, we shall not just return to a haemorrhaging of village offices, with all the consequent social and economic disadvantages for the elderly, the disabled and people without transport in those communities?

Ms Hewitt: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend about the vital importance of post offices in rural communities—something that he knows better than many people. I am sure that he will welcome the fact that we have already put an obligation on the Post Office, which is no longer allowed to close a rural post office unless it is completely unavoidable—in other words, nobody can be found to run it. As a result, we have already halved the number of rural post office closures across the country. As I have just said, we are putting in an additional £450 million to support that, on top of the Countryside Agency grants that already help to keep rural post offices open. Of course, we shall look at the situation again in 2006; we need to see how effective we are with the £450 million that we are allocating over the next three years and we can then consider how to continue to keep that vital local service open.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): May I take the Secretary of State to task for serious discourtesy this morning in releasing, an hour ago, a written statement that has far-reaching financial implications for the rural post office network and the network in general, without giving us an opportunity to question her in an oral statement and without even referring to it in answer to a supplementary question? Can she confirm that, in addition to the £450 million for rural post offices, she proposed this morning an extra £1 billion in the form of emergency assistance to the post office network to save it from immediate financial collapse? As £420 million of that money is in the form of short-term loans, can she explain how those loans are to be repaid, since the post office network has been deprived of its main source of income generation?

Ms Hewitt: I announced in June the total funding package for the Mail's business—the use of the £1.8 billion of accumulated gilts and interests—and of course that was done by way of a written statement. This morning, my hon. Friend the Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness made a written statement to Parliament, which was tabled in the Library at 9.30. That statement sets out the details of that very welcome financing package for the whole business. About £2 billion of accumulated profits and interest, which in the past was creamed off and returned to the Treasury, is now being made available to the business as part of the entire restructuring plan that will return the Royal Mail to sound health. That includes debt financing on commercial terms of just over £1 billion, which will allow the Royal Mail to implement its renewal plans, and of course those loans will be repaid as the Royal

Mail, through its restructuring, sorts out its finances. The rest of the money will be used to support the post office network.

Ms Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley): Does not the future of rural post offices depend entirely on the funding stability of Post Office Ltd? Does not the statement that my right hon. Friend has just made mean that the financing position of Post Office Ltd. will be much more stable? Will that not benefit urban post offices in areas such as mine, which struggle to continue to provide a service to elderly and disabled people who cannot get to other post offices to collect their benefits and pensions?

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend is right. What we have done—starting with the appointment of Allan Leighton as chairman—is to ensure that the Royal Mail and the Post Office as a whole have the leadership, management and financial stability that they need in order to return the business to financial health. All Members of the House understand that rural sub-post offices are, in many cases, not commercially viable. That is why, over the next three years, as part of the overall financing package, we are putting in £450 million specifically to support the rural network.

As regards the urban network, the urban reinvention programme means that by reducing the number of post offices in areas where there are too many sub-post offices for the number of customers, we can ensure that sub-postmasters make a better living and that customers continue to be served. The package is very good for the Royal Mail, sub-post offices and, especially, for our constituents—their customers. I am sure that the House, which welcomed the statement that I made in June, will welcome the details today.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): The Secretary of State has exploited the new system to make a written statement when she should have made an oral statement, and has now amplified that without allowing hon. Members on both sides of the House the opportunity to question her properly. What she has announced is the spending of profits made by the Post Office in the years of the Conservative Government. That is not new money in any realistic sense.

To return to the subject of the question, rural post offices, does she understand not only that the Government's decision to abandon the Horizon project undermined rural post offices but that the preparations for the card account are now in chaos? Will she confirm that the personal invitation document, which should have been circulated to post office customers by the start of this year, has been delayed until 25 March, only six days before the new system is due to start operating? How will vulnerable people in rural areas, who depend on collecting cash benefits from their local post office, be protected?

Ms Hewitt: The hon. Gentleman is wrong. People who want a post office card account simply ring the helpline, and if they decide that they want the card account, the application is sent to them. The post office card account and the broader universal banking services—and the migration to automated credit transfer—are on track, as we said that they would be. Not only will they deliver a more efficient benefit payments system with much less risk of fraud but, above all, they will enable all our constituents who want to continue getting benefits in cash at the post office to do so, whether through a card account, a basic bank account or the increasing number of other bank accounts that can also be used at the post office.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): The opening of a post office card account is not as simple as the Secretary of State has just described. People must ring a helpline and answer a set of gruelling questions; they are then told to use their current account if they happen to have one, which is incorrect, and to write in in connection with that. If people want to join a bank through that system, all they have to do is tick a box. Why cannot they just tick a box in connection with the post office card account?

Ms Hewitt: The helpline exists to ensure that all claimants understand the options available to them and make an informed choice. It is up to the customer, however, to decide whether they want to use an existing bank account or open a new account, and if so, whether they want to open a bank account or post office card account. I have gone through the script, as has my hon. Friend. It is a simple and helpful service. The bottom line is that customers decide for themselves what kind of account they want to use to get their benefits and, if they want, to get them in cash at the post office.

Universal Parcel Postal Service

5. **Mr. Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland): If she will make a statement on the future of the universal parcel postal service. [90936]

The Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness (Mr. Stephen Timms): The primary duty of the regulator set out in legislation is to ensure maintenance of the universal postal service at an affordable, uniform tariff. The Royal Mail operating division of the Royal Mail group now carries out the universal service obligation for parcels.

Mr. Carmichael: I thank the Minister for that answer and welcome his basic assurance. It will, however, have a hollow ring in my constituency, where people have found that, since the effective demise of Parcelforce last year, they are now excluded from the same standards of service as people in the rest of the country. Many mail order companies will deliver to island communities only at a significant surcharge, and many will not deliver to them at all. Will the Minister meet me and other MPs from the highlands and islands to discuss the matter and find some way of protecting those who rely most on services from mail order companies from the worst effects of the demise of Parcelforce?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am keen to get through the Order Paper, which means that we must have more precise questions and precise replies. It is only fair to those Members who have put down questions that I try to reach them.

Mr. Timms: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I should be happy to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss the position. Parcelforce was losing £15 million a month, and is now a competitor with others in the express parcels business, but the universal service obligation is operated by Royal Mail. Sending a standard parcel to anywhere in the United Kingdom—three to five days' delivery, up to 1 kg—costs £3.15. That is the case whether one is sending a parcel to another part of London or to the Orkneys, but, of course, I will be happy to discuss the position with him.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the ideas that we might like to progress relates to how we could create much better links with the sub-post offices? One of the problems these days is that parcels are delivered to people who are not at home; the parcels are then returned to the local sorting office, which may be some distance away from the home. Surely we could have a better co-ordinated approach whereby parcels are delivered to the local sub-post office. If we did that, both sides would gain.

Mr. Timms: My hon. Friend makes a very interesting suggestion, which I am happy to take up with Post Office Ltd. There will be increasing possibilities for the Post Office to provide other services, including delivering the goods that people buy not to their homes but to a point from which they can collect them. He is absolutely right.

Construction Industry

6. **Mr. Hugo Swire** (East Devon): If she will make a statement on the Government's policy on the construction industry. [90937]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Nigel Griffiths): The construction industry makes a significant contribution to our economy, comprising 8 per cent. of gross domestic product worth £83 billion, and it employs more than 2 million people. It secures some of the most prestigious contracts worldwide. We are working closely with the industry through the strategic forum for construction to improve industry productivity. I know that the hon. Gentleman will join me in congratulating Mid-Devon, which is the only district council listed for beacon status in the rethinking construction category.

Mr. Swire: I most certainly wish to join the Minister in congratulating Mid-Devon council on anything that it does. However, it does not fall within my constituency.

When it comes to formulating construction policy, will the Minister bear in mind the very real problems faced by many smaller companies in the construction industry as they seek to obtain employee and public liability insurance? When those companies can obtain insurance, they are often faced with premiums that have risen by anything between 100 and 400 per cent. To date, the Government have promised an inquiry, but the construction industry requires action. When can it expect it?

Nigel Griffiths: The hon. Gentleman is slightly out of date. I have had discussions with the Federation of Small Businesses, the CBI's council for small and medium-sized enterprises and others. We at the Department of Trade and Industry are working with our Treasury colleagues and are being led by the Department for Work and Pensions to help companies to resolve the problem. The Office of Fair Trading will also report on part of this matter in the spring.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): My hon. Friend will know that a subset of the construction industry is the chemical engineering construction industry, which brings in several million pounds to the Exchequer from the work that it does overseas. Does he share the concern of the employers and the British Chemical Engineering Contractors Association that there is a substantial skills shortage in the industry? The fact that the Engineering Construction Industry Training Board has been abolished means that there will be a further problem. What efforts will be made to put in place a system to encourage employers in the construction industry to train people for the future of the industry?

Nigel Griffiths: I want to make it clear—I know that my hon. Friend will accept this—that there is not a proposal to abolish that board. The Construction Industry Training Board is a separate body and, according to its latest figures, 40,000 people are now starting construction courses. That is an increase of 14 per cent. over the decade. The board received more than £30 million last year to fund modern apprenticeships. We accept that this is a serious issue and serious measures are being taken to address it.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): A crisis is obviously facing smaller firms. What does the Minister say to a small specialist construction firm on the south coast that requires cover of £5 million to secure contracts from its regular customers? This year, that business was able to secure cover of only £1 million at a cost of £8,000 whereas, last year, £12,000 bought cover of £10 million. Such firms do not want reports in the spring; they want action now. Can he guarantee that the reports will be acted upon?

Nigel Griffiths: The House will note that there is not one suggestion from the Conservative party on how to resolve the problem. That is why the industry, representatives of small business and others in business have welcomed the fact that the Government are addressing the issue, both through the Office of Fair Trading and in working with the Association of British Insurers and the British Insurance Brokers Association to find a solution to a problem that is caused not by the Government but by long-term structural changes in the insurance industry and the propensity of lawyers to litigate more readily than in the past. All those factors are causing problems and forcing up premiums. We recognise that this is a serious issue and are addressing it in the most serious manner.

Mr. Gareth Thomas (Harrow, West): Does my hon. Friend accept that the British construction industry would benefit enormously from the Olympic games

being staged in Britain? If he does, may I encourage him to lobby the Secretary of State vigorously to support a London Olympic bid?

Nigel Griffiths: Of course we welcome anything that helps the construction industry and is affordable. I know that discussions are taking place with the London mayor who has a scheme that he believes is low-cost—my Treasury colleagues will be interested to have the details. We know that the construction industry played a tremendous part in revitalising and showcasing Manchester. That is a great lesson, and I hope that the Olympic bid committee will learn from it.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): Since the Minister quite rightly accepts the importance of the construction industry to our economy, will he have discussions with his Treasury colleagues about removing some of the taxes that are holding some of the industry back, such as the construction industry tax, IR35, the aggregates levy and the landfill tax?

Nigel Griffiths: That is not what I heard from representatives of the construction industry in Nottingham yesterday when I presented an Investors in People award to TBL Construction. Obviously the construction industry has benefited from one of the best tax regimes in the world, with corporation tax at lower rates. It also benefits from the fastest growing economy in the world, which is perhaps why last year's output in construction marked the biggest annual increase in 12 years and why there are strong order figures this year too. We have addressed the industry's concerns—that is why it is thriving.

Strikes

8. **Mr. Bill Wiggin** (Leominster): What steps her Department is taking to reduce the number of days lost to strikes. [90939]

The Minister for Employment Relations, Industry and the Regions (Alan Johnson): Although days lost through industrial action have increased over the past year, the number of disputes remains near the lowest ever recorded. The Government fully support the expert work of the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service in helping parties improve their employment relations and have increased its funding by more than 80 per cent. since coming to power.

Mr. Wiggin: I cannot accept that the Minister's answer was particularly helpful when the number of days lost to strikes has increased from 235,000 in 1997 to more than 1 million in the past 12 months. How can the Government do more to cut the number of days lost and make Britain a better place in which to do business?

Alan Johnson: The hon. Gentleman was asking about levels of industrial action. The figures for days lost through industrial action are notoriously lumpy, for example, a one-day dispute by local government workers contributes 500,000 days lost to the figures. However, when we get the final month's figures, the actual number of disputes this year will be shown to be the lowest ever recorded.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): What about the Post Office?

Alan Johnson: As for the Post Office, the level is the lowest for 25 years. If we define good government by days lost through industrial action, the figure under this Government is 36 per cent. lower than under the Major Government. Using that definition, we are a very good Government.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): Will the Minister confirm that industry is not only plagued with strikes—in fact it has had its worst year since 1990, with more days lost than at any time over the past 12 years—but that manufacturing productivity is rising at only half the rate that it was when the Government were elected; business investment has just recorded its worst fall since 1996; the trade balance is worse than at any time since—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's question is too wide and relates to a question that was not called because the Member was absent.

GATS Negotiations

9. **Ann McKechin** (Glasgow, Maryhill): If she will make a statement on her Department's recent consultation on the World Trade Organisation general agreement on trade in services negotiations. [90940]

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): The consultation ended on 3 January with some 700 replies, including one from my hon. Friend, for which I thank her. I will publish a summary and a response from the Government as soon as possible.

Ann McKechin: I thank my right hon. Friend for her reply. She will be aware that in the current GATS agreement the European Union placed a horizontal limitation on its service commitments to strengthen the protection against the use of public utilities and the manner in which they provide public services. Can she assure the House that she will resist calls in the negotiations to remove that limitation? How will she protect the way in which public bodies in the UK can provide and control public services in sectors such as health and education, even if they are delivered either wholly or partially by the private sector?

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend is right about the existing horizontal limitation. A number of the consultation replies stressed the need for Europe to maintain that limitation. I strongly see the force of that argument, although we have not seen the Commission's draft proposals on the limitation. However, as I have stressed before and would stress again today, we have no

intention of making any GATS commitments that would call into question our ability to maintain public services.

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): Why did the Government refuse to publish in full all the requests made by other WTO members to liberalise UK public services? Can the right hon. Lady confirm that those requests included the elimination of the subsidy to the BBC and the reprivatisation of Network Rail?

Ms Hewitt: We did not publish the requests for the simple reason that our partners in the WTO, including a number of developing countries, wanted to keep the requests confidential. As a process of negotiation is under way, it makes sense to do that. What we have done is to publish a summary of all the requests made to us. We have also published an 88-page detailed consultation document on the website, and will shortly publish a summary of the responses and our response in turn to them. We have been more open and transparent in the process than any other WTO member. We continue to press our European Union colleagues for the maximum possible transparency in the EU, consistent with ensuring that we have effective negotiations.

British Aircraft Industry

10. **Mr. John Wilkinson** (Ruislip-Northwood): What discussions her Department has had with the Ministry of Defence on the British aircraft industry. [90942]

The Minister for Employment Relations, Industry and the Regions (Alan Johnson): The Department maintains a close and regular dialogue with the Ministry of Defence on industrial matters relating to major defence procurements and defence industrial policy. Inevitably, those discussions have, where appropriate, touched on the British aircraft industry.

Mr. Wilkinson: Is not the Minister's Department concerned at the inordinate delays in introducing into service in the Royal Air Force the Eurofighter, the A400M and the new tanker aircraft? Or perhaps the Secretary of State for Defence just does not care because British Aerospace, the main participant, is not British in his eyes.

Alan Johnson: The hon. Gentleman asks about three specific projects, which we are extremely concerned to bring to fruition. From his great experience of the issues, he will know that they are not entirely under the control of the British Government. Indeed, we are waiting for the German Government to come into line on the A400M. We very much care about the aerospace industry, in particular about BAE Systems, which is why I am due to receive the interim report of the innovation and growth team report on aerospace next week from Sir Richard Evans. I think that that will map the future for aerospace in this country.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): Does my hon. Friend accept that it is not just the big players in the aerospace industry, such as BAE Systems and Rolls-Royce, that are dependent on Ministry of Defence work? Many highly skilled aerospace businesses in constituencies such as mine also depend on the contracts being given to the British aerospace industry.

Alan Johnson: Of course I accept that point. My hon. Friend knows full well that we have the biggest defence order book for the past 50 years, which provides a tremendous opportunity for British companies—including small and medium-sized enterprises in the supply chain generally, some of which are in my hon. Friend's constituency.

David Burnside (South Antrim): BAE Systems is the biggest producer of aircraft parts and aircraft in the United Kingdom. Does the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry agree with the Secretary of State for Defence that, through its ownership, BAE Systems can no longer be classified as a British company? For example, in the decision between Thales and BAE Systems on the contract for the two aircraft carriers, would not awarding the contract to Thales, which has a major contributor in Harland and Wolff in Belfast, be a more patriotic choice for the British defence industry?

Alan Johnson: We have just agreed a defence industrial policy between the Ministry of Defence and Department for Trade and Industry that has been widely welcomed and which makes it absolutely clear that we are looking for value for money for the British taxpayer. BAE Systems is a British-controlled company in terms of the competition for two 55,000-tonnes carriers. Whichever contract is successful, it will mean jobs and prosperity for British workers—but that contract must be awarded on a proper competitive basis.

Postal Services

11. **Mr. Andrew Lansley** (South Cambridgeshire): When she last met the chairman and chief executive of Royal Mail to discuss postal services and prices; and if she will make a statement. [90943]

The Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness (Mr. Stephen Timms): Ministers and officials have a regular dialogue with directors of Royal Mail on a range of issues relevant to the role that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has as a special shareholder of the company.

Mr. Lansley: Will the Minister say when he or the Secretary of State last met the chairman and chief executive of Royal Mail? Was the price control regime proposed by Postcomm discussed? In particular, if Postcomm withdraws from the extension of the scope of price control over Royal Mail—which seems to me and others who believe in competition to be somewhat excessive—will the Post Office not seek to delay matters by going to the Competition Commission? Incidentally, did the Minister express reservations about the Post Office's proposals in relation to format-based pricing?

Mr. Timms: The hon. Gentleman is an experienced observer of arrangements for competition regulation and will know that there have been animated discussions between Royal Mail and Postcomm over Royal Mail's recent application for a price rise. Postcomm is an

independent regulator and it is important that it and Royal Mail agree a way forward that is acceptable to all parties. I am optimistic that will be the outcome. In terms of the discussions, Postcomm is a fully independent regulator. In looking at the current price rise application, the Government have of course submitted information of which Postcomm will take account but the decision is entirely for Postcomm.

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): Returning to the vital role that rural post offices play and bearing in mind that most village post offices are also shops, is not the best way to ensure their survival for the people who live in villages to use those post offices regularly? Is it not the case that if all the people who regularly drive to a supermarket and spend £40 or £50 to fill their car boots spent just 10 per cent. in their village shops/post offices, that would ensure the survival of the rural network?

Mr. Timms: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Post Office has an important role to play in taking advantage of the big investment that has been made in new technology and offering new services that will attract people back to the post office network, to ensure that it has a thriving future.

Manufacturing Industry

12. **Mrs. Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham): What recent assessment she has made of the state of manufacturing industry. [90944]

The Minister for Employment Relations, Industry and the Regions (Alan Johnson): We are continuously monitoring and tracking the progress of manufacturing in partnership with our key industry stakeholders.

Mrs. Gillan: I am sure that the Minister is constantly tracking the manufacturing industry. The Engineering Employers Federation estimates that 500,000 jobs have been lost in manufacturing since the Government took power in 1997. Yesterday the Office for National Statistics announced that in the three months to November 2002, manufacturing jobs fell by 155,000 on the same period last year. Does the Minister think that the Government are living up to the Secretary of State's promise to think of manufacturing as an integral part of the future of our economy?

Alan Johnson: Yes, I do. Manufacturing is an integral part of our economy. It is crucial to the future of the country, as it represents 60 per cent. of our exports and a fifth of our gross domestic product. Manufacturing is indeed facing problems in this country, as it is in Japan and in the USA. There is a global downturn—the first synchronised global downturn in those three parts of the world since 1974. Manufacturers know that it is a tough world out there. This is not the ritual dance in which we sometimes engage, but perhaps I could have a quick little pirouette: 2.75 million jobs in manufacturing were lost under the previous Government. We are seeking to draw up the first manufacturing strategy in this country for 30 years, and to address the practical problems facing manufacturers. The Engineering Employers Federation, which is entirely engaged in that process, understands that full well.

MINISTER FOR WOMEN

The Minister for Women was asked—

Domestic Violence

20. **Mr. Andrew Turner** (Isle of Wight): What evidence she has collated of changes in the incidence of domestic violence in the last three years. [91057]

The Minister for Women (Ms Patricia Hewitt): According to the British crime survey, the number of domestic violence incidents per year has fallen by 19 per cent. over the past three years. Further research is being undertaken that will give us more detailed information about domestic violence, as well as sexual assault and stalking.

Mr. Turner: The Women's Aid website reports that 23 per cent. of separated women suffer post-separation violence and 76 per cent. suffer verbal abuse and threats. Does the right hon. Lady recognise that one reason—although in no way a justification—is the difficulty that some separated men feel they have in maintaining access to their children, even when access has been ordered by the courts? What steps is she taking to ensure that the paramount needs of the child and the safety of all, as determined by the courts, are met?

Ms Hewitt: The hon. Gentleman is right about the shocking extent of verbal and physical abuse, not only in cases following a separation—one quarter of all violent crimes relate to domestic violence, and two women a week are murdered by their partners. That is utterly unacceptable. With regard to fathers' access to their children, my view is simple: children benefit from having, wherever it is possible, the love and support of their father as well as of their mother. My right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor and his Department are ensuring that in access cases, proper attention is paid to the needs of the child. That is the overriding consideration. I would warn the hon. Gentleman—I am sure that he was not seeking to do this—against in any sense excusing verbal or physical abuse. In some recent murder and manslaughter trials where the woman has been killed by her husband or partner, there has been an attempt to defend that crime by blaming the woman. That is unacceptable as well.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): In the circumstance where one third of all homicides in the country occur following domestic violence, and where there is no other crime with a higher level of repeat victimisation, is there not a crisis that requires more urgent action than we have been able to deliver, not just to protect women, but very often to protect children? How can we make sure that women's lives are protected from violent men?

Ms Hewitt: My right hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor-General has already put in place new guidelines for the Crown Prosecution Service, and is working with my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to ensure that the police and the prosecution service work far more effectively together to make sure that the warning signs of early evidence of violent incidents are

properly taken into account, and that women are protected against the very real risk that domestic violence will end in the death of the woman. I welcome the fact that the Attorney-General has recently taken the step of referring outrageously lenient sentences in such cases to the Court of Appeal for further review.

Sandra Gidley (Romsey): In a written reply from the Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety, on 10 December, he stated:

"Domestic violence is not separately identified in recorded crime statistics collected by the Home Office."—[*Official Report*, 10 December 2002; Vol. 396, c. 233W.]

Given the acknowledged high number of such incidents and the fact that one in five incidents result in a woman having to visit a doctor, would it not be useful for all agencies concerned to collect those figures separately in future?

Ms Hewitt: I think that it might well be, and I shall certainly draw that issue to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. As I said in my first reply, we are also doing further research on this, because domestic violence is notoriously under-reported. The British crime survey can help us to get a better fix on the actual scale of the problem.

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): In 1975, the Select Committee on Home Affairs recommended that there should be one refuge place per 10,000 people, for the protection of victims of domestic violence. Today, we have only one third of that number. Will the Minister tell the House whether the forthcoming Green Paper will contain revised proposals for meeting the shortfall in refuge provision?

Ms Hewitt: I agree that, over several decades, not enough attention has been paid to this issue, nor has enough investment been put into refuges for women suffering domestic violence. I welcome the fact that we will be spending an additional £7 million on developing new refuges in partnership with local authorities around the country. I also welcome the fact that the Minister for Social Exclusion and Deputy Minister for Women launched a new national 24-hour helpline in December to ensure that women who are fleeing violent partners can get the advice and information that they need.

Lady Hermon (North Down): Given that responsibility for criminal justice was not devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly—whether suspended or not—and that that responsibility remains here at Westminster, and that the incidence of domestic violence remains at a very high level in Northern Ireland, will the right hon. Lady tell the House what discussions she has had with her right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland about measures to combat domestic violence there?

Ms Hewitt: I have not had discussions with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, but I know that the Northern Ireland Administration, as well as those in Scotland and Wales, are closely involved in the work that is being undertaken right across government on the issue of domestic violence. We have to engage the police, the prosecuting authorities, the local authorities, housing authorities and so on. All the different agencies are being involved in this, and that includes those in Northern Ireland.

Equal Pay

21. **Mr. John Bercow** (Buckingham): If she will make a statement on the incidence in the last three years of cases successfully brought against employers for paying women lower wages than those paid to men for doing similar work. [91058]

The Minister for Women (Ms Patricia Hewitt): In the three financial years up to 2002 for which we have figures, 163 equal pay claims were successful at tribunal. Many more, of course, were settled and withdrawn before they came to a tribunal hearing.

Mr. Bercow: It is disgraceful that such claims should need to be made at all. Does the Minister for Women agree that economic efficiency and social justice alike demand that there should always be equal pay for work of equal value? Given that there are continuing and unjustified disparities, does she agree that it is urgently necessary that the message should go out from representatives of all major political parties that skinflint employers who seek to break the law with impunity in 2003 will be subject to zero tolerance?

Ms Hewitt: I am delighted to hear the hon. Gentleman reciting the central mantra of new Labour that economic efficiency and social justice go together. Of course he is right to say that unequal pay for work of equal value is absolutely unacceptable. That is why we have strengthened the law with the new equal pay questionnaire. We do not want cases going to tribunals if we can possibly avoid it; we would rather settle them inside the workplace. That is also why we have established equal pay audits in the public sector, all of which will be completed by April, and why we are putting in place proper plans to re-organise the pay structure and job classifications, as we have done at ACAS and as we are doing in the national health service, to ensure that there is indeed equal pay for work of equal value.

Domestic Violence

22. **Margaret Moran** (Luton, South): When her report on the cost of domestic violence will be published. [91060]

The Minister for Women (Ms Patricia Hewitt): The full research report is scheduled for publication in the early summer—not the spring; the summer.

Margaret Moran: I thank my right hon. Friend and her colleagues for their wisdom in taking up the suggestion that we undertake an analysis of the cost of domestic violence. As I am sure she is aware, recent research in the United States showed that $1.6 billion is spent in the health service alone on picking up the cost of domestic violence. Given that a woman is assaulted 35 times, on average, before she flees to safety, I am sure that the cost to the NHS will be as much as that or more. Does she therefore agree that it is essential that, once the report is published, we seek to shift resources away from

picking up the pieces and into prevention? Will she vigorously advance that argument to the Treasury and ensure that we have sufficient funds for preventive measures in domestic violence cases?

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend the Minister for Social Exclusion and Deputy Minister for Women recently announced the early results of the research, which we will be publishing in more detail later. The initial estimates are that the annual costs both to the public purse and in lost economic output amount to about £40 million in terms of the murder and manslaughter of women in their homes. If the appalling emotional and human impact costs are added, the figures increase to about £112 million a year.

This is an appallingly extensive crime. Of course, I shall do as my hon. Friend asks in pressing the case for even greater investment than we are already making in prevention and support for those women.

Business of the House

12.30 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Will the Leader of the House please give us the business for next week?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): It would be a pleasure, Mr. Speaker:

MONDAY 20 JANUARY—Opposition Day [3rd Allotted Day]. Until 7 o'clock there will be a debate entitled "Government's Failure to Tackle the Crisis in Winding up Arrangements for Occupational Pensions", followed by a debate on European directives on traditional herbal remedies and food supplements on an Opposition motion.

TUESDAY 21 JANUARY—Debate on House of Lords Reform on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

The House will wish to know that there will be a further debate on Tuesday 4 February in which Members will have an opportunity to vote on the seven options recommended by the Joint Committee.

WEDNESDAY 22 JANUARY—Debate on defence in the world on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

THURSDAY 23 JANUARY—Remaining stages of the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill.

FRIDAY 24 JANUARY—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week after will include:

MONDAY 27 JANUARY—Second Reading of the Electricity (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill.

TUESDAY 28 JANUARY—Second Reading of the Railways and Transport Safety Bill, followed by motions relating to the establishment of a Select Committee on the Lord Chancellor's Department. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am grateful for that support from Opposition Members.

WEDNESDAY 29 JANUARY—Motion to take note of the outstanding reports of the Public Accounts Committee to which the Government has replied.

THURSDAY 30 JANUARY—Opposition Day [4th allotted day]. There will be a half-day debate on an Opposition motion. Subject to be announced.

FRIDAY 31 JANUARY—The first debate on Private Members' Bills.

The House will wish to know that on Wednesday 29 January, the third meeting of the Committee on the Convention on the Future of Europe will take place to consider the fifth and sixth reports of the United Kingdom representatives to the Convention.

Mr. Forth: As ever, I am grateful to the Leader of the House for giving us the business.

Yesterday, my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) identified a case of premature expostulation by the Secretary of State for Defence. In column 699 of *Hansard*, with regard to yesterday's statement by the Secretary of State, my hon. Friend pointed out that by 5.30 pm the previous day, the Press Association was reporting that there would be a statement on the following day in which it said that the Secretary of State would be

"'minded to accept the American request to use Fylingdales.'"—[*Official Report*, 15 January 2003; Vol. 397, c. 699.]

You, Mr. Speaker, have deprecated such practices time and time again. What is the Leader of the House going to do to get Ministers to follow your instructions to stop demeaning the House and giving their information to the Press Association or anyone else before that happens here in the House of Commons? Time and again, Ministers have been giving crucial information to the media 24 hours ahead and then coming to the Chamber and boasting that they are bringing the matter to the House. This is just the latest example and the right hon. Gentleman must tell us what he is going to do to deal with the practice effectively and not allow it to continue.

The Leader of the House has often boasted that the series of ghastly measures—so-called modernisation—has resulted in no reduction in the time available for the House to hold the Government to account. Let us consider Thursdays. In the good old days, the House sat from 2.30 pm to 10 pm—seven and a half hours of quality parliamentary time to the hold the Government to account. Matters took a turn for the worse when the ghastly modernisers said, "We'll sit from 11.30 am until 7 pm", and the Leader of the House said, "Don't worry, we'll still have the same amount of time to do our parliamentary business." That was just about bearable, but the modernisation process edged further forward, and the Leader of the House suggested that we should sit from 11.30 am till 6 pm on Thursdays. That is a reduction in parliamentary time by any reckoning.

What business is sufficiently trivial to require less time on a Thursday? Today, the vital fisheries debate has been squeezed into a mere three hours. That is an insult to the subject. Next week, the crucial Regional Assemblies Bill will be considered on a Thursday. Given that business questions are held on Thursdays and that statements occasionally follow, it is obvious that modernisation has reduced the time that is available for the House properly to hold the Government to account. What does the Leader of the House have to say about that?

Next Tuesday, we shall debate the vital matter of Lords reform. On 4 February, as the Leader of the House announced, we will have an opportunity to vote on seven different options for Lords reform. Where do we go from there? When we began the process, we believed that the Government had a policy on Lords reform. We believed that phase 1 was the virtual elimination of the hereditaries and that phase 2 would be the completion of the project.

That appeared to be the case until the Lord Chancellor said on the "Today" programme on Radio 4 on 7 January:

"All bets are off in the sense that the White Paper . . . didn't command acceptance."

At least we now know that the Government no longer believe that what was originally meant to happen will take place. The Lord Chancellor helpfully said that

"many voices are speaking out against what they call the nonsense of a hybrid House"—

[Mr. Forth]

I believed that that was the preferred option of the Leader of the House. The Lord Chancellor continued even more revealingly:

"The Government has arrived at no views as yet . . . some genius is going to have make sense of the votes."

He went on, uncharacteristically modestly:

"I am pleased to say that that genius is the Joint Committee."

The Leader of the House should tell us now what will happen after next Tuesday's debate and the votes in February, especially in the likely event of the House and the other place reaching different views on reform of the House of Lords. What remit will the Government give the Joint Committee? What sort of timetable can we expect for the crucial completion of the reform of the upper House? The Joint Committee has identified at least eight pieces of further work that it must do, never mind the remit that the Government will give it after our votes. We need to know; otherwise, we shall conduct our debates on a crucial parliamentary and constitutional matter in a vacuum created by the Government.

Mr. Cook: I welcome the right hon. Gentleman back and wish him a happy new year.

I assure the right hon. Gentleman that the Government stand firmly against premature expostulation. It was widely known that the Secretary of State for Defence was going to make a statement to the House. From the moment such information is known, all sorts of people begin to speculate about the content—*[Interruption.]* The phrase that the right hon. Gentleman quoted was not in the statement. It is not only the press who speculate. The shadow Secretary of State for Defence touted himself around television and radio stations, speculating about the statement.

Mr. Forth: He is not the Government.

Mr. Cook: The hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) may not be the Government, but neither is the right hon. Gentleman. What is sauce for him is sauce for the shadow Defence Secretary. The Opposition cannot complain about media speculation when they want the broadcasting media to interview them about the possible contents of the Defence Secretary's announcement.

On the question of the modernisation measures, we debated these matters very fully on 29 October. It was an excellent debate, which is fully recorded in *Hansard*. If the right hon. Gentleman wishes to re-live it, I invite him to read that edition of *Hansard*, or to view the videotapes. All of these questions were put to the House on that occasion, and there was a very compelling majority for the conclusion that we should stop at 6 pm on Thursdays.

Before the right hon. Gentleman waxes any more indignant about the outrageousness of stopping at 6 pm, I should point out that last Thursday, the House actually finished before 4 pm because there were no speakers left to continue the business before it. I thank the right hon. Gentleman, but I refuse to feel particularly guilty. Perhaps some of the Opposition Members who are so keen that we continue until 6 pm on a Thursday will turn up to make a speech next time, which they did not last Thursday. I understand why the right hon. Gentleman was unable to be with us for last Thursday's business statement. We did deal with the Lord Chancellor then, thanks to the intervention of his deputy, the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Knight). It is impossible to speak at too great length about the Lord Chancellor, and I am happy to do it all over again.

The fact is that five of the seven options that will be before the House when we vote on 4 February will provide for some form of mixed membership. The right hon. Gentleman complains that there is no Government view, but frankly, the strength of the debate for the House is that it will have a free vote and the decision. We set out that strategy clearly last summer, when I made it plain that we believe that reform of the second Chamber is a matter for Parliament and not just for the Government, and that it is therefore right that Parliament take a view. It would be wrong, having set out that strategy, for the Government now to try to lecture Parliament on what that view should be.

As to what happens next, there is no secret about that. A statement was made last summer, and we have discussed the matter on a number of occasions. What happens next is that the votes in both places will go back to the Joint Committee. There is no need for a new remit for the Committee. The remit that we agreed with the Committee last summer—when the Committee was established—sets out clearly that it will first come to us with an interim report on the options, which it has done, and then translate the outcome of those votes into a detailed proposal. That remains the strategy and the timetable, and I hope that we can take it forward in time to legislate during the next Session.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Can the Leader of the House confirm that it is his expectation that the UN inspectors will report back to the Security Council on their initial findings in Iraq on Monday 27 January, and that the following day, President Bush will make his State of the Union address? Does the Leader of the House not recognise that the House of Commons must be given the opportunity not only to debate what may come out of those two events, but to have a definitive vote on the situation, in terms of the deployment of British troops in the Gulf? Does he accept that the answer given to Baroness Williams of Crosby in the other place on Tuesday—at column 126 of the House of Lords *Hansard*—by Baroness Symons, in which she said that she was very "sympathetic" to such a request, requires confirmation that he, too, is sympathetic on the Government's behalf to the idea that such a debate and Division might take place?

According to today's *Financial Times*, it seems that the Government have torn up their expectation of increasing rail ridership by 50 per cent. in a decade. Can the Leader of the House therefore tell us when we will have a debate on the Government's rail strategy, so that we can learn whether they have indeed changed it? Perhaps that would also give the Conservative Opposition the opportunity to apologise, at long last, for the botched rail privatisation that has given rise to this appalling situation on our railways. While having to spend seven hours getting here last week, instead of the usual three and a half, I found myself standing next to a

former British Rail manager, who confirmed in absolute terms that it was the previous Conservative Government's failure to invest in the infrastructure, combined with their privatising—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] Conservative Members seem unable to listen even to those who travelled on British Rail, let alone to those who ran it.

Finally, may I draw the Leader of the House's attention to motion 4 on today's Order Paper, which I think I am right in saying refers to dioxins, furans and polychlorinated biphenyls. The document mentioned in the motion was before a European Standing Committee just two days ago, but we do not have the *Hansard* report. We have no idea what is at stake. The motion may be very worthy, but how can we bring a motion to the Floor of the House without having a clue as to what it is all about? Moreover, on looking at the online *Hansard* for that Committee, I found that it was three years out of date.

Mr. Cook: I am afraid I cannot shed further light on the directive without notice. I think the hon. Gentleman referred to phenyls, but in any event I will ensure that he is positively deluged with correspondence explaining the directive.

Let me repeat what has been said on a number of occasions about the 27 January report. It will of course be the first substantive report from the inspectors to the Security Council, but it will not necessarily be the last. It will probably be a staging post for future reports, and I will not be at all surprised if Hans Blix's main conclusion on 27 January is that he requires further time in which to explore the issue.

The Foreign Secretary has said from this Dispatch Box that the Government have no problem with the idea of a substantive motion on the question of commitment of British troops should we end up there, which is not inevitable; but it must come at the appropriate time, and I would be rather surprised if 27 January provided such an occasion. The Foreign Secretary will go to the United Nations next Monday, and will take part in a ministerial exchange in the Security Council. I am sure that he will want to ensure, as he has repeatedly, that the House is kept fully briefed on the progress of those discussions.

I also noticed that the official Opposition's response to the business statement did not raise the question of rail. I deduce from that that once again it was impossible to find a Conservative Member who is willing to defend the way in which the Conservatives went about the privatisation of the rail industry. I am, however, happy to disabuse the House and the hon. Gentleman in regard to an error in what the hon. Gentleman said. The Government have not abandoned their commitment to a 50 per cent. increase in rail use. We remain committed to that target throughout the 10-year programme of our transport plan, and indeed we are well on target in that we have increased rail use by 25 per cent. since 1997.

David Hamilton (Midlothian): May I return the Leader of the House to next Tuesday's agenda and House of Lords reform? I read the relevant paper with great interest, and noted the seven proposals for a fully appointed House, a fully elected House, and so forth. The one proposal that is not there, of course, is the proposal for abolition. Will the Leader of the House have another look at the proposals? Has he seen early-day motion 529?

[That this House expresses its concern that the Joint Committee on House of Lords Reform did not include an option for abolition in its first report; further notes that much of the impetus for House of Lords reform stems from concerns about the effectiveness of the House of Commons; and would support proposals for a unicameral solution coupled with reform of the House of Commons legislative procedures.]

In a single day, that motion gathered 63 signatures in favour of abolition. Could such a motion come before the House, so that we could vote on it?

Mr. Cook: I read the early-day motion with interest, and noted that it had attracted signatures from a significant number of Members. We have sought to implement to the letter the recommendations of the Joint Committee. We were keen to establish the Committee, and said that it should present the proposals on which the House should vote; so we will not depart from its recommendations now. It has not recommended abolition as an option, although I note that, of necessity, half its members are from the other place.

While my hon. Friend is perfectly entitled to support his proposition as an individual, as are a number of our colleagues, it is not the policy on which we fought the last election. We have a mandate from our manifesto at that election not for the abolition but for the reform of the second place. I very much hope that after 4 February we shall be able to stop arguing about what is the option for reform, and at long last get on to the reform.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): According to my calculations, the Bank of England and therefore the people of Britain have lost more than £700 million as a result of the policy of instructing them to sell their gold and buy three specific currencies. Do the Government not believe that there is a case for an early debate in which they can give their calculation of what money has been lost, and we can have a full review of what has been a disastrous and costly policy that should never have been embarked on?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman has produced a question that is an oldie and, I suppose, a goldie. As we said at the time, Governments around the globe are diversifying the way in which they hold reserves. When we made the decision, Britain held an unusually high proportion of reserves in gold. It was therefore an entirely rational and proper decision, and I fully defend it. I suspect that, had a Conservative Government been in power at the time, they would have made precisely the same decision.

Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): Will my right hon. Friend make time available for an urgent debate on the textile industry? He may be aware that there were 19,000 textile jobs in Leicester in 1984. That total fell to 9,000 in 1997, and is now down to 3,000. If the trend continues, there will be no more manufacturing in the textile industry in Leicester. In 1950, it was said that one out of every five pairs of socks worn in Europe was manufactured in Leicester. Can we have a debate on this urgent matter?

Mr. Cook: I fully understand my hon. Friend's concerns about the impact on his constituency of the decline in jobs that he has described. I am sure that he will readily acknowledge that we should not infer from the reduction in employment over the long period to which he referred that there has necessarily been a parallel reduction in output, as a relevant factor has been the substantial increase in productivity in that sector over the same period. I am pleased to tell the House that the recent employment figures demonstrate that, in the past year alone, there has been an increase in the number of people in work under this Government of 250,000, and that there was a further fall in unemployment of 5,000 in the last month. However, I fully understand that those figures do not remove the anxiety about the decline of traditional industries, especially in local communities such as that represented by my hon. Friend. I cannot offer him any immediate hope of a reversal of that trend in the textile industry, but I can assure him that the sound economy that the Government have created provides other opportunities for people in my hon. Friend's constituency, and elsewhere.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): The Leader of the House has confirmed Tuesday's debate on Lords reform, when a number of hon. Members hope to make the case for a predominantly elected second Chamber. There is known to be a wide range of views in the Cabinet, and Ministers are to be allowed a free vote and apparently to express their views in public. Given that collective ministerial responsibility no longer applies, is there any reason why Ministers should not speak in the House from the Back Benches?

Mr. Cook: We are obviously going to have a very interesting debate on Tuesday. I do not hold out much hope that it will be made even more interesting in the way that the right hon. Gentleman suggests. However, it is important that we approach the matter in a mature way. We have committed ourselves to a free vote. It would be right and proper for the Opposition to complain if there was any suggestion that the Government were not allowing a free vote. Consistent with our commitment to a free vote, it would be wrong for the Government to advance a collective view.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Has my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House seen early-day motion 410, on avoidable accidents caused by sleep deprivation?

[That this House recognises that a significant proportion of all road accidents resulting in death or serious injury is caused by sleepiness; notes the human misery caused by fatal road accidents, which cost around one million pounds each; further notes that at least 1 per cent. of the United Kingdom's adult population has a medical cause for sleepiness; acknowledges the Royal College of Physicians' observation that untreated sleep apnoea sufferers may have driving impairments comparable with other drivers well over the legal alcohol limit; acknowledges that sleep apnoea is readily treatable with a machine costing £300 which lasts for ten years; notes the research undertaken by the Sleep Centre at Edinburgh university; that shows the cost of treating 500 sleep apnoea patients with Continuous Positive Airway Pressure treatment for five years would be a total of £400,000 in comparison to the estimated cost of accidents caused by untreated patients with sleep apnoea over the same five year period being £5,300,000; and calls on Her Majesty's Government to give serious consideration to increasing the provision of treatment for sleep disorders.]

That is a very serious subject. From the answers that I have received from the Department of Health, it is clear that many primary care trusts and hospital trusts do not take the matter seriously. They do not offer a cost-effective treatment that could save many lives on our roads, as the majority of accidents are caused by people who suffer from sleep apnoea. Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on what is a very serious matter?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend raises a matter about which she has expressed concern on the Order Paper. She makes some important statistical points about the importance of the disorder. I am sure that Ministers at the Department of Health will want to make sure that the NHS responds to the problem properly. I shall ensure that they write to her setting out the strategy for dealing with this disorder.

Mr. Andrew Rosindell (Romford): The Leader of the House will be aware that the Committee stage of the European Parliament (Representation) Bill was successfully completed today, and that that measure gives the people of Gibraltar the right to vote in European elections. Do the Government intend to introduce a similar Bill that will give the people of Gibraltar and all British overseas territories the right to democratic representation in the British Parliament, which has responsibility for them also?

Mr. Cook: No is the short answer to that. The Government deserve credit for introducing, as no previous Government have done, a measure that will make sure that the people will be represented in the European Parliament. However, it is in the nature of the overseas territories that they have their independent form of government. As someone who was Foreign Secretary for a time, I know full well how jealously those territories guard their right to govern themselves and to ensure that their administrations are accountable to their indigenous populations. It would be wholly inconsistent with that to make them part of this Parliament, which would necessarily mean that they were subject to rule from Westminster.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): Will my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House inquire as to when records relating to links between King Edward VIII and the Nazis will be released? I am told by the Lord Chancellor's Department that an investigation into this matter has been completed, but there seems to be great reluctance to release the findings.

Mr. Cook: I am advised that the papers relating to the abdication of King Edward VIII will be released to the Public Record Office on 30 January. That will enable those who wish to examine the matter to see the discussion that took place at the time and the anxieties that may then have existed. It is right that that should be

put in the public domain. Hon. Members and other members of the public can then come to their own conclusions.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The Leader of the House will be aware that the Northern Ireland Grand Committee is supposed to meet at least four times a year, and that there is a possibility that it will meet six times. Next week, three months will have elapsed since we last met. Will the right hon. Gentleman give an undertaking that the Grand Committee will meet within the month and that, in keeping with commitments that have already been made, it will do so in Northern Ireland? That would allow some Northern Ireland Members who find it difficult to attend meetings at Westminster to attend the sitting. If there is a question about where to meet, I understand that the old Senate Chamber is available.

Mr. Cook: I am in discussions with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland about the precise powers and role of the Grand Committee in circumstances when we do not have the Northern Ireland Assembly. We are fully seized of the additional importance of the Grand Committee in those circumstances. The hon. Gentleman can take it that there will be a meeting of the Grand Committee in the foreseeable future. Where it should meet is normally a matter for consultation between all parties, and it has not always been possible in the past to get agreement on what is the most convenient location for everybody. However, I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be willing to undertake those consultations.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): I draw to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House early-day motion 436, on missile defence.

[That this House notes the request by the United States Government to upgrade facilities at RAF Fylingdales as part of their National Missile Defence programme; recognises that there are huge moral, economic, technological and legal issues raised by NMD; welcomes the Government's commitment to a wide ranging public debate on these issues; and believes that the United States request should not even be considered until the British public has been able to have this debate and decide whether the "Son of Star Wars" proposals offer any real security for Britain or the international community.]

Will my right hon. Friend make time for a full debate, in Government time, on national missile defence? Although the subject can be raised in next week's defence debate, the House needs to examine many issues to do with star wars. They include whether the technology works, what risk local populations face, and the destabilising effect of what many regimes in the world, including China, will regard as missile proliferation. Also, the House needs to discuss whether the Government have been entirely transparent in saying that the decision that they are about to take to update Fylingdales does not mean that Britain is signing up for the star wars project.

Mr. Cook: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, when he answered questions both here and in the Select Committee yesterday, made it clear that the decision that he was minded to take had to do with the current application, and that any future decision would be a matter for a future debate. On the question of discussing the matter in the House, I fully understand the interest that my hon. Friend and many other hon. Members have in it. That is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence came to the House and made a very full statement and took questions for a full hour yesterday. He then went to the Select Committee and answered questions for a further hour. There will be a debate on defence in the world next week. It is one of a number of debates on defence of a general character that are held in the course of the year. It would be entirely relevant for any hon. Member who wishes to ventilate some of these issues to do so in that debate.

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): Is the Secretary of State for Defence prepared to come to the House this afternoon to put right the statement that he made about the future of BAE Systems? Many hon. Members on all sides who have a workforce involved with BAE were shocked by his comments. This is the second time the Secretary of State has effectively damaged the company. In the next few weeks a decision will be made about the purchase of two carriers for the Royal Navy. Quite rightly, there should be an open competition, but the Secretary of State by his comments has seriously damaged the financial future of a major British company. Would the right hon. Gentleman please make a statement on this?

Mr. Cook: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has in no way damaged the prospects of any company obtaining any contract from the Ministry of Defence. It would be rather odd if anything that he said damaged his ability to award a contract to that company.

Perhaps I may remind the hon. Gentleman of the background. Last year BAE Systems itself asked the Government to remove the requirement that 50 per cent. of the shareholders had to be British. The Government responded to that initiative and request from the company by removing the requirement. As I understand it, at present 54 per cent. of the shareholders are of foreign rather than British origin. But that is not a consideration in the award of any contract by the Ministry of Defence. Certainly the Ministry quite rightly and properly attaches importance to the economic benefit that would come from a contract being awarded. That economic benefit remains constant so long as BAE's installations are in Britain, and is not dependent on where its foreign shareholders may be based.

Mr. Ivan Henderson (Harwich): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the article in *The Times* on 13 January regarding the new post office card accounts initially being available to only 10,000 claimants? Will my right hon. Friend arrange for a Minister to make a statement as to whether the article is correct? Does he agree that if it is correct the existing methods of payments to benefit claimants at post offices should continue until the cards are available to those who want them?

Mr. Cook: I believe that I am on sound ground in telling my hon. Friend that the answer to his last

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question is "Yes", that those who wish to retain the present post office card may do so, and that we shall try to make sure that the system can ensure that they are paid in the normal way. Only a small number in the initial period will be transferred to any other form of payment. We are very sensitive to the need to make sure that we fully provide choice to the customers of the post office.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Can the Leader of the House arrange for the Secretary of State for Transport to make a statement on the following matter? Five and a half years after the election of a Labour Government it was announced last year that trains would run from Matlock to Birmingham straight through. It has been announced today that, within two months of that service being operated, instead of 10 trains running there will now be two. Does the Leader of the House think that that will encourage people to use public transport?

Mr. Cook: In the way in which he puts his question the hon. Gentleman draws attention to the fact that last October there was a substantial increase in cross-country services. Indeed, the Virgin cross-country services doubled in October. It has not proved possible for Virgin to maintain that service without substantial congestion in the network. Therefore, most of the reductions announced today relate to the Virgin cross-country services. However, I understand that there will still be substantially more cross-country services after the reductions than there were before last October. The hon. Gentleman was on the Conservative Benches when the present structure of privatisation was created. I, and I think his constituents, would take his complaint rather more seriously if he could point to a single instance in the course of those debates where he expressed that reservation.

Mr. Colin Challen (Morley and Rothwell): Now that the Department of Trade and Industry's consultation on the World Trade Organisation's current round of General Agreement on Trade in Services negotiations has just been completed, may the House have a full debate on the liberalisation of trade in services? Many people, including the Local Government Association and even this morning hon. Members, have expressed great concern about the future of public services under those arrangements. May we have a full debate so that it will be possible to answer the point that some of the negotiations were carried out in secret to avoid public scrutiny?

Mr. Cook: To be fair to the present Government, I would tell my hon. Friend that we have sought wherever possible to make more open and more transparent the discussions within the World Trade Organisation and will continue to look for new ways in which accountability can be secured in its deliberations.

On the generality of my hon. Friend's point, he raises a profoundly important and serious issue. I sometimes feel that in our political exchanges we do not necessarily reflect the most profound and most strategic changes, but those that are currently the issues of greatest current publicity. I shall consider what appropriate mechanism there may be for this matter to be ventilated. I assure my hon. Friend that the Government are fully determined to make sure that we achieve a liberalisation of trade and that we secure an opportunity to export for the growing service sector within the United Kingdom. At the same time, we are sensitive to the need to make sure that it happens in a way that promotes rather than hinders the development of those countries that are yet to develop.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): Until now members of the public have accepted that there is a genuine need to provide asylum to those who fear for their lives. In the light of the tragic death of the police officer in Manchester and the apprehension of persons from north Africa, some will look at asylum now as the Trojan horse for terrorism. Will the Home Secretary make a statement on the subject of our current asylum procedures, so that the House may have an opportunity to probe the thoroughness, preparedness and resources at our disposal to deal with the mounting terrorism threat?

Mr. Cook: I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his sound bite, but I cannot congratulate him on his responsibility. It is a cheap and irresponsible form of politics to try to label all asylum-seekers as if they may be terrorists. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Hon. Members should let the Leader of the House answer in the way that he pleases.

Mr. Cook: I would have more respect for the perspective being argued from the Opposition Benches if it were not the same party that only last year tried to prevent us from having a new rule which would enable us to deport asylum-seekers guilty of a serious offence. The right hon. Gentleman should look at the record of his own party before trying to turn this to political advantage.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): I apologise for the brief blast of Beethoven from my phone.

May I reiterate the request to my right hon. Friend for a specific debate on the general principle of British involvement in missile defence, which was requested yesterday by the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Front Benches? We know from my own early day motion that there is concern amongst over half the Parliamentary Labour party, the vast majority of Labour Back Benchers. The public believes that this is an important decision, which in a democracy should be properly discussed in this Chamber. It is wholly inadequate to reduce it to passing references during a debate on defence in the world, in which inevitably issues such as Iraq will correctly predominate.

Mr. Cook: I understand the strength of feeling on this issue and also fully understand the complexity of the arguments on both sides of the question. But, on the narrow question of process, five days are set aside each Session for defence, and we meet those mandatory requirements in each Session. Moreover, there are many additional days on issues of topicality, such as Iraq, which I am sure we will debate again. What my hon.

Friend said about the Opposition having demanded such an opportunity was an interesting observation. I find it strange that instead they have chosen to debate herbal medicines next week.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): The Leader of the House may or may not be aware that the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe passed a resolution on a paper of mine calling for a convention against clandestine migration. In view of the serious security implications of this matter, and notwithstanding the right hon. Gentleman's intemperate response to my right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack), whose comments were entirely apposite, could not the Home Secretary tell the House that the Government will be following the recommendations of the convention, because surely the general public deserve it?

Mr. Cook: The United Kingdom plays a distinguished part in both the Assembly of the Council of Europe and its meetings at ministerial level, and will continue to do so. Of course, we shall take very seriously any recommendation by the Assembly for such a convention. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary made a statement to the House yesterday, quite rightly and quite properly, in the immediate aftermath of the appalling murder, and of course he will continue to keep the House fully briefed. But, in fairness to those many people who seek legitimate asylum from illegitimate persecution in the countries from which they flee, we should not now start to tar them all with the terrorist brush.

Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): Last week, I requested a debate on the sell-off of part of the defence evaluation quango, QinetiQ, to the Carlyle Group. I argued that such a debate was necessary because of the secretive way that the procedures have been adopted by placing minutes in the Library before the recess in July and December last year. The Leader of the House refused to hold the debate as he was of the opinion that the procedure had been open and had been done through a statutory instrument. However, the statutory instrument referred to March 2001, whereas I was referring to minutes being placed in the Library in July and December 2002. I am pleased that the Speaker has informed me that Parliament was notified by item 12 in appendix I of the Votes and Proceedings of 17 December last year. That is hardly essential breakfast reading. Because of money involved—underwriting about £100 million—will the Leader of the House rethink and perhaps agree to hold a debate on such an important matter?

Mr. Cook: It is perfectly correct to say that I did not apprehend at the time that a minute had been deposited in the Library and, as my hon. Friend will see if he consults the report of what he said at the time, that may partly reflect the fact that he did not make it clear in his question either.

On the process on that occasion, the Ministry of Defence has followed the standard procedure where a Government liability is being created in excess of £100,000, which is to place the minutes in the Library. The fact that that was done on the day before the recess has, of course, no bearing on the fact that the period for objection is 14 sitting days, not 14 calendar days, and therefore it is of no procedural significance whether it was done before or after the recess. I can only suggest that, if my hon. Friend wishes to force such a debate, he and his friends need to ensure that there are sufficient objections, and we will consider the issue in the light of that at the end of the 14 sitting days.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): Does the Leader of the House not find it incredible that the only group of parliamentarians in the United Kingdom who will have the opportunity to consider and vote on a substantive motion in advance of military action in Iraq are Members of the Scottish Parliament at Holyrood, on the back of a Scottish National party motion? Will he endorse the view of his colleague, the First Minister of Scotland, who says that Labour Members who vote against Government policy do not deserve to be in the Labour party?

Mr. Cook: I am happy to disagree with the hon. Gentleman on all the points that he makes. First, it is not the case that only Members of the Scottish Parliament will have the opportunity to vote on a substantive motion. For the record, I should say that we had a substantive motion in the House before Christmas. Indeed, there was a vote on that substantive motion and, by a very large majority, the House endorsed the Government's strategy in ensuring that we fully support the United Nations process and UN resolution 1441.

The Foreign Secretary has already made it clear, as I mentioned earlier, that the Government have no difficulty at all with the idea that there should be a further substantive motion and, if hon. Members wish to divide the House, a vote on the commitment of troops at the appropriate time. Of course, the Scottish Parliament will have views, and those who have a view to express and have formed intelligent opinions about the policy on Iraq will have an opportunity to debate them. However, I am pleased to reassure the House that Britain's foreign policy will be settled in this Chamber, not in the Scottish Parliament.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to the dispute that has apparently arisen between the World Health Organisation researchers at Leiden university in Amsterdam and the International Air Transport Association about whether airline companies are helping or hindering vital research into deep-vein thrombosis and air travel? Given that the British taxpayer is funding that research, will he bring the issue to the attention of his right hon. Friends, with a view to reporting back to the House?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend takes a deep interest in this matter and has alerted the House to it on several occasions during business questions. As he will know, the Government share his apprehension and concerns, which is why we have been one of the countries willing to fund the international research, and we will continue to give that support. We should not prematurely judge the outcome of that research until it is available to us. I can assure my hon. Friend that nothing said in the meantime will deflect the Government from our

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commitment to ensuring that we have full, thorough international research, partly funded by the United Kingdom.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): Although many hon. Members—at least those on the Conservative Benches—strongly support the Prime Minister's policies on the promotion of international law and order, are they not a terrible contrast with the Government's complete and lamentable failure on domestic law and order policies? Will the Leader of the House arrange for an urgent debate on the Government's crime and law and order policies to be held as soon as possible? Will he ensure that, during that debate, we hear from the as yet unnamed but widely quoted senior Labour Minister who described the Lord Chancellor—I think that I quote him exactly—as a muddled and confused old codger?

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire): Own up.

Mr. Cook: I am happy to respond by saying, no, it was not me. I am very pleased to tell the House that, among my many responsibilities, I do not number the obligation of disclosing the sources of the press, which is probably as well for the press because, in my experience, quite a lot of what we read in the press is made up in the bar.

On the Government's record on crime, I would point out to the hon. Gentleman that, according to the British crime survey, crime has declined by 27 per cent. in the past five years. That is a stark contrast to the way in which crime doubled during the years when the Conservatives were in office.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): Following the question about asylum asked by the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack), would my right hon. Friend accept that there are many innocent victims of the culture that he was right to decry? Would not a debate on asylum give us an opportunity not only to consider the obligation that the Government and the country have to maintain civil liberties, but address the needs of people, such as my constituent, Erald Angoni, who is a 10-year-old Kosovan who cannot visit his dying grandfather because of the current clampdowns? Would my right hon. Friend accept that a debate on that matter could have benefits for those who are concerned about that part of the argument?

Mr. Cook: Of course I cannot comment on the individual constituency case to which my hon. Friend refers, but there are other ways in which he can seek to ventilate and remedy that problem. On the wider question, there is probably no other single issue that the House has discussed more in the past Session than asylum, and I would be very surprised if we did not continue that debate during this Session. My hon. Friend is, of course, absolutely right: it is important that we get the balance right between carrying out our international obligations to provide refuge for those who are fleeing persecution and safeguarding the civil liberties of the people of Britain, who also, of course, have perfectly reasonable grounds to expect that the Government will ensure that people do not abuse the asylum system by entering it for reasons other than to seek protection.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Points of Order

1.17 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Can you help the Leader of the House and, indeed, the whole House in pointing out that there is a distinction between the obligations on Ministers and what they do and say with regard to the House and the different role played by Opposition Members? The Leader of the House seemed to suggest, quite extraordinarily, that Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen had the same responsibilities as Ministers. Mr. Speaker, you must surely help him to make the distinction, which he has failed to make, that there is a real responsibility on Ministers to pay proper regard to their attitude to the House, whereas, frankly, the rest of us, as mere Members of Parliament, can pretty much say whatever we like when we like.

Mr. Speaker: I have said in the past that I have no responsibility for the content or quality of the replies of any Minister, including the Leader of the House. However, certainly in any of my statements about Ministers' responsibilities, I have said that the responsibilities are far different for those who hold Opposition posts. I shall say no more on that matter.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Would you be willing to look into the issue of the delays that now occur in the translation of ministerial written replies into the *Official Report*? At about 6 o'clock yesterday evening, I received a long-awaited written answer from the Department of Health—it goes back to November—informing me that the Government spend £53 million a year on promoting the consumption of fruit and vegetables. I had hoped that that answer would appear in today's *Official Report*, but it does not, and it is not on the internet either. That seems to be part of a new pattern that communications between Departments and *Hansard*—it may be for another reason—result in *Hansard* not producing written answers in a timely fashion.

Mr. Speaker: I would suggest that it would be better for the hon. Gentleman to take the matter up with the Editor of *Hansard,* if that is where the complaint lies, before raising it with the Speaker.

Mr. Chope: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker, my complaint is not with the Editor of *Hansard.* My suspicion is that Departments are not communicating the information to *Hansard.*

Mr. Speaker: In that case, the hon. Gentleman should try the Minister first. When I was a shop steward, I used to say that people should take matters up with the manager before they went to the shop steward.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker, we regard you as our shop steward in this matter because it relates to not one but several Ministers and certainly not to the Editor of *Hansard.* In recent weeks, since the introduction of the new system, there have been several cases of a written statement not being made available in the Library or in the Vote Office. Indeed, I have drawn that to your attention, Mr. Speaker. Could you, in the nicest possible way—in your usual extraordinarily tactful way—as our shop steward, make representations to the Government that if they are not ready to make a written statement available to Members of the House they only have to wait another day and then do so?

Mr. Speaker: The Liberal Democrat Chief Whip, the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell) has written to me on that matter. Perhaps I may be given the opportunity to reply to the hon. Gentleman.

Orders of the Day

Church of England (Pensions) Measure

1.21 pm

Second Church Estates Commissioner (Mr. Stuart Bell): I beg to move,

That the Church of England (Pensions) Measure, passed by the General Synod of the Church of England, be presented to her Majesty for Her Royal Assent in the form in which the said Measure was laid before Parliament.

This is the first Church of England Measure to be debated in this Parliament, so I welcome hon. Members on this august occasion.

The Measure makes provision in two main areas. First, it amends the powers of the Church of England pensions board in relation to certain funds that it holds in statutory trusts for the benefit of its pensioners and their dependants. It does so by transferring them to the general purposes fund established by the board in 1975. That fund is then given charitable purposes that embrace all the former purposes of the funds added to it. The result will be to enhance flexibility to make discretionary charitable provision for its pensioners and others and to reduce administrative costs.

The Measure widens the board's powers in relation to the provision of retirement housing for those who have served in the stipendiary ministry. Previously, where a couple housed by the board divorced after retirement, the board could continue to house only its pensioner and not the former spouse. The Measure gives the board power to house a former spouse as well as the pensioner and thus enables it to treat both even-handedly.

The Measure clarifies the position as regards the liability for payment of the cost of accruing pension rights where compensation is paid under the Pastoral Measure 1983 and the Incumbents (Vacation of Benefices) Measures. The changes relating to the Church of England pensions board are dealt with in clauses 1 to 4 of the Measure.

Secondly, in clause 5, the Measure extends for a further seven years, from 1 January 2005, the power granted to the Church Commissioners by the Pensions Measure 1997 to resort to capital to pay their pre-1998 clergy pension liabilities. The 1997 Measure significantly altered the arrangements for the funding of clergy pensions. In particular, it limited the commissioners' pension liabilities to those arising from service before the end of 1997.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I hope that the Measures will not be controversial but, given the previous problems experienced by the Church Commissioners, can my hon. Friend tell us what the fall-out might be if there were no improvement in the Church's overall capital position? We are talking about some of the poorer pensioners; it is a myth to pretend that former vicars do not face an extremely difficult situation.

Mr. Bell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. The commissioners' investment performance over the past three years has been adversely affected by the poor return from global stock markets, but their property holdings have mitigated the impact, although full figures are not yet available. When they are, I shall ensure that my hon. Friend receives the information.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): I understand that we are talking about assets of about £4.5 billion and that actuarial assumptions envisage that about £2 billion of that will be required over the next 60 years. Can we assume that the actuaries have taken a bleak view of the present stock market position and that things could actually be much better as time goes on?

Mr. Bell: The actuaries estimated that, on the basis of present withdrawals from the funds of the commissioners—the capital to which the Measure refers—which amount to about £30 million a year and possibly more than that, it would take 60 years for half our capital to be divested, or used up. Of course, 60 years is a long time for all of us—we may all be dead by then. However, the pensions liability, according to the actuaries, is long standing and we hope that, with flexibility in relation both to our property investments and our stock market investments, the situation to which my hon. Friend alludes will not arise, but I am grateful to him for putting the question.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): May I ask my hon. Friend about the other side of that actuarial calculation? The first actuarial calculation to be undertaken for the commissioners relates to how much of the total fund will be required, but the second is for the new scheme that is to be established. Is he satisfied that the actuarial calculations for the new scheme are as soundly based as they should be, given that the situation has changed so quickly over the past couple of years? Might the commissioners want to bring forward the actuarial review of the scheme?

Mr. Bell: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that question. As he is aware, the pension schemes to which we are referring are final salary schemes. The essence of the Pensions Measure 1997 was to divest responsibility of the commissioners for future schemes from that date and to pass it to the dioceses. My right hon. Friend raises an interesting point and I shall be glad to take up the question of whether there should be an actuarial review of the schemes and draw it to the attention of the commissioners.

I shall now return to my speech, with apologies to *Hansard* if it is not the point where I left off.

The Pensions Measure 1997 limited the commissioners' pension liabilities to those arising from service before the end of 1997 and created a new and separate funded scheme into which dioceses—through funds raised from parishes—could pay clergy pension contributions in respect of service from the beginning of 1998. In support of those arrangements, it gave the commissioners power, but only until the end of 2004, both to give financial assistance to diocesan boards of finance and others in taking on the cost of paying those pension contributions and to spend capital in meeting their own pre-1998 pension liabilities.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I recognise that this a relatively narrowly drawn Church of England pensions Measure, rather than a Bill that seeks to

address contracts of employment. Given the widespread concern on both sides of the House about the relatively minimal and unsatisfactory employment rights of members of the clergy, does the hon. Gentleman feel able to hold out any prospect that the Measure could be amended so that those whose contracts of employment are terminated might be given additional pension provision?

Mr. Bell: The hon. Gentleman is right that the Measure is narrowly drawn, and not capable of being amended. However, his point about employment rights has been well taken by the Church, which is providing a full document as part of the consultation procedures demanded by the Department of Trade and Industry that will close in July. I will ensure that the question of pension rights in relation to employment rights is linked in our consultation document.

The Measure will alter the last of the powers to which I referred by extending for a further period of seven years, from 1 January 2005, the commissioners' powers to spend capital to pay their pre-1998 clergy pension liabilities. The reason for seeking that extension is that, because of the need to fund those liabilities, the commissioners' expenditure is likely to exceed their income by at least £30 million per annum, a point that my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Leicestershire (David Taylor) made. Without the continuation of the power to resort to capital to meet those liabilities, the commissioners would need to make substantial cuts in their discretionary expenditure or to realign their investment portfolio to generate higher income. Either course of action would be damaging to the Church's long-term interests. It is also worth recalling that while the commissioners' capital is being reduced, the new funded scheme is being increased in size at roughly the same rate because so far it has few pension payments to make, so that, overall, there is no loss of capital at the national level of the Church.

In summary, the Measure both rationalises the administration of discretionary funds in the hands of the pensions board—

David Taylor: My hon. Friend has just announced that the Measure includes provisions that will end the seven-year transitional arrangements, which allowed contributions to diocesan boards of finance and others to help them meet their post-1998 liabilities. The cessation of that will essentially pose extra burdens for dioceses, deaneries and parishes such as mine, which are already groaning under financial pressures. Is he convinced that this is the right time to end that seven-year arrangement? Should it not be extended?

Mr. Bell: The seven-year period is being extended by the Measure. It was introduced in this Parliament in 1997, and Parliament thought that it ought to be brought back after five years. It is now being brought back, and it is being extended. The reason for that is to give the commissioners' flexibility in handling their financial affairs for the benefit of those clergy. My hon. Friend's point about the burdens on dioceses was recognised in 1997, and that continues, but I am happy to say that the powers of giving in relation to Church communities have been enhanced. As far as I am aware, those commitments are being met, although we recognise that they are onerous.

Extending the commissioners' power to spend capital allows them to manage the resources under their control in the most strategic and effective manner. The Measure is therefore not only important to the pensions board and the Church Commissioners but to those many clergy and their spouses who have faithfully and loyally served the Church over many years. For those reasons, I commend the Measure to the House.

1.35 pm

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): I warmly welcome the Measure, which I hope will pass speedily through the House. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) for the way in which he presented the issue, which is of great significance to a substantial number of people in my constituency in the diocese of Salisbury. There has been unhappiness in several areas for some time. It is important that the Church realign its resources in this way, streamline its administration, and change the basis of the funding of pensions for the clergy and their spouses.

I broadly welcome clause 3 on housing and residences, as there had been an anomaly. The Church is not immune from the ways of the world today, and, sadly, when spouses divorced after retirement, the Church Commissioners had no power to assist in housing the divorced spouse. That anomaly is put right by this Measure, which is extremely important. I dare say that there will be further amendments in that line.

Finally, the Measure illustrates the importance of the relationship between the Church of England and the state, which I welcome. It illustrates not only that the Church of England is undoubtedly in a privileged position, but that that is not just symbolic but, at a practical level, alive and well and working in the interests of the clergy of the Church of England. Having read the whole of the minutes of the deliberations of the Ecclesiastical Committee, which was quite a task and required several gin and tonics in the middle, I can say that it was worth the read. It illustrated how seriously Members of both Houses take their responsibilities on the Ecclesiastical Committee, and how they bring to bear their wisdom and experience, which has been to advantage in this case. The substantial change made by the Ecclesiastical Committee, which was accepted without difficulty by the Synod, illustrates clearly once again how the relationship between the Church of England and the state is flourishing, and I hope that that will continue for many years.

1.37 pm

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): I have a feeling that my declaration of interest may last longer than my remarks. As my wife is an Anglican priest of three years' service before the changes were introduced, we have several pennies at stake on this Measure. We hope, however, that that will not bias my comments unduly.

My colleagues and I also welcome the Measure. We note that when the General Synod considered its original version, it was approved by 366 votes to one—

Mr. Key: Name him.

Mr. Webb: A bishop; I do not know who.

[Mr. Webb]

Parliament is in the absurd position of considering the matter for the third time. Given that Synod and the Ecclesiastical Committee have already considered it, we should be cautious about seeking to amend anything that has the overwhelming support of the Church. Having said that, Parliament has a historic role in overseeing these processes.

Like other Members who have spoken, we very much welcome clauses 1 to 4, which allow the discretionary funds of the pensions board to be used more flexibly than hitherto, which seems sensible and appropriate. We welcome the fact that divorced spouses of clergy—in post-retirement divorces—will have some possibility of having their housing position protected. Several of my friends are clergy and clergy spouses, and many feel insecure about their housing position, both while in active ministry and after retirement. A provision that recognises that relationships break down and that individuals should not be dependent on a spouse for a roof over their head, possibly at short notice, is entirely to be welcomed. The changes on retirement housing are therefore good.

On the pension arrangements, we become nervous when we hear that pension payments will be made by running down the capital of a pension fund. However, the simplest analogy would be to think of this as a closed pension fund in which no new liabilities accrue and in which existing ones may run on for many decades. It is appropriate that we plan ahead for a measured and orderly financing of responsibilities.

I do not think that the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) mentioned this point, but it is worth touching on the fact that the Ecclesiastical Committee prompted one change to the Measure. The Committee felt that, in a further seven years, the House should have a substantive opportunity to review the processes and reconsider whether the run-down of capital was being handled in the right way. It felt that the Measure should not go through on the nod under the negative resolution procedure for statutory instruments. That was probably a constructive suggestion, and I know that the Synod approved it without demur.

Overall, we are comfortable with the proposal. In the unlikely event that the House should seek to divide, I will encourage my colleagues to support the Measure.

1.41 pm

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): I am a member of the Ecclesiastical Committee, and the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) pointed out the overwhelming majority that the Measure enjoyed in the Synod. It was even bigger than the majorities that we encounter in the parliamentary Labour party.

I have one concern to put to my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell). The commissioners have a range of discretionary responsibilities for parish ministry support, bishops' working costs, grants to cathedrals and money given to other bodies. When the Ecclesiastical Committee discussed the Measure in April 2002, I made the point that the sums that are currently being used to bridge the gap between funds and pre-1998 liabilities were on a substantial rising curve. Is my hon. Friend confident that there will be little, if any squeeze, on the worthy work that the commissioners do on parish ministry support, bishops' working costs and on the others things that I mentioned?

To clarify my earlier question about the renewal of the seven-year arrangement, I was referring to the seven-year transitional arrangements that allow sums to be paid to the boards of finance in particular dioceses. That arrangement will help them with their liabilities, but it will end, as I understand it, on 31 December 2004. That new burden, which will be unrelieved by any contribution from the Church Commissioners, concerns me in the light of current diocesan financial pressures. I would like reassurance on that point.

1.43 pm

Mr. Bell: With the leave of the House, I wish to respond to some of the points that have been raised. I am grateful to hon. Members for the manner in which they have raised them and for their constructive approach to the Measure.

My hon. Friend the Member for North-West Leicestershire (David Taylor) asked about the commissioners' power to spend capital. We have the power to spend capital to help dioceses with new pension schemes. As he is aware, that power ends in 2004 and that is to protect the power of the commissioners' fund so that we can help poorer dioceses in other ways. The timetable for phased transitional relief has been agreed with all the dioceses. I shall return to his other points shortly.

I shall deal chronologically with the points made by the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key). He made the important point that one of the attractive features of the Measure is that it will help divorced spouses who might lose their homes after a separation. That problem is now being rectified, and we have powers to help a spouse or former spouse in that position. He mentioned the Church-state relationship, but I do not wish to widen the debate.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): Go on.

Mr. Bell: I certainly do not want to do that when my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) is in the Chamber. I do not want to encourage him to take part in the debate at this stage. We are dealing with one of the interstices in the Church-state relationship, but that relationship is a matter for another debate. I am always willing to listen to contributions on that subject.

I welcome the contribution of the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb). If I may paraphrase the words of a famous former Prime Minister, I assure the hon. Gentleman that his wife's pension is safe in our hands. *[Interruption.]* This might not be the right place to come to buy a second-hand car, but we are certainly looking after his wife's interests and her pension.

The hon. Gentleman agreed with clauses 1 to 4 and welcomed the provision on divorced spouses. He made an interesting point that I did not cover in my opening speech because I did not want to bore the House with the intricacies of the relationship between the Ecclesiastical Committee and the General Synod. However, as the matter has been raised, the House might now be aware that one aspect initially concerned the Ecclesiastical

Committee. In addition to the Measure providing an initial extension of seven years up to 2011, it also provided for an indefinite number of further extensions after 2011. The General Synod would have been able to obtain them via a statutory instrument that would have been subject to annulment in Parliament.

As the hon. Member for Salisbury said, and the hon. Member for Northavon emphasised, the importance of the Ecclesiastical Committee's role in the Church-state relationship meant that the Committee thought that it would be inappropriate for the power to be extended by statutory instrument. Instead, it decided that that should be done by means of a Measure that could be brought to the House for a debate like today's. The Measure returned to the General Synod and was amended by omitting the power to obtain further extensions through statutory instruments. The Ecclesiastical Committee was happy that the Church was prepared to amend it in that way, and co-operation between the Committee and the Synod has led to the Measure being debated on the Floor of the House.

My hon. Friend the Member for North-West Leicestershire rightly referred to the additional powers and responsibilities of the commissioners. They have a range of responsibilities upon which they expend their funds. They include parish ministry support, bishops' working costs, grants to cathedrals and money given to other bodies to support their administrative expenditure. As he said, much of that help is discretionary, and we are aware of the additional role. Non-pension responsibilities, however, stand alongside our statutory responsibilities for pensions arising for service from before 1998.

The key issue facing the commissioners is the management of their assets and income in the most effective and strategic way, so that they can make the best possible investment returns at the same time as they carry out their spending in a planned and coherent fashion. To take up my hon. Friend's point, providing discretionary funds to the parishes that are in need has led to us making substantial contributions of at least £20 million a year and they have been worked out with the Archbishops Council.

I trust that I have dealt with the points that have been raised. I again commend the Measure to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Synodical Government (Amendment) Measure

1.49 pm

Second Church Estates Commissioner (Mr. Stuart Bell): I beg to move,

That the Synodical Government (Amendment) Measure, passed by the General Synod of the Church of England, be presented to Her Majesty for Her Royal Assent in the form in which the said Measure was laid before Parliament.

I shall be brief. The Church of England has a system of synodical government, which gives representatives of clergy and lay people a role, along with bishops, in the governance of the Church at all levels. Although the principles underlying the system are long standing, a modern form of synodical government came into existence with the passing of the Synodical Government Measure in 1969 and the inauguration of the General Synod the following year.

The main proposals in the Measure before the House provide for amendments to Church representation rules made under the 1969 Measure and make detailed provision for a range of matters relating to the synodical structures of the Church.

Several of the changes are intended to confer more flexibility or lighten Church organisational structures; examples include reducing the minimum size of diocesan synods from 150 to 120, new arrangements for calculating the number of lay representatives on a parochial church council, and a power for another cleric to chair a parochial church council in the absence of the minister if the minister and the parochial church council agree and the bishop consents.

Other changes affecting parochial church councils include a new requirement that lay people aged 18 or over should have had their name on the electoral roll of a parish for at least six months before being eligible for election to its parochial church council or the deanery synod. This requirement is seen as a desirable protection against a sudden influx of new members with little previous involvement in parish life.

In addition, to make changes to Church representation rules, the Measure also make a number of miscellaneous changes to legislation on Church life at diocesan level.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): Is my hon. Friend aware that there is a problem with the Church electoral roll? The problem concerns who is on the roll and how its contents are made known. I raise a tangential but important point: without people's names appearing on the Church's electoral roll, there will be no democracy in the Church, and if their names do not appear on the other electoral roll, or if the Church does not have access to it, the problem will worsen.

Mr. Bell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who again shows the importance of having these debates on the Floor of the House. Curiously, the Ecclesiastical Committee did not challenge the most contentious proposal in the Measure—the requirement that a lay person should have been on the electoral roll of the parish for at least six months before qualifying for election to the PCC or deanery synod. The purpose of the change, which does not apply to anyone under 18, is to require that commitment be demonstrated to a

[Mr. Bell]

parish before seeking election to its PCC or the deanery synod. One may feel that six months is a long time; before one can stand as a parliamentary candidate for the Labour party, one has to be a member for two years.

The measure and the changes include the lightening of certain committee structures and an amendment to the functions of diocesan synods to enable them to approve the annual budget and accounts of the diocesan board of finance. This last change reflects an increasing desire to enhance strategic management by bringing the policy making and financial management of a diocese closer together.

The changes to synodical government effected by the Measure may at first sight seem both amorphous and modest. Taken together, they none the less represent a valuable and uncontentious first step in the process of synodical reform and development to which the Church stands committed. I therefore commend the Measure to the House.

1.56 pm

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): As the Member of Parliament for Salisbury, better known to some as Barchester, I warmly welcome this very sensible amendment to the small print of the rules of the Church of England. It is of considerable consequence; anyone who is not familiar with the politics of the Church would be surprised at the games of entryism that go on and the carpetbagging that occurs from time to time. These rules, which are designed to get around those problems, are very welcome and relevant.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): The hon. Gentleman refers to carpetbagging. One reason that many people join the electoral roll of a church is so that they can qualify to get married in that church. Does he think that that rule should change?

Mr. Key: No, I think that that is fair enough, because, entirely appropriately, residence qualifications are still required to get on the church's electoral roll. I also have no objection in this case to the positive discrimination in favour of young people to whom, under schedule 2, this rule will not apply.

The Measure is entirely sensible and once again illustrates the importance and relevance of the relationship between the established Church of England and Parliament.

1.57 pm

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I will not delay the House long, but I should like to add to the point that I made when I intervened on my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell). Unless people are registered on their church's electoral roll, the basic democracy of the Church becomes sadly weakened. For that to happen, however, they must be registered on the wider electoral role, which is becoming increasingly difficult because of data protection.

We do not need further barriers in the way of getting people on to the electoral roll, and I hope that the Church Commissioners will deal with the problems that have been brought to my attention in my constituency. More than one parochial church council representative has asked me to give them details of who is on the electoral roll as well as the numbers, because of budgetary considerations. The Church must be much more active in ensuring that it includes people on the electoral roll. Those of us who are active in the Church are worried that numbers are ridiculously low, given the importance of the Church in the community.

1.59 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I am grateful for the very clear way in which the Second Church Estates Commissioner, the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell), put the case for the Measure. Indeed, I am delighted to follow the hon. Members for Salisbury (Mr. Key) and for Stroud (Mr. Drew). The hon. Member for Salisbury and I go back some time, as he will recall from school days. I recall the very distinguished role that his father and brother both played in the Church of England, as have some members of my family.

Unlike my hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb), I have no pecuniary interest in the Measure, although I am a communicant member of the Church of England, I have been a member of a parochial church council and my brother is a parish priest. My grandfather was a parish priest in Cornwall at the time of the 1928 prayer book, and had been all his life. That was some 75 years ago and he decided then that it was time for disestablishment. He thought it absurd that the House should debate such issues and saw its role as an absurd intrusion into the work of the Church.

It is an irony that this interesting Measure, which the hon. Member for Middlesbrough introduced so elegantly, is all about democracy in the Church of England, yet out of the 659 people who in theory could vote on it in a few minutes' time it is unlikely that a majority would be members of the Church of England. In talking about democracy, we are negating democracy, which is a curious situation.

I hope that we will pass the Measure, which has been thoroughly thought through. It is important that we recognise, however, that it is only the first phase of more contentious proposals that are being considered. It is my ambition that when the second Measure is introduced it will not have to come before the House of Commons.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): Will the hon. Gentleman explain his new doctrine that we can vote only on things in which we are actively involved? The House normally votes on crime, but I am sure that no hon. Members are criminals. Would that debar them from voting on crime measures?

Mr. Tyler: I am tempted to say, "Speak for yourself."

In the debate and vote in the Synod, the votes were 24 to nil among the bishops, 160 to four among the clergy, and 175 to 14 among the laity. As has been said, that is a pretty clear majority compared with even the Government's majorities.

The hon. Member for Stroud made an interesting point about the church electoral roll. I hope that the hon. Member for Middlesbrough responds to that. It is critical to the Measure that the church electoral roll is

full of integrity and credibility and that it has the respect of parishioners; otherwise, the hierarchy of Church democracy is at risk.

The notes and minutes provided by the Ecclesiastical Committee, which is a Joint Committee of both Houses, are a model of their kind. I am not a member of the Committee and pay tribute to it for the way in which it has guided us on the issue. The documents explain that there was a sharp division on a number of Measures that form part of the 40 recommendations in the Bridge report. As far as I can establish, it is only those that have not caused controversy that are before us today. That is helpful, but I hope that the hon. Member for Middlesbrough agrees that we should have a full explanation of where opinion is divided if and when the next stage takes place.

The Committee discussed at length whether someone should be on the PCC electoral roll for 12 or six months and recommended a six-month rule, which is helpful. It will affect not just those who suddenly decide that they want to be involved in church work, but those who have moved from another parish where they were extremely active. In my part of the world, Cornwall, we want the expertise of retired people who have given good service to their parish and church in, for example, London. I have not come across any parochial church council that is worried about entryism. They are much more worried about departure, especially the call to their maker.

Mr. Bryant: I hesitate to correct the hon. Gentleman, but there is significant concern in the Church of England about many cases in which groups of people have tried to take over the local church. That is a worry in many parishes and the Measure is important.

Mr. Tyler: I would not for a moment suggest that the Measure is not important. I accept the six-month requirement. It is perfectly right and proper, although the same entryism could happen in six months and a day. In the end, however, that is democracy, as the hon. Gentleman's party knows only too well. Entryism was a major feature of the Labour party in the 1980s and he is right to be worried.

It is important that we recognise that the recommendation by the Ecclesiastical Committee is sensible. It is a useful compromise and, as I understand it, accepted by the entire Synod. I accept that the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) has particular expertise in the Church and direct personal knowledge of it, but we are more likely to look for more recruits for parochial church councils rather than to worry about too many suddenly arriving. I was nominated to a PCC, but we held the first election to it in recent memory, which ensured that better candidates were selected than me. So I am well aware of the ways in which the electoral system works.

The proposals are intended to improve the flexibility of democracy in the Church of England. Paragraph 4 of the report recommends a more realistic approach than that set out in the present arrangements, especially for smaller parishes. My parish in Cornwall is relatively small and we want to ensure that democracy is as healthy as it is in more populous parishes.

Continuity is also important. The way in which elections are held has been dealt with intelligently and sensibly and we have managed to avoid a problem. I understand the argument for a minimum size for the diocesan synod, but how many are in the band under consideration? The proposal is that the minimum size should be reduced from 150 to 120. I do not know how many diocesan synods would fall into that category. There was a suggestion to reduce it to 100, which might be more practical and effective in some circumstances.

The schedule is the critical consideration. The Synod team has been considering it for, I think, nine years, which is a long time.

Mr. Bell: Since 1997.

Mr. Tyler: But much work was done before that. The gestation period has been long. There is always a worry with any Measure that the road to hell may be paved with good intentions, but the detail should fulfil the aspirations of those who want to make the reforms. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will reassure us that the changes have the unanimous support of those in the Synod who proposed them, so that the Measure fulfils their expectations and aspirations.

I end as I began by saying that I am not only a loyal and supportive member of the Church of England, but a dedicated supporter of disestablishment. I hope that when we reach the second phase of the measures on democracy, we are able to let the Church of England be a democratic institution for the first time in its life since its creation by Henry VIII.

2.9 pm

Mr. Bell: With the leave of the House, I will respond to some points. The electoral roll has preoccupied many Members. The Measure makes a change to eligibility. Parishes are experiencing difficulties in being able to inspect the civil electoral civil roll, which they used to do for the purposes of electing church wardens, and we are looking into that matter.

A lay person is entitled to have his name entered if he is baptised, 16 or over, has signed an application form and declares himself to be either a member of the Church of England or of a church in communion with it and resident in the parish or to be such a member not being resident in the parish habitually having attended public worship in it during a period of six months prior to enrolment. The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) was absolutely right. The original period was one year but, following debate, was reduced to six months.

The third condition is to be a member in good standing of a church that subscribes to the doctrine of the holy trinity although it is not a church in communion with the Church of England. The person must also be prepared to declare himself a member of the Church of England, having habitually attended public worship in a parish during the six months prior to enrolment. The hon. Member for North Cornwall was perfectly right to remind me that although the Bridge report on synodical government was produced in 1997, discussion and research took place over several years beforehand. We heard that the road to hell is paved with good intentions, but the mills of God grind slowly and exceeding small. They certainly ground exceeding small in respect of that Measure.

When the report was published, response to it was divided. There were a number of controversial proposals, chiefly with regard to the size and

[Mr. Bell]

composition of the General Synod. The hon. Gentleman made an important point about the reduction in the number of members from 150 to 120 and specifically asked for the context. I will be glad to give him a reply in writing. I said earlier that the Ecclesiastical Committee did not challenge the Measure, but that does not mean that the Committee did not debate it in depth. It was a contentious proposal but it went unchallenged. I refer to the requirement that a lay person should be on the electoral roll of the parish for at least six months before qualifying for election to the parochial church council or deanery synod.

The hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) made a pertinent comment about the Measure's relevance and answered a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant), obviating the need for me to intervene. He referred also to the Church-state relationship that brings us to the Floor of the House, to which reference was made by the hon. Member for North Cornwall and, in a sedentary intervention, by my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda.

I hear a lot of propositions—I am propositioned all the time—about disestablishment but no one makes any specific proposals. We have had a lot of time since the days of Henry VIII. It has taken 100 years to get around to reforming the House of Lords, so I dread to think how long it will take to get around to disestablishment. However, I shall be happy to hear from anyone with proposals to make. My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) referred to the various problems that have arisen and spoke about a more proactive Church. I think that we would all say amen to that.

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House said earlier that we should not believe everything that we read in the newspapers and that sometimes stories are invented. However, I was sorry to read that the hon. Member for North Cornwall will be retiring at the next election. The hon. Gentleman also gave his age away. I will not divulge it on the Floor of the House. In one conversation with him, I mentioned that I had been to 25 Labour party conferences and felt proud of that achievement. He replied that he had attended 40 Liberal party conferences. Anyone who can attend 40 Liberal party conferences in his lifetime merits great congratulations from Labour Members.

The hon. Gentleman described my speech as elegant, and I hope that he also found it eloquent. I shall not go into detail about his speech. However, he referred to the work of the Ecclesiastical Committee and wanted to be advised of the next planning stage. We shall certainly take him up on that. On the issue of 150 or 120 members, he said that the road to hell is paved with good intentions, and referred to the need for detail. Of course, the devil, who is never far away, is in the detail. He also mentioned total unanimity in the Synod, which, like this Parliament, is never likely to achieve unanimity.

I am grateful that our short debate on synodical government has received the approval of the House and has been wide ranging in the best traditions of the House. I commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Fisheries

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): In case it was not entirely clear from the Order Paper, this debate will conclude at 6 pm. I should also tell the House that Mr. Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

2.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of European Union Document No. 2341/2002 of 20th December 2002, a Council Regulation fixing for 2003 the fishing opportunities and associated conditions for certain fish stocks, applicable in Community waters and, for Community vessels, in waters where catch limitations are required; European Union Document No. 2369/2002 of 20th December 2002, a Council Regulation amending Regulation (EC) No. 2792/1999 laying down the detailed rules and arrangements regarding Community structural assistance in the fisheries sector; European Union Document No. 2370/2002, a Council Regulation establishing an emergency Community measure for scrapping fishing vessels; European Union Document No. 2371/2002, a Council Regulation on the conservation and sustainable exploitation of fisheries resources under the Common Fisheries Policy; and European Union Document No. 14886/2002, a Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on a Community Action Plan to reduce discards of fish.

As I reported to the House in the pre-Fisheries Council debate on 21 November, the December Council was always going to be exceptionally difficult. It involved major decisions on the common fisheries policy and the review; the major issue of the cod recovery programme in the North sea; and effort management. The council was held over a five-day period, and involved a great deal of work and discussion. I pay tribute to my officials, my colleague in the Scottish Executive and the fishermen's leaders, who were actively engaged in discussions throughout the week.

In our previous debate, I set out the Government's objectives and our intended action against the background of scientific advice that the North sea should be closed to all fishing for cod-related stocks and the serious consequences of that advice for the fishing industry. I made it clear that total closure of the North sea, or an 80 per cent. reduction in fishing effort, which is frankly hardly different from total closure, or, indeed, the seven days a month limit were not acceptable and would simply destroy the infrastructure of the UK fishing industry. There would not be much point in introducing difficult and painful stock recovery programmes if there was no infrastructure left in the UK to benefit in future.

Those proposals were successfully resisted, but I have no illusions about the severe impact that the recovery proposals that were finally agreed will have on sections of our white fish fleet—I shall say more about that in a moment.

Shona McIsaac (Cleethorpes): I apologise for not being able to stay for the whole debate because of commitments in Committee. As my hon. Friend knows, some hon. Members fought to get compensation for distant-water trawlers after the Government's action in the cod wars. What is he doing to ensure that fishing

communities get compensation quickly if they lose their livelihood so that we do not have another 25-year fight for their rights?

Mr. Morley: My hon. Friend has raised an important issue. Of course, there is a case for a support package for the fishing industry, and I shall say more about that later. I recognise that many fishing communities, including those in Grimsby and Cleethorpes, will be affected to a varying extent by the changes—we are not going to ignore that.

There are aspects of the three amendments tabled by Opposition parties with which I do not disagree. However, I find the Conservative amendment the most unreasonable. One issue raised by the amendments is the need to recognise the impact on fishing communities. We do recognise it, and take it seriously. I shall come to that in a moment.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): When the Minister returned from the Fisheries Council blinking into the sunlight, he describe the package as "a balanced outcome" and "a turning point", whereas the Scottish Minister who was carrying his bags that week described it as "inequitable, unfair and crude". Which was it?

Mr. Morley: I understand that the hon. Gentleman feels it necessary to make such points, but I can assure him that Ross Finnie was involved in every stage, every aspect and every detail of the negotiations that week. I very much appreciate his support and backing in an extremely difficult negotiation. I do not disagree with anything that Ross Finnie said in the Scottish Parliament about those discussions. If the hon. Gentleman listens to what I say in the debate, he will find that there are echoes of what Ross Finnie said.

I made it clear in discussions before the Council that I could not and would not ignore the scientific advice, which was serious, and that we had to respond to that advice in a credible and responsible way. Destroying fish stocks will, of course, also destroy the fishing industry. My approach was guided by the views of Members of the House and reports from the House of Lords Select Committee on the European Union, which considered the common fisheries policy and concluded that

"the manifest failure of the CFP during its first two decades has been in large measure due to lack of political will in the face of clear scientific advice."

I had to take that comment seriously. It was echoed by the Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. I am pleased to see that its Chairman, the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), is present. The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee report on the CFP stated that

"the state of some stocks, particularly that of North Sea cod, is so poor there can be no excuse for failing to act rapidly to reverse the declines."

The report continued:

"Courageous and decisive action is needed to safeguard both stocks and the fishing livelihoods that depend upon them."

I took those comments from the two all-party Select Committees very seriously.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): The EU documentation makes it clear that discards—the throwing of dead fish back into the sea—is a massive problem. Hundreds of thousands of tonnes of fish are needlessly wasted every year under that mad policy. Why did the Minister press not just for study and discussion but for immediate action to stop the scandal of killing all those small fish, throwing them back into the water and making no use of them?

Mr. Morley: We do want action, and we want it to be effective. That means identifying the problems. I am pleased that one of the positive outcomes related to CFP reform, including a discard policy, which addresses part of the right hon. Gentleman's point. I should emphasise that the vast majority of discards in the fishing industry are of undersized and non-commercial fish. We must address the matter as an aspect of fisheries management. I shall speak about that in due course.

Mr. Anthony Steen (Totnes): As the Minister knows, we have been going round this track for about 30 years. We could go back 30 years or so—the hon. Gentleman would not have been in government—and find Ministers of both parties saying that there were too many fishermen and too few fish, and that we must do something about it. Nothing has been done about it. Ministers keep saying that the scientific evidence is terribly important and we must do something about it, but nothing happens. I shall be interested to hear what the Minister says. I enjoy hearing him say the same thing every time. Are we going to make any progress? Surely the only way to make progress is to recognise that there is only a certain amount of fish and that there must be an auction. The fishermen should decide who will bid for each quota, dividing the amount of fish by the number of fishermen. We cannot go on trying to decide that fishing—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is breaking into a speech.

Mr. Morley: As always, the hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen) has some interesting suggestions regarding fisheries. I know that he has extensive experience of and background in the subject. There is some truth in what he says. For many years the problem has been acknowledged and people have been saying that we must do something about it, but action will inevitably be painful. It has always been resisted both by Fisheries Ministers from European countries and by the industry. Even now, there are people who deny the need to take action on the basis of the scientific advice. If we do not address the problem, there will be the constant spiral of decline that the hon. Gentleman correctly identifies.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): On the absence of political will, does the Minister recall that a decade ago the House voted to introduce effort control in the form of days at sea? That was never implemented and, like practically every other conservation measure, it was fiercely opposed by the industry. Does the Minister think that, in retrospect, had it been applied, we would be in quite the mess that we are in now, including over days at sea?

Mr. Morley: I thought the right hon. Gentleman might mention that, and he has every right to do so.

[Mr. Morley]

There are different forms of effort management. I recall the debate on the proposals to introduce effort control. There were problems with that. The right hon. Gentleman will recognise that there were great difficulties in terms of bureaucracy, ascertaining people's right to days, and the appeal procedures. It was a difficult and complicated structure, and there were some valid criticisms from the industry, which I acknowledge.

There is no perfect system of fisheries management. If there were, it would have been introduced long ago. We must therefore examine the range of management tools available and try to adapt them in the most effective way. I have always had an open-minded approach to these matters, including effort control. I listen to what the industry says. I tried to persuade the Commissioner to take a different approach and consider a recovery programme that did not involve effort control of that kind. With reference to Ross Finnie's remarks, I agree that the measure is crude. Of course, it is an interim measure, and I shall discuss the details in a moment.

Sir Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): The Minister is right to say that there is no perfect system of management of stocks, but would it not be an awful lot easier to tie the industry in if we had proper, effective regional management of the industry in the North sea? How soon does he believe he can achieve that?

Mr. Morley: Yes, I do agree with that. One of the successes of the CFP reform is that we have put in place the regional advisory councils. We want to get them up and running as quickly as possible. It is the beginning of a process, and we need to build on those councils. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that an element of regional management and regional involvement, particularly the involvement of the industry, is essential for future fisheries management. That is the direction in which we want to go and for which we were arguing.

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster (Hastings and Rye): Will my hon. Friend immediately discount the suggestion made by the hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen) that the market should play some part in divvying up the fish? The birthright of my constituents in Hastings and Rye, who cannot afford to enter the market, would be compromised. Will my hon. Friend discount that Conservative proposal entirely?

Mr. Morley: I understand the concerns of my hon. Friend, who has been a great advocate for and friend of the Hastings Beach fleet. I made it a priority to exempt the under-10 m fleet from the effort control restrictions, recognising that it is a low-impact fishery. I understand the concerns for such fleets, which are unlikely to become involved in an open-bidding market. Quota is bought and sold; that is a feature of the fishing industry, but the under-10 m fleet is not part of the inshore fleet. The inshore fleet is non-sector, and managed by the Department. We recognise the low impact that it has. It should be exempted from the range of measures that we were successful in achieving.

Dr. Stephen Ladyman (South Thanet): : May I pass on to my hon. Friend the thanks of the Ramsgate under-10 m fishing fleet for his efforts? He gets all too little praise in the House. The fleet is broadly pleased with the outcome of the negotiations and wants to thank the Minister and also his officials, who are unfailingly helpful to it.

Mr. Morley: I appreciate that. It is worth remembering that the majority of the boats in the United Kingdom fishing fleet are under 10 m. They support many small, isolated communities. They employ low-impact, traditional methods. I have always had a great deal of admiration for the way in which they operate, and always tried to take their needs into account.

Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby): On the issue of under-10 m boats, will my hon. Friend also confirm my understanding that recreational fishermen who have diversified from the main fishery would fall into that category and therefore not be affected by these proposals?

Mr. Morley: Yes, I can confirm that both under-10 m boats involved in recreational fishery and larger boats that are not carrying fishing gear but are involved in recreational fishery are exempt from the restrictions.

Mr. Salmond: Can we just inject a little reality into this? The overwhelming majority of the white fish industry does not depend on boats under 10 m, important though they are in certain communities. The overwhelming majority of the white fish industry depends on reasonably sized boats. That sector is now at risk of total financial and fishing collapse over the next few months. I know that the Minister has been asked a variety of questions, but will he now turn his attention to the question of whether it is his policy to see that vital historical part of the fleet survive or not?

Mr. Morley: It is absolutely my priority to ensure that that part of the fleet survives. Our fishing fleet is divided into different sectors which have different priorities and operate in different ways. They are all equally important to me as the UK Fisheries Minister. It is worth remembering, however, that the majority of vessels are under 10 m, and that an awful lot of people are involved in that sector. They have needs and rights, which I recognise. I acknowledge the point that the hon. Gentleman makes, particularly in relation to his own constituency, that the white fish fleet on the east coast of Scotland is a very important economic driver in the fishing industry. I absolutely concede that point.

Andrew George (St. Ives): I thank the Minister for giving way once again. His taking of interventions is one of the valuable aspects of this debate, because a great deal is elucidated by it. In the light of the issue raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Sir Archy Kirkwood) about regional management committees, which we would prefer, does the Minister agree that there has been a change of culture in the industry in recent years? Does he also agree that we need a change from treating fishermen as perpetrators to treating them as partners in the management of their industry? That is the big change

that has taken place over the last 10 years, and I urge the Minister to take that on board in future deliberations on the development of the policy.

Mr. Morley: Yes, I absolutely accept that. It is unfortunate that there has been a widening gulf between the fishermen and the scientists, for example. One of the objectives to which I want to turn my attention is how to bring those two sectors together in future. I shall touch upon that again later.

Mr. Steen: One or two of the Minister's Back Benchers mentioned two or three boats with six or eight people running them round the bay in Bexhill or Ramsgate and tried to distract him from the important point that I made earlier. I should be grateful if he could deal with it now. Would it not be a way forward to have an auction of the quota, once the European Community has fixed the quota? That way, the fish would be allowed to live, and we could then eat them.

Mr. Morley: I shall give the hon. Gentleman a serious answer to that. I can see some major disadvantages to his suggestion. I know exactly what he is saying, and there is an element of market forces at work in quota trading as it stands. That can be beneficial, particularly in relation to producer organisations ensuring that quota remains within their regions. There are advantages to that. If, however, we follow the full-blown logic of the hon. Gentleman's proposal, it would result in the disadvantage of the Icelandic individual transferable quota system, which, although it has some advantages in management terms, has had the effect of concentrating ownership of the quota in the hands of a very limited number of companies. That is a problem. I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman's rather disparaging remarks about those who work the in-shore boats in my hon. Friends' constituencies. They are as important to me as anybody else; they support families and communities, and they have every right to be taken into account and to have their needs recognised. I intend to ensure that that happens.

I appreciate the comments of the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) about interventions. I do hope that my taking interventions will not lead to the length of my opening speech being held against me. I had prepared a speech of a fairly standard length, but I am happy to take interventions because this is an important debate on serious issues and I know that everybody who attends such debates has a genuine and sincere interest in them. I take that very seriously.

Mrs. Joan Humble (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood): May I return my hon. Friend to remarks that he was making earlier about the importance of scientific advice? The fishing communities that are being hit by the cuts in quota feel that it is equally important that the views of the fishermen are taken into account when determining the level of fish stocks. Nobody disputes that the levels have gone down, but the extent of that reduction can be disputed. Will my hon. Friend confirm that he takes seriously the views of the fishermen who are actually fishing for these stocks?

Mr. Morley: I do take that seriously, and I shall touch on that matter in a moment. The experiences and views of the fishermen—the data from their log books, for example—are taken into account in relation to stock projection. I recognise that there are some problems, however. In that respect, I want to try to bring the two sides together and involve them more to ensure that the fishing industry is involved in the scientific projections and that the scientists listen to what the industry has to say.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): We welcome that assurance. The hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) mentioned a spirit of partnership, which is necessary. The hon. Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) takes a great interest in the Fleetwood fishermen, and she will recall that I reminded the Minister that, in 2000, there was a tie-up east of the Isle of Man based on the sort of scientific advice that he now advocates, because the scientists claimed that it was not a cod spawning area. It turned out to be one, and the tie-up was a disaster. The fishermen were right and the scientists were wrong on that occasion.

Mr. Morley: I do not know who the hon. Gentleman has been talking to, but that is totally wrong. In fact, the fishermen in Fleetwood have raised a number of technical issues with me about the cod recovery programme, which I took very seriously. My hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood arranged meetings for me in Fleetwood and I went along and talked to the fishermen. Their concern was about the level of cod in the eastern Irish sea. As a result of their representations, which I took seriously, we arranged trial trawls in the eastern Irish sea—by chartering boats from the fishing industry—which demonstrated that the cod population in the spawning period was extremely low. In fact, the closed area in the western Irish sea was precisely the area in which there was a concentration. That has been the basis of the three-year cod recovery programme, which is supported by the fishermen of the Irish sea.

It was inevitable, given that the UK had the majority of the quota for the most threatened stocks, that the December Council was never going to provide a good outcome for the fishing industry as regards quotas. But not responding to those threats or to the scientific advice was not an option for us either, not least because the threat of emergency measures being imposed by the Commission was a very real one, and we had to take that into account. We paid a great deal of attention to the details of the common fisheries policy and, in terms of the reforms, this at least provided a better outcome for the UK.

In relation to the reforms, the UK achieved all its principal objectives. Those objectives have been repeatedly called for by hon. Members in the House and they include a commitment to a multi-annual approach to stock management and to recovery plans for depleted stocks, and the renewal of our six and 12-mile zones. We pressed very hard for that measure to be without limits, but, unfortunately, the Commission's legal services advised that all aspects of Commission and Council decisions have to be reviewed at intervals. The wording

[Mr. Morley]

of the final decision contained an assumption that these provisions will continue even though they are up for review. That was important.

Mr. Salmond: As the Minister knows, the Spanish fleet now has access to the North sea, but not to pressurised stocks. I have read the Commission's account of the Council meeting, and it seems to suggest that inspections of Spanish boats in the North sea can be carried out only with the consent of the Spanish authorities. If that is the case, it will be a disaster. I hope that it is not the case. Will the Minister tell me whether it is the case, and clarify the account that I have seen in the Commission's explanatory notes?

Mr. Morley: That is most certainly not my understanding. Any EU vessel within a member-state zone is subject to the enforcement and inspection measures agreed by the EU.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): Will the Minister confirm that this country will use its powers and inspect those vessels?

Mr. Morley: This country inspects all vessels that are fishing in our waters and we will continue to do so. Indeed, enforcement and inspection is one of the areas that have been strengthened and we strongly argued that that should happen.

We also obtained the retention of the principle of relative stability, which is very important and is one of the priorities of our fishing industry, as hon. Members have said. We have also retained the Hague preference. That was not easy, because it benefited only the Republic of Ireland and us, but it has nevertheless been retained. As has been pointed out, there was no adjustment of stock allocations in the North sea in favour of Spain or Portugal. Even though they have access under accession, that is meaningless economically without a quota to go with it.

The Shetland box has been retained pending a review of all restricted areas in 2003. Public aid for fishing vessels is being ended, as is aid for the transfer of EU fishing vessels to third countries from 31 December 2004. That issue was controversial and was an important sticking point in the Commission negotiations. Indeed, there was a threat that Commission powers would be used in relation to that issue because it proved so controversial. We would have preferred the aid to have ended immediately, but its doing so in 2004 is a reasonable outcome in the circumstances. There are also limitations on modernisation aid.

Countries that use public funds for building will, in addition to the aggregation penalties of 1:1.35 that they will have to apply for vessels of more than 100 tonnes, have to reduce capacity by 3 per cent. over two years as a penalty. That was also agreed at the Fisheries Council. There is also an increase in the maximum rate of scrapping grants in the EU.

Major improvements in enforcement arrangements are important in relation to what I have been saying about better information and co-operation, and information sharing between member states. Provision to establish regional advisory councils has been mentioned. We regard the councils as very important and see them as the beginning of the process. We want to strengthen them over time, but the priority was to establish them, as the proposal was controversial when it was originally made.

The policy on discards, on which I can now provide some details, includes technical measures dealing with the structure of nets and making them more selective. The policy will take into account the issue of minimum landing sizes, which has been raised before in the House. Hon. Members will be pleased that the landing sizes are going to be reviewed with a view to the possibility of raising them. Catch composition in relation to defined mesh sizes also needs to be considered, as will the application of closed areas and real-time closures when, for example, there are temporary concentrations of juvenile fish or spawning areas are identified.

The fishing industry has been keen to make progress on all those issues, which hon. Members on both sides of the House have raised on a number of occasions. I am pleased to see that those points have been agreed.

Mr. Peter Duncan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): The Minister suggested that the Government were effectively satisfied that they had got all the CFP reforms that they wanted. Does that mean that they are now satisfied that the CFP will deliver for British and Scottish fisherman in the next 30 years, just as it has failed them for the past 30 years?

Mr. Morley: These are important improvements, but I do not want to pretend that they are the be-all and end-all. As far as I am concerned, this is the beginning of a process. However, the changes are beneficial and address some of the problems in the CFP. Of course, we want to make further progress, and we will do so over time.

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): May I join other hon. Members in welcoming my hon. Friend's achievement in exempting under-10 m vessels from the days-at-sea regime? Will he also confirm that he has secured extra days' fishing for those whose method is long lining? Most of them are covered by the rule, but will he confirm that the figure is 19 days for those who are not covered, bearing in mind that people would want a couple of days off a week or eight days off a month? Does he agree that that is quite an achievement?

Mr. Morley: Following the representations that my hon. Friend has made and having met long liners from his constituency, I told the Commission that, in relation to recovery plans, we should take into account the sort of gear that is being used and how selective it is. Long lining is very selective and involves minimal discards. Indeed, it is often possible to return the fish to the water alive and that has been recognised in the 19-day allocation. Other forms of gear may be equally selective. I should like to explore that issue and will continue to argue for further exemptions for gear that is selective and minimises discards.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): One of the most selective and conservation-efficient forms of

fishing is anchor seining, which is practised by Grimsby vessels. Will my hon. Friend work to ensure that that is excluded in the same way as long lining?

Mr. Morley: Yes, I most certainly will. I know that the Grimsby anchor seiners use a net with very large mesh because they are targeting large, high-quality fish. Of course, I cannot ignore the fact that we have a severe problem with cod. That includes taking into account the total allowable catch and total quotas, and that involves the anchor seiners. However, as we develop the cod recovery programme, we will have to take into account the issue of minimising discards and selectivity. It is perfectly legitimate for whatever system is in place to recognise that fishermen are using selective gear, and the anchor seiners are certainly a case in point.

Mr. Peter Duncan: In considering very selective forms of fishing and the settlement that has been reached, we see that Danish factory boats can sail off into the sunset with a by-catch that is effectively unlimited and unaffected. That seems a totally inequitable settlement and I would be obliged if the Minister would comment.

Mr. Morley: I agree that that is unfinished business in relation to the industrial fleet, and yes, the arrangement is inequitable. As I have said before, the problem is a lack of scientific information in relation to the level of by-catches of the industrial fleet, especially of the sand eel. There is no argument in relation to the Norwegian pout fishery, which is included in the discards strategy. One of the assurances that we have in relation to reform of the CFP is that the impact of industrial fishing and its by-catch in particular will be examined in detail, which I very much welcome. In case I have not written this down in my notes, I should also say that we reached agreement on extension of the closed area to industrial fishing off the east coast of Scotland and Northumbria for a fourth year. That is the first time that a closed area has ever been agreed in relation to industrial fishing.

Mr. Salmond: If I remember rightly, that area was agreed because of the potential effect on sea birds, as the Minister will recall. Given that the area has been agreed, that he has been banging on about industrial fishing for as long as he has been speaking for the Government about fisheries and that he has now been the Fisheries Minister for more than five years, why is no research available on the impact of industrial fishing, which we all know is devastating to a marine environment? He is telling us that there is no research. Why not? Is he not the Minister?

Mr. Morley: I said that there were no clear scientific findings. Research has been conducted, but to date, it has not identified a very high white fish by-catch. We need to do more work on that issue, but I do not want the hon. Gentleman to think that nothing has happened. The problem is that the work that has been done has not identified the sort of problem that is being portrayed.

As the hon. Gentleman rightly says, fishing for human consumption should always take priority. I believe that the scale of industrial fishing must have an impact on ecology and ecosystems, so we must take the issue seriously and examine it. Progress is slow and I am not exactly pleased about that, but since I have been fisheries Minister, a TAC has been applied to industrial fishing for the first time. That TAC has been cut since I have been a Minister, although not by as much as I would like, and closed areas have been introduced. That is a bit of progress compared to what happened in the past. I am not pretending that it is enough, but I do not think that he should allege that nothing has been done.

Andrew George: The Minister said that there had been insufficient research and therefore implied that there is insufficient information. He will know that, as was reported in *Fishing News* on 13 December, two Danish industrial vessels were found with landings on board of which between half and three quarters was white fish. Both were landing 500 tonnes of fish. We know that that has a devastating effect. Frankly, we do not need any more research on the matter. Action needs to be taken now, and that is the widespread feeling in the industry.

Mr. Morley: I know that. I raised the issue with the Commission and referred specifically to the story in *Fishing News*. However, the Pout industrial fishery has a white fish by-catch. The story covered an illegal landing and the Danish authorities are dealing with the fishermen. Denmark has far more draconian penalties than this country. It can remove people's fishing licences—a penalty that I might like to consider.

Although the story covers illegal activity, that does not mean that we should not tackle the issue, which demonstrates the impact of industrial fishing. However, we must deal with illegal activity wherever it occurs. It is unfortunately not restricted to one country. Any fisherman who has been involved in black fish landings or misreporting has done equal damage to stocks and the reputation of our industry. When we pressed the Commissioner for alternatives that involved technical measures, we encountered some cynicism in the Commission because of the record of widespread abuse of the rules and black fish landings. Any fishermen who have been involved in that have undermined not only conservation and the future of the fishing stocks for their companions, but the credibility of their countries when they argue for change.

Angus Robertson (Moray): The Under-Secretary said that the Danish authorities had draconian penalties, which he would consider introducing in the United Kingdom. If he had read more than the introductory paragraph in *Fishing News*, he might have stumbled across the fact that the Danish authorities have withdrawn the licences of the two boats for one month. Is that a draconian measure?

Mr. Morley: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would like to ask fishermen about the effect of not being able to go to sea for a month. That is not the only penalty that has been applied.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): The Minister mentioned cynicism about black fish and other illegal activity. However, according to the Commission's figures, there have been fewer prosecutions of UK fishermen than those of other EU nations. In that case, why does the burden appear to fall on this country's fishermen?

Mr. Morley: Because the hon. Gentleman refers to a one-year report. I am glad that our enforcement and

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control measures are so effective. That has been one of our priorities. However, I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to the infraction proceedings, which proved humiliating for the UK because of our failure to enforce quotas properly for 11 years up to 1997. My comments apply to the past because enforcement and control has improved. Nevertheless, such a reputation dies slowly. I repeat that all those who have been involved in misreporting and black fish landings have done the fishing industry no favours.

The recovery plan is an interim measure. The arrangements will be established pending further discussions, with the end of March as the target date for agreement and July as that for implementation. A great deal of work remains to be done. I understand the fishing industry's anxieties about the proposals for the North sea and the west of Scotland. During the negotiations, I met industry representatives regularly in Brussels. Leaders of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation and the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations made powerful arguments and forcefully presented their members' views. I tried to respond to them and take them into account as much as possible.

Short-term pain is inevitable given the scientific advice and the relevant stocks. The aim is to secure a long-term future, and I regret the short-term effect on individuals and communities. I understand the implications, and that is why we have worked so hard to provide as much flexibility in the schemes as is consistent with scientific advice. That involved Government activity at all levels, including the intervention of the Prime Minister, to ensure the maximum flexibility that we believed that the science justified.

The Commission was rightly adamant, given the state of the stocks, that the emergency recovery plan had to be agreed and implemented without delay. It needed to be simple, even crude if necessary. The Commission was also adamant that the plan had to make a genuine impact on fishing effort—another justifiable position given the fair scientific conclusions that the dire state of the stocks is directly attributable to the failure of the TAC-based management policy that has been pursued until now to achieve the necessary reduction in effort.

The Commission originally proposed that white fish demersal trawlers should be allowed a mere seven days a month out of port. That would have meant unacceptable devastation to the economies of most of the relevant UK vessels. My colleagues and I spent almost the entire five-day Council meeting arguing for an increase that would strike a balance between maximum flexibility and the scientific advice.

The solution that we eventually secured will allow the UK's demersal trawlers 15 days a month. I shall explain some of the details. Hon. Members will note that the regulations specify a monthly allowance of nine days for such trawlers. However, the EU text allows extra days to be allocated to member states to compensate for steaming time between ports and fishing grounds. There is also provision for the allocation of further days on the basis of the achieved or expected results of the decommissioning proposals. In line with what the industry pressed for, I ensured that the decommissioning round last year and the technical measures that the industry had implemented were taken into account in the effort calculations.

The relevant provisions are in annexe 17 of the regulations, which set TACs and quotas for 2003. They will result in UK white fish demersal trawlers receiving an extra six days a month—a total of 15 days. That days-at-sea scheme applies in the North sea and the west of Scotland from 1 February. As I said earlier, it does not apply to vessels that are under 10 m in length. Different days-at-sea allowances are set for different sorts of gear, as hon. Members pointed out. There is no limit on pelagic trawlers and 25 days a month are allowed for nephrops vessels. That means that they can operate as normal. The days are specified to try to prevent effort from increasing.

Sir Archy Kirkwood: The nephrops fishery fears that effort will be diverted as a result of the closure. Will the Under-Secretary give some assurances to places such as Eyemouth in my constituency, where such fishing takes place?

Mr. Morley: Yes, we recognise that there is always a risk of diversion of effort. However, measures exist to counter that, such as the ceiling and way in which the calculations work. Those who fish for nephrops must also have a nephrops net. However, we take the hon. Gentleman's point seriously.

Mr. Salmond: For clarity, will the Under-Secretary confirm that even the 15 days have been bought at the expense of not only past decommissioning and technical change but an expected further decommissioning round? The industry did not argue for that, and the Under-Secretary knows it.

Mr. Morley: It is true that the UK has made a commitment to a decommissioning scheme. The inevitable result of the pressures on the industry is that a decommissioning scheme must be part of the package. It would be foolish to pretend otherwise. As it was always inevitable that we would have to consider that, there is nothing wrong in obtaining extra days for the fishing fleet as part of the commitment.

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): Will the Under-Secretary confirm the percentage reduction that is required for us to buy the extra days? There is currently a dispute in Scotland about the number of white fish boats in the fleet. Will the hon. Gentleman assure us that an unrealistically liberal number of boats will not have to be taken into account?

Mr. Morley: I can confirm that the decommissioning reduction will take place in the North sea white fish fleet. We will be considering a reduction of between 15 and 20 per cent. That is a reasonable target. I cannot give exact figures immediately for making an impact on the problem and helping the fishing industry, but I am happy to write to the hon. Gentleman. As he appreciates, management of the Scottish fleet is a matter for the Scottish Executive.

Mr. Alan Reid (Argyll and Bute): The Under-Secretary said that the nephrops fleet was exempt and

was allowed 25 days at sea. Does he realise that some nephrops vessels in the west of Scotland use twin rigs and mesh sizes of more than 100 m—*Interruption.*]—I mean 100 mm? There is therefore an anomaly. Those vessels are restricted to 15 days at sea, but if they used a smaller mesh size, they would get 25 days at sea. Will the Under-Secretary sort out the problem so that nephrops fishermen can continue to use larger mesh sizes?

Mr. Morley: I suspect that that is the kind of catch balance that individual fishermen are going for. The hon. Gentleman is right to suggest that such points of detail need to be addressed as part of the talks about the regime that will be in place from July. That is inevitable, and no one is pretending that this is not a crude scheme. It is not our preferred option, and in trying to refine it between now and March, we will address some of the hon. Gentleman's points.

Mr. Salmond: What happens between now and July? Will the prawners have to revert to 80 mm to get the extra days? The Minister will appreciate the cost of re-gearing a boat.

Mr. Morley: I do, but I do not know the exact catch composition or the fishery concerned, and the best way to deal with that point is to consider the advice of the department in Scotland with responsibility for fisheries.

Mr. Steen: Most of the interventions have been from the Scots. [*Interruption.*] I am not holding that against them, I am just stating a fact. The concern in the west country is that Scottish fishermen will move south. The deal that the Minister has managed to pull off for the south-west was better than most Members thought he could pull off, and we are grateful for that, but what happens when the Scots come marauding down into the English channel, eating up the fish that are currently fished by west countrymen. Is he going to erect some sort of barrier to prevent that from happening?

Mr. Morley: No, their vessels are UK vessels, and they are entitled to fish in UK waters according to the rules and to their quota—as, indeed, is every fishing vessel. Our job is to look at the immediate problems, and the hon. Gentleman is right to say that the south-west has been exempted from the effort control regime. That happened because it does not have the same kind of problems. The industry also asked me to ensure that measures that have been in place for some years in respect of the Irish sea—and which are showing some welcome, if modest, signs of improvement—are also taken into account, and I have done so.

The days at sea scheme will be applied to the North sea and the west of Scotland from 1 February. It exempts the "under-10s" and the pelagic trawlers, and there is no real restriction on the nephrops trawlers. My colleagues and I attach great importance to protecting sections of the industry against unwarranted restrictions. The arrangements do not apply in the Irish sea. Last year's cod recovery arrangements have been in place for some time; they are working, and the industry is supporting them. I also recognise the commitment that the industry has made in that regard.

In addition, the Council adopted TACs, which represent reductions of some 50 per cent. on 2002 levels for key white fish stocks of cod, haddock and whiting. Taken as a whole, TACs for pelagic species are largely the same as in 2002. In respect of the three nephrops stocks that are of interest to the UK, we secured a repeat of the 2002 levels, despite the Commission's original proposal for reductions. We considered that proposal to be unjustified, and we successfully argued against it.

I fully recognise that many members of the UK industry consider days-at-sea restrictions to be anathema. Unfortunately, we are not in a position to argue that things should carry on unchanged, or to ignore the scientific advice, and we must act if the mixed white fish fishery is to have any long-term future. The agreed provisions are much less devastating than the original proposal, but I understand that they are unwelcome and will have an impact. They represent the best balance that could be struck at this time between the industry's long-term and short-term interests, and in terms of the level of support within the council.

We shall obviously need to take further management decisions in future as we travel the road to recovery—not least when the Commission fulfils its intention to introduce proposals for a more sophisticated and longer-term recovery plan. That is supposed to happen by 15 February, and they could enter into force by 1 July, but a lot of work yet needs to be done. During the discussions, we will need to aim for the same balance that we sought in respect of the emergency recovery plan.

It is at least encouraging to note that in future discussions on fisheries management, we shall be working under a stronger and sounder common fisheries policy framework than in the past, but unfinished issues remain. We have touched on industrial fishing, minimum mesh size and minimum landing size, which are being addressed. Moreover, the hake recovery plan is also supposed to be finalised by July. We did achieve what the industry asked for, which was a mid-term review of the scientific advice on cod, and if it proves to be different from previous advice, it will of course be linked to TACs. That will also be dealt with by the scientific and technical committee, and it will provide an opportunity to look at the details of effort management.

During the recovery programme, I want also to look at ways of decoupling haddock and whiting stocks from cod recovery, because I realise that they are not in as poor shape as cod stocks. However, we do not want to over-emphasise the condition of those stocks, because there is cause for concern. I am very interested in work on separator trawls. Certain designs of separator trawls could allow the use of 110 mm mesh in a mixed fishery, with a larger mesh underneath to allow cod to escape. I want to explore such initiatives with the industry, and for it to become more involved in scientific studies.

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen, South): On separator trawls, has my hon. Friend had a chance to read the information—I sent it to him this week—from a retired constituent of mine who used to work in the fishing industry? He did a great deal of work on that initiative a few years' ago, and he hopes that the ideas that he developed then might be of use to the industry.

Mr. Morley: I should be very interested to read about those ideas. Separator trawls for mixed fisheries have been trialled by the Sea Fish Industry Authority, so

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some work has already been done. Of course, if we are to get acceptance it is likely that we will have to demonstrate to the Commission the effectiveness of that initiative.

Lawrie Quinn: The Minister is detailing the empathy that he feels for the short-term pain of people at the quayside, and many people in my constituency are fearful of bankruptcy in the short term. Can he tell the House what efforts he has made to hold discussions with banking institutions or regional development agencies in England? Can he also say a little about the real concerns of the safety implications of the measures that he has outlined?

Mr. Morley: On the safety implications and the days-at-sea regime, we recognise that there are potential problems. They have been addressed via pressure from the UK, in that there is 20 per cent. flexibility in terms of the months during which one can bank and borrow, to reflect bad weather, for example. In an extreme case whereby someone was tied up in port for the whole of February because of bad weather, under the arrangements the total number of February days can be added to the March days over a two-month period. In that way, the days can be accumulated. That gives people the flexibility to cope with weather conditions, and it takes some pressure off them.

I cannot give details of the financial package today, because it is still being worked on. I spoke to my colleagues in the Department of Trade and Industry this afternoon, and we are also talking to the regional development agencies. Of course, the Prime Minister is taking a personal interest in this issue, and he will meet industry leaders towards the end of the month. That work is therefore ongoing, and similar work is under way in parallel in the Scottish Parliament, in terms of the support package required by the Scottish industry.

Mr. Savidge: The fishing industry still has a tragically high level of injury and loss of life. The Minister said that decommissioning will occur, but can the safety of vessels be taken into consideration in choosing which are retained and which are decommissioned?

Mr. Morley: We do not apply a general criterion in relation to the condition of vessels; it is entirely up to individual owners as to whether they want to submit their vessels for decommissioning. There is a legal standard that must be applied to any fishing vessel that is operating normally. Funds are available for modernisation and improvement through our financial instrument for fisheries guidance programme, which is open to all fishermen. I want information to be available in all fishing ports about the grants and so forth that are available to the industry as part of the recovery package, so that those who feel that they could benefit can take advantage of what is there.

Mr. Weir: The Minister has mentioned aid. A circular letter that he sent Members this morning states:

"We will be considering further arrangements for decommissioning vessels for those who wish to leave the industry, and will make a further announcement as soon as possible. In addition the regional agencies will be ready to assist fisheries-dependent communities through the range of instruments available to them."

Will the Treasury give the agencies any extra funds—particularly in Scotland, where the impact on many communities will be devastating?

Mr. Morley: The work is still under way, but various agencies and other bodies are provided with funds to help communities affected by restructuring, and the fishing industry has as much as a claim to support as, say, a large factory that has had to close. Funds are already available to deal with such eventualities; it is a question of the best support that can be given to the industry.

Lawrie Quinn: There is a history of such funds' not reaching communities at the quayside. That is regrettable, and offensive to those affected by restructuring. Will the Minister try hard to persuade his colleagues in other Departments that fishing communities must be targeted?

Mr. Morley: I appreciate that necessity. In the last round of English decommissioning, funds to help fishing communities were made available through what was then the Department for Environment, Transport and the Regions. Some of my hon. Friends felt at the time that the funds were spread too thinly and were not aimed at the appropriate targets as effectively as they should have been, but I assure my hon. Friend of my determination that that will not happen this time. I will discuss the application of the funds with the regional development agencies: I have already given them written warning that I shall want to do so.

Mrs. Humble: When he looks at the economic packages, will the Minister consider giving financial support to keep the industry alive, rather than just providing money enabling fishermen to decommission their vessels and get out of the industry? Fishermen are suffering cuts now so that they will be in a position to fish when—hopefully—stocks recover in the future.

Mr. Morley: I understand my hon. Friend's point, but we cannot ignore such issues as state aid rules. However, we are trying to take all these points into account in putting the package together.

Mr. Salmond: There is plenty of scope in existing regulation and, for that matter, in the new Commission guidelines. But, as the hon. Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) pointed out, we want an aid package that sustains the industry. If the predominant part of the package is another decommissioning scheme it will be good news for the clearing banks, but few other people will benefit, and communities that depend on the fishing industry will suffer. There must be new money. Will there be new money from the Treasury, or will it be a case of reshuffling money that is already there?

Mr. Morley: I repeat that money is made available for circumstances such as these. It can be directed to communities and industries that need it. I appreciate the need for ongoing support, but whatever happens

decommissioning will be an element, because when people simply are not viable and want a way out it is one of the answers. We cannot escape the issue of state aid, which makes provision of the kind of support at which some Members are hinting very difficult.

Andrew George: The Minister rightly says that decommissioning money can be provided, and that money is already available to help communities adjust to economic problems. What discussions has he had with his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, who told my hon.—and beknighted—Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Sir Archy Kirkwood)—[HON. MEMBERS: "Benighted?"]—whom she told at Scottish Question Time that she was having discussions with the Treasury and considering additional packages? Is the Minister involved in those discussions?

Mr. Morley: I have discussed the matter with my right hon. Friend. As I have said, a range of issues are being considered. We are thinking about what we can offer, and how we can offer it. I cannot give details now because the work has not been completed, but an announcement will be made as soon as possible.

Mr. Peter Duncan: Will the Minister confirm that the purpose of these schemes is to ensure that the industry is viable when stocks recover?

The Minister mentioned the Secretary of State for Scotland. I think Scotland will have observed that its representative at Westminster is not present today, and that the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is not present either. Those two absences from such a crucial debate are very significant.

Mr. Morley: I think the hon. Gentleman will find that a range of important issues affecting a range of people in the industry must be addressed by a very busy Department. I do not think that that was a very fair comment.

I can only say that, while I appreciate all the points that are being made, it should be recognised that existing funds are being allocated for exactly these circumstances.

Sir Archy Kirkwood: The Minister's position is clear, and obviously work is being done to try and quantify the package, but there is great uncertainty in the fishing communities. Is it safe to assume that when the Prime Minister meets the industry later this month that work will have been completed, and the money will then be provided?

Mr. Morley: As the hon. Gentleman will know, a number of Departments are outside my control—not least the Scottish Parliament, which is of course an autonomous body. They are doing their own work. The impact of the cuts does of course fall heavily on Scotland, and we should not pretend otherwise, but other Departments are involved and must be consulted. I can say, however, that I think the Prime Minister would expect the package to be ready by the time he meets the industry.

Mr. Savidge: I am pleased that we are talking about communities as well as decommissioning. In the past, some decommissioning schemes have seemed quite properly to consider the concerns of owners, but without considering the problems of employees and ex-employees sufficiently.

Mr. Morley: That is, unfortunately, in the nature of the structure of the available packages, but we must look at employment prospects and also at the potential opportunities. It might be possible to retrain people and to support those who might like to use their skills in, for instance, the marine sector.

Mr. Steen: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Morley: I will, for the last time. I sense that Members want to continue this interchange, but I want to finish my speech.

Mr. Steen: I merely wanted to say that the Minister has done terribly well for one or two minutes, and I do not propose to intervene further.

Mr. Morley: I appreciate that.

I think I have dealt with the main parts of the aid package.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Morley: I think I had better conclude.

Above all, our guide in this problem is the key principle that fisheries management must be sustainable. That principle guided us when we put in place better management tools. Those tools are not everything that we could have wanted in the circumstances, and we will continue to argue for changes in the light of the representations that the industry has made to us. I emphasise that we have not achieved a final shape in the process of putting in place recovery measures, and that the process is not at an end.

We recognise the impact of the proposals on the white fish sector, but the industry has many successful sectors. I believe that the industry has a good future, to which the Government are committed. This is the start of the process, not the end. We wish all sectors of the industry to be involved in the recovery programmes and to develop better measures for a profitable and sustainable future. I believe that we can achieve such a future, even though there is no doubt that there will be short-term pain in order to achieve the longer-term gain.

3.19 pm

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): I beg to move, in line 14, at the end, to add the words:

"notes the failure of European ministers to address adequately the issue of industrial fishing; believes that the measures agreed by the Fisheries Council will be ineffective in restoring white fish stocks; deplores the devastating and disproportionate impact that the policies embodied in these documents will have on the UK fishing industry; and calls on the Government to set out a clear strategy to conserve fish stocks, offer a sustainable future to the United Kingdom's fishing communities and to establish national and local control over the United Kingdom's fisheries."

Many of our kingdom's fishermen face ruin. Fishing communities face devastation. That is the cruel light in which we must debate these matters in the House today.

[Mr. John Hayes]

I have acknowledged before, and I do so again today, that there are hon. Members of all parties who are knowledgeable and concerned about fishing. The Minister is among them: he has a certain unlikely and curious charm, and that was evident in his speech. He was generous in dealing with interventions, and I hope that we can have a reasoned and civilised debate.

We last debated this matter before Christmas. That debate was held in a good spirit, but we did not know the extent to which the EU would punish our fishermen and their families. There can be few in the Chamber who know more about this subject than the Minister, and we sent him to defend our national interest, protect vulnerable communities and contribute to the development of an effective policy to ensure adequate fish stocks into the future.

Those were the vital tests that we set the Minister, more in hope than expectation. He failed those tests. He says that the outcome of the discussions is not a humiliation for the British Government, that the deal represents the best balance that could be achieved, and that the Government have attained all the objectives that they set. However, he simultaneously tells the House that the deal represents unfinished business, that it is a crude settlement and only the beginning of the process. He implies that there are more cuts to come. He says that the settlement is not the end of conservation, but just the beginning.

The Minister's failures will not be paid for principally by him, but by the thousands of fishermen and their communities—perhaps up to 50,000 people in total, if one takes the wider communities involved into account—who will suffer and pay with their livelihoods.

Fishermen and their representatives regard the December deal as so disappointing and damaging for three principal reasons. First, despite their economic consequences, the measures will not deliver stock recovery in the North sea. Secondly, the day-at-sea restrictions that will apply from February will push many vessels beyond economic viability but will not bring effective conservation. Thirdly, as the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Sir Archy Kirkwood) pointed out, the diversification of effort into derogated areas and small-mesh fisheries is an inevitable consequence of the scheme. A direct result will be that fishermen will struggle to fish in fewer and fewer areas, putting additional conservation pressures on those areas and on their stocks of fish.

What will be the effects on the communities involved? They are still waiting to hear the details of the financial support that they will need to avoid ruin. The hon. Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) was right to say that this deal is not about decommissioning money but about giving those communities some interim payment or ongoing support to enable them to maintain their businesses until such time as fish stocks recover and can be harvested.

I make no projection about that, and no notional judgment about the figures but simply ask whether that money will be available. Will those communities be supported? If not, and if the Minister is right that the recovery programme will be successful—although I do not buy that argument—those stocks will be harvested by vessels of other nations. It is as simple as that. Britain will no longer have a fishing industry able to take advantage of them.

Mr. Morley: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way, as I should like to make two points. First, I really do not need him to tell me the views of the fishing industry, as I can talk to industry members directly. Secondly, as Opposition spokesman, it behoves him to say what his alternative would be. Would he have ignored the science involved? Would not the Opposition have taken action when it was projected that the cod stock could have fallen as low as 30,000 tonnes of spawning biomass? I remind him that that figure fell to 28,000 tonnes when the stock off the Grand Banks collapsed.

I would also be very interested to know how the hon. Gentleman claims to be a great advocate of financial support, coming from a party committed to cutting public expenditure by 20 per cent.

Mr. Hayes: The hon. Gentleman should have listened to me more carefully. I simply asked a question. I am not in Government. I do not have the Chancellor's ear. I do not have the power to give this lifeline to the fishing industry. I asked the Minister what he intended to do about it, as did hon. Members from all parties during his speech. Hon. Members from his side asked about the short-term support and payments he would give.

What the hon. Gentleman said about conservation was weak, coming from a man who knows so much about the subject. Is he really suggesting that the only way to conserve fish stocks—the only way to put in place a recovery programme—is through days at sea? He knows that that is not true, and it has never been accepted as true by either party or by him as Minister. There are many conservation policies. The Government could have implemented many fish recovery policies as part of the programme.

As I shall explain, the Minister had the opportunity to pursue those avenues in the European Fisheries Council. He has not chosen to do so. He has ended up with a days-at-sea policy. That is a matter of judgment and choice, a choice that he and other Ministers made, but he knows that it is not the only option. He is not being entirely straightforward in suggesting that it is.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): Is my hon. Friend aware how delighted both I and the Southend fishing industry have been to read the terms of the Opposition's amendment, and in particular the clear indication that the Conservative party would want to re-establish national control over UK fishing? We are thrilled with this proposal. I hope that he will be able to find time in his speech to explain how Parliament could do that.

Mr. Hayes: Even my hon. Friend would find it hard to trump me on those matters. I shall be happy to say more about that during my speech.

Let us first talk about the communities that will be so badly affected. The Minister said that he would speak directly to the fishermen and their organisations. I understand that they have been promised a meeting with the Prime Minister, because it is clear that the Prime

Minister understands the political, electoral and other effects that these matters may have on his fortunes. Let us hope that they have more success with the Prime Minister than we did when we asked him to raise them at Copenhagen.

I have a copy of a letter to the Prime Minister written by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition. The House will know what a strong stand my right hon. Friend has taken on these matters. He has visited the fishermen. He has gone to the communities. He has had many discussions with them, and he invited the Prime Minister to raise these matters in Copenhagen when European leaders came together.

That would have been an ideal opportunity for the Prime Minister to take a personal lead. When we last debated the issue the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), with me and other hon. Members, asked the Prime Minister to do precisely that. We said that he should take the matter in hand at an early stage and not come in at the last minute, as he had to do, to try to prop up the Minister when he could not do a decent deal for us. He was invited to take that personal lead and raise the matter in Copenhagen. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition wrote:

"You had an opportunity at Copenhagen this week to make it clear there is no justification for these proposals"

that will damage our fisherman's interests.

The Prime Minister replied:

"I believe to raise the issue at the European Council would be a mistake."

That was the level of priority that the Prime Minister gave to this matter and the livelihood of these people. We hope that, when he meets the fishermen, he will be able to offer them a little more hope, a rather more positive perspective, a little more generosity and a little more empathy than he showed on that occasion.

Angus Robertson: I am grateful to the Conservative spokesman for giving way on the subject of leadership. I notice that he says that it is important that the Government should have raised such matters at the Copenhagen summit—the Scottish National party first called for that—but can he tell the House how many times before that summit meeting the leader of the Conservative party raised fishing during Prime Minister's Question Time? Will he confirm that it was none?

Mr. Hayes: That is a cheap point, and the hon. Gentleman knows it. He also knows that I would be first to acknowledge that even the SNP, firing grapeshot as it does—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. May I remind the hon. Gentleman that it would be for the convenience of those who are trying to record proceedings and in conformity with normal courtesies if he would address his remarks to the Chair?

Mr. Hayes: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for that reminder.

Even the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson), who speaks on behalf of the SNP, will understand that when his party fires grapeshot, it will occasionally hit the target. SNP Members did so when they called for the Prime Minister to take a lead, and he failed to do so.

Fifteen-day tie-ups mean that many boats will be tied up for ever. Fishermen will be driven out of business, unable to meet their costs or feed their families. If fishing effort is reduced by 15-day tie-ups, there is no reduction in fishermen's mortgage payments or the cost of feeding their families, let alone the overheads faced by their businesses. At least 900 vessels are likely to be affected. Hon. Members are right to emphasise the fact that the effect is particularly profound on the Scottish east coast, where fishing is the principal source of employment in many communities.

Bob Spink: Does my hon. Friend agree with the estimate that 20,000 jobs will be lost in the Scottish fishing fleet? Will he explain why France, Spain, Belgium, Denmark and Holland did relatively well in the December talks compared with the British fleet, which was sold down the river?

Mr. Hayes: I will answer—mindful of the need to address the Chair—in two parts. First, those countries did relatively well because their Ministers care more about fishing than ours do. Their Ministers and Prime Ministers place high priority on such matters and our Government simply do not. That is the truth of the matter.

Mr. Morley: I do not want inaccuracies to be recorded. Denmark was severely affected by the changes because it had the second biggest cod quota after the United Kingdom. Those management methods affect the United Kingdom, Denmark, Sweden, Germany, Belgium, Holland, France and Ireland to varying degrees, depending on their fishing practices. It is ridiculous to suggest that some members have got better deals; things depended on the circumstances. If the hon. Gentleman can find one member state that received quota against the scientific advice, I shall be very interested in hearing about it. The Prime Minister raised fishing at the margins of the Copenhagen summit meeting.

Mr. Hayes: I am not sure whether the Minister's intervention was intended to relate to me or to my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink), but I shall come to the point about job losses in responding to my hon. Friend's original intervention. With the typical understatement and moderation for which he is well known in Essex and the House, he underestimated the effect of the changes. Estimates suggest that up to 40,000 people could be affected. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan quoted precisely that figure, although he now looks bewildered, when we debated fishing in November. If he checks the record, he will find out. If account is taken of the other industries and people affected—those who work in harbours, in boat building or repairing businesses or in the wider fishing economy—the number is much greater than 20,000. I suspect that it is more than 40,000, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is about to trump me on that.

Mr. Salmond: The overall figure for fishing industry dependent employment is 44,000. Obviously, not all

[Mr. Salmond]

those people are employed in the white fish sector, but none the less, thousands of jobs will be lost, and the effect will be heavily concentrated in Shetland and a few east coast ports. People in those areas desperately want to hear what will be done to protect their livelihoods.

Mr. Hayes: The hon. Gentleman's estimate is right: the figure is 44,000. To amplify his point, it is important to emphasise that the job losses will be concentrated. In some communities, the fishing industry accounts for a significant proportion of total employment and there are knock-on effects for families and the wider economy.

A large number of vessels are affected, yet the Minister and the Government do not appear to be taking the industry seriously enough, despite landings in 2001 to the value of £574.4 million, a figure revealed through a parliamentary question.

The Government's half-cocked and half-hearted defence has been mounted on conservation. In meetings with me, fishermen's organisations have pointed out a number of flaws. Contrary to the Minister's assertions that we are making gradual progress on minimum landing sizes, they have been reduced for certain species. The opposite should happen: the minimum landing size should be edged upwards, with corresponding escape opening areas. We know why that issue is so contentious for many who debate such matters in Europe: the taste in southern Europe for baby fish. We should not be frightened of acknowledging that fact; it is well known, widely understood and should be stated in this place.

Furthermore, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) said, we should not be frightened of raising the issue of the quota system, which has caused the dumping of hundreds of thousands of tonnes of prime fish, dead, back into the sea. The quota system was never designed to aid conservation or fish recovery; it is all about EU integration.

As other hon. Members have said, the impact of the deal is mainly on vessels that use large-mesh nets of more than 100 mm. It thus encourages vessels to move to smaller-mesh nets—for example, the prawn fishery uses 80 mm—or smaller-mesh areas such as the southern North sea where 80 mm is permitted for white fish, to escape the impact of day-at-sea restrictions.

The Minister asked me to suggest an alternative and I shall speak more about what could be done, but he has to answer the point that day-at-sea restrictions are the most likely of all the conservation options to deliver precisely that movement of effort from one part of our coast to another—from one fishing area to another.

Mr. Alan Campbell (Tynemouth): For quite some time, there has been concern about diversion of effort in coastal areas that are reliant on prawn fishing, but can the hon. Gentleman give the House an estimate of whether the pressure would have been greater had the Council gone for a cut in white fish of between 80 and 100 per cent?

Mr. Hayes: I shall deal with that matter in some detail later on. The Government claim that we achieved some sort of victory because we edged up the Commission's original proposal, but it was a pyrrhic victory. The arguments are hollow, as the hon. Gentleman knows, but I am glad that he at least acknowledges that the displacement factors that I described are true. I am sure that he will also acknowledge that they will be exacerbated by the current arrangements.

Mr. Steen: We are exploring alternatives to quotas. Earlier, I suggested to the Minister that there should be an auction of quota limits for all fish. The Minister was helpful, as he normally is, but I am sure that my hon. Friend can be even more helpful. Has he considered the concept of such an auction?

Mr. Hayes: As my hon. Friend knows, the Select Committee studied those matters. Indeed, the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) will recall that, when I was a member of the Committee, we enjoyed many an evening discussing Europe and the United Kingdom and looked closely at issues such as the one raised by my hon. Friend. Such matters are worthy of consideration and further study—I put it no stronger than that—and he is right to raise them. I hope that the Minister will have the opportunity to deal with them when he sums up.

The open areas for the saithe fishery mean that larger vessels, in order to remain viable, will direct their effort to those fishing grounds that are not subject to effort control. Part of the saithe designated area appears to overlap with the 2001 cod area and other fishing vessels will undoubtedly take advantage of that north-east zone. Many believe that the sector received special treatment to please the French, as, two years ago, stocks were said to be in a perilous state. Perhaps that is another example of unfinished business. The Minister may speak of unfinished business; I speak of the finish of the businesses of fishermen around our coast in Scotland and England. That is the real story: the finish of our industry, our businesses, our fishermen.

The proposals that the Minister has now agreed are peppered with anomalies and inconsistencies. He will know of the anomalies in respect of the north channel, which is an important area. As Members who represent Scottish constituencies will know, many boats going out of the Clyde, some Ulster boats and some English boats fish extensively in the north channel. In the north-west Scotland zone, there are restrictions on carrying a 150 mm net on board. Cod stocks will not be replenished, as fishermen will be guilty if they carry their net across that zone. I regard that anomaly as a nonsense; it is certainly impossible to enforce or police.

Fishermen will not be guilty, however, if they travel without their net, pick it up in Norway, and then fish. The truth is that fishermen will not just be penalised for catching fish but for the potential to catch fish while they cross one of these zones. That is a nightmare, and it is foolish. The Minister must know that that is not practical or enforceable. Vessels operating out of ports on the east coast of England that fish in their traditional grounds in the North sea will be discriminated against because of their longer steaming time. No allowance is made for geography. The UK fleet has been uniquely disadvantaged by the deal, and the social and economic consequences will be severe.

Perhaps the greatest scandal of all, which has been highlighted in several interventions, is the failure of European Ministers adequately to address the continuing nightmare of industrial fishing, practised principally by Denmark and Norway.

Mr. Peter Duncan: Has my hon. Friend considered the point that I made in an intervention on the Minister about the discrimination against long liners who are given some deal in Europe? There is total ignorance, however, about the scandal of the Danish boats creating soup from the North sea bed, which is totally unsustainable in terms of by-catch?

Mr. Hayes: My hon. Friend, who is knowledgeable about these matters and defends the interests of his fishermen vigorously, will understand that there are two aspects to this. He is right about the effect on the food chain, which is profound. He is also aware of the considerable by-catch. The Minister suggested today that there is scientific evidence to support the claim that there is very little white fish by-catch from industrial fishing. As has been stated several times, however, two Danish boats were prosecuted—I think that the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) mentioned a figure of about 65,000 tonnes out of 100,000 tonnes yearly. In practice, the one-month penalty was served over the Christmas and new year period.

The substantial by-catch from industrial fishing is incompatible with a cod recovery programme in the North sea. The Minister must know that: the whole House and fishermen and their representative organisations and their communities certainly know it well. I suspect that the Danes and the Norwegians know it, too. The Minister knows about the destruction of the food source by industrial fishing, as he secured a closure around the Isle of May and the firth of Forth for three years, and he knows that when he did so it was extended because of the birdlife. Fish stocks recovered. He knows very well that industrial fishing is a major issue. He has taken an honourable position on that point, but he has failed to do anything about it.

Mr. Morley: I have pointed out what I have done.

Mr. Hayes: The Minister says that he has pointed out what he has done, but he describes the prawn restrictions as negligible and as of no consequence, because prawn fishermen are allowed to fish for 25 days a month. However, industrial fishermen will be allowed to fish for 23 days a month, and he leads us to believe that that is a significant step forward and real progress. Presumably, that is what he has done.

How did this sorry situation come about? I come to the real charge that I make of the Minister. The situation came about because of the hesitation, prevarication and poor negotiating skills of our Government. He will know that the bullying and arm twisting of the EU—*[Interruption.]* The Minister laughs, but I have received a report that I hope he will investigate. I will not go into fine detail now, but I have a report that suggests that a senior official abused members of the UK delegation. They were told that they were wasting their time and that a deal had been done before they had even arrived at the meeting. I will be prepared to give him full details after the debate, so I hope that he will look into the matter.

Mr. Morley: I will give the hon. Gentleman the full details now. That is utter nonsense. I do not know where he gets such things from. Some people, including Richard Lochhead from the Scottish Parliament, were hanging round the bars at Brussels, and that may explain how such rumours get running. However, this one is complete and utter rubbish.

Mr. Hayes: Before the Minister says that things are rubbish, he should consider the full details. I will furnish him with them out of the context of the debate. He will then find that he may want, at the very least, to consider them carefully to see whether there is any truth in them.

It is certainly not rubbish to say that the Council of Ministers sent signals that there was no prospect of agreement on the Commission's proposals for the cod and hake recovery programme based on limits of time at sea. The Minister will know that that happened twice last year—in June and November. Had the Government worked with the other states who share a common interest in these matters, we could have done a very different deal. He knows very well that a conservation arrangement or a recovery programme could have been arranged around capacity reduction, closed areas and technical measures that excluded or, at least, limited the effort-control measures that we now face with such trepidation.

Angus Robertson: On the point about ministerial representation at Council of Ministers meetings, the hon. Gentleman will be aware of the concern in Scotland at the quality of representation by the Scottish Minister responsible for fisheries. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that Ross Finnie has bothered to attend only 26 per cent. of agricultural and fisheries meetings since he took responsibility for these issues in the Scottish Executive? He was not even recorded as being present at seven of the 10 meetings to which he turned up. Is that not perhaps a reflection of the quality of representation that we have in Scotland from a Liberal Democrat Minister for fishing?

Mr. Hayes: Once again, I suspect that it reflects the priority that the Government attach to fishing, which is not high on their agenda. When these matters are debated in Europe, we give most ground on fishing so as to gain ground on other issues. We all celebrate and are aware of the benefits of the European Union, and we may hear more about them in the debate. The fishing industry, however, has certainly not benefited from the negotiations.

Had the Minister taken the steps that he could have taken and seized the opportunity to bring together a coalition that would have agreed a very different recovery programme, I suspect that we would not be in this position. As we have already heard, the Commission seized on our failure to follow through the signals that were sent that it might be prepared to opt for something that would have been more agreeable to us and came out with the ludicrous proposals for seven days at sea each month. The Minister now asks us to accept that he did a good job by raising the proposed

[Mr. Hayes]

seven days to nine. He got us only two days extra; the Prime Minister, at the eleventh hour, having refused to raise the matter any earlier, stepped in and upped the nine days to 15 days at sea a month. The Minister acknowledged that the Prime Minister helped—I think that he made a passing reference to the assistance that the Prime Minister gave him.

What else did the Minister fail to secure, despite claiming that this was not a humiliation but a victory, a triumph, a real step forward and real progress? There is no redress over previous upgrades—the Spanish have banked their port and fleet upgrades and bolted the door behind them. They still have the most modern vessels and best facilities.

There is no urgent revision of the method for scientific monitoring. There is a pledge that they will consider it at some time in the future, but it remains distant from people's communities and experience. As the hon. Member for St. Ives said, there must be a partnership between fishermen and scientists drawing together all available expertise to deliver science that is trusted and enforceable.

No binding agreement was reached on the reform of scientific method in line with experiences elsewhere, such as landing all catch rather than discards. Good practice proposals seem to be the best that the Minister can come up with.

Why was industrial fishing not more severely restricted?

What was achieved by the red tape, regulation and bureaucracy that fishermen regularly face as they go about their business?

Will there be new guidelines for Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs officials who work at ports?

Under the agreement, the derogation of the 12-mile limit has only been extended. If the 12-mile limit is so important to the Minister, why has it not been made a permanent arrangement? He said that some EU rule or convention meant that things were not done in that way. However, that is what we need and deserve.

The common fisheries policy has never delivered a viable fishing industry or the maintenance of fish stocks. Ironically, it has punished fishermen and fish simultaneously. In Britain, the fishing industry has steadily eroded. Places around our coast, once proud to be known as fishing towns and villages, have seen fishing reduced to a cottage industry. As the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan reminded us, up to 40,000 people owe their employment to the Scottish fishing industry.

The figures are stark but worthy of examination. In 1980, there were 23,309 fishermen; by 2000, there were 15,121, and the figure is still falling. The CFP can never be made to work in the interests of British fishing, partly because fishing is given too low a priority by our Government, who have been complicit in a Commission-led plan to tie up boats. Other Governments fight for their fishing industry—ours do not.

Mr. Peter Duncan: Does my hon. Friend share my frustration that Ministers say that scientific back-up is important, but year after year it comes down to political barter. Far from being at the heart of Europe, the UK always ends up at the back and Scottish fishermen get it in the neck every time.

Mr. Hayes: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. As my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen) said, we have been round this course many times. The hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), who is a stalwart in these matters, knows it, as does the Minister, who has been stuck in this job for a very long time and has been involved in many of these debates.

We have been round the course too often. The CFP cannot be reformed to work in Britain's interests. All those who look at these matters objectively know that the CFP is intrinsically flawed. As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition said recently, it is rotten at its core. Those naïve enough to maintain faith in the CFP—mainly those on the Liberal and Labour Benches—must surely realise that this aspect of the European dream has come to an end.

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hayes: No, I want to draw my remarks to a close.

Mr. Foster: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hayes: I want to draw my remarks to a close so that other right hon. and hon. Members can speak in the debate.

There is no better example of the contemptible nature of EU fishing politics than the sorry saga of quota hopping—the DEFRA report came out on 18 December; surprise, surprise, in the Christmas holiday—in respect of which Mr. Blair immediately dropped the Amsterdam negotiating veto of John Major unless the matter was resolved and then merely secured an exchange of letters on landing fish in one place and driving them by truck to another. The truth is that only by returning UK fishing to the control of the British people through their sovereign Parliament will a coherent strategy for the industry emerge. National control, with the local involvement of fishermen at every stage of policy development, is no longer an option; it is an imperative.

Let me be crystal clear on that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir Teddy Taylor) invited me to be. I pledge that an incoming Conservative Government will restore national control of our fisheries. We fully understand the constitutional and political implications of that, and will take the necessary legislative steps to achieve it.

Mr. Morley: How?

Mr. Hayes: My hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir Teddy Taylor) knows how EU treaties have force of law in the House and what I mean by that pledge, as does the Minister, so there is no point in him crying out, "How?" The difference between our parties is that we will do that and the Government will not.

Serious questions remain for the Minister to answer. Did the Commission use the most recent data, or are the suggestions that cod are still around but have moved north for climatic reasons accurate? Will the Government veto the convention proposal that there should be an integrated maritime agency to cover a maritime approach to such matters and to monitor fish? Does he agree with the statistic offered by the Commission that 28,000 fishermen will lose their jobs, and, if so, how many of those will be British? What extra moneys have been set aside for decommissioning, given the proviso that an extra 20 per cent. may be on offer above the usual rate?

Can the Minister clarify what final decision has been made on how the Commission will judge relative stability in respect of changes in national catches over time? Does Spain gain access in the North sea under the interpretation of historic access, or are its accession rights upheld? Will he assure the House that cuts will be a total percentage of all fleets rather than those fishing in home waters? Most of all, do the Government have any long-term projected plans for rebuilding the fleet after the crisis is over? Instead of decommissioning, they could offer support to allow the fleet to be maintained so that it can harvest the stocks once they have recovered. Does he concede that other Community vessels will move in?

Fishermen and their representatives have come to fear that the December betrayal is part of a long-term plan within the Commission and other countries to break up the established North sea fishing fleet. A determined island race with a proud maritime history will look to the Government's record on fishing with an unhappy mix of derision and despair. The Minister will be aware of the anger in Scotland and the English North sea ports at the horrendous injustices inflicted on them and other parts of the United Kingdom. They accuse him of leaving them in total despair after his debriefing meeting with them on 20 December following the Council of Ministers.

Fishing is about more than cold statistics and dry debating points. It is about more even than jobs. It is about lives, families and communities. Greater still, however, it is about culture, identity and a way of life that reaches across generations, which challenges and inspires. In the words of Eliot:

"The river is within us, the sea is all about us:
The sea is the land's edge also,
The sea has many voices, Many gods and many voices . . .
Pray for those who were in ships, and
Ended the voyage on the sand, in the sea's lips
Or in the dark throat which will not reject them".

We are an island maritime race. Just as the CFP epitomises the shoddy, shabby, shady politics of the EU, so fishermen and their families embody the spirit of our nation. We should pray for them, as Eliot implored, but with equal faith we must work for them, argue for them and fight for them. All hon. Members should support the amendment because our battle to save the fishing industry is at the very heart of our battle to save our nation.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Before I call the next hon. Member, I ought to say that in a debate that can occupy 224 minutes, 103 of those minutes have now been taken by two Front-Bench speakers—albeit that they were generous with interventions. At least 10 hon. Members are seeking to catch my eye in the time remaining. If they each voluntarily impose a limit of 10 minutes on themselves, we may accommodate every hon. Member who wishes to participate.

4 pm

Mr. Frank Doran (Aberdeen, Central): This is the second time in succession that I have followed the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) in a fisheries debate. His presentation is becoming interesting—quite Churchillian in aspiration, although certainly not in content. Hearing the hon. Gentleman's espousal of Tory party policy towards the common fisheries policy gives new meaning to one of Churchill's famous phrases,

"we shall fight on the beaches".

Churchill was a historian. The hon. Gentleman needs to mug up on his history. He made a major point about the priority that the present Government attach to the fishing industry when for the last Conservative Government there was no lower priority than the fishing industry.

I welcome the reforms outlined by my hon. Friend the Minister and I am pleased that despite the industry's difficulties, those measures were welcomed also by the Scottish Fishermen's Federation—particularly the protection of the six and 12-mile limits, success with preserving the Shetland box, relative stability and the Hague preference. In these difficult times, all are extremely important.

My hon. Friend the Minister made it clear that issues for the Scottish fleet will be the preserve of the Scottish Executive. It is important to emphasise the significance of the Scottish fleet not just to Scotland but to the whole UK fishing industry. The bulk of the white fish caught in the UK is landed in north-east Scotland, which is crucial to the whole industry. If we are forced to rely on imports, that will have serious consequences not just for the industry but for the consumer.

The industry faces dark times. One of the difficulties of making any assessment—or, indeed, any contribution to the debate—lies in calculating how long the problems will be with us. The industry is familiar with the huge uncertainty that is the direct result of the European Union's decision. It is still a mystery to me that any industry can survive when the availability of its raw product is determined the week before the financial year begins. The sooner a multi-angled approach is taken, the better.

It is clear why the industry is concerned and fishermen are genuinely afraid for their future. One major problem is the availability of fish. The severe reductions in the total allowable catch seen this year emphasise the severity of the situation. Is my hon. Friend the Minister able to make an assessment of how long the current regime is likely to last? Now that the new arrangements are in place, what incentive is there for the European Commission and other member states to change them? The UK has come out of the negotiations worse than any other country. It would helpful to know how my hon. Friend sees the process moving forward.

[Mr. Frank Doran]

Another major concern is the particular form of the control, which is effectively a tie-up. The industry faces the removal of half its working time and probably half its income. No matter how extensive and effective decommissioning may be, it will not help the boats that are still fishing, because they will be tied up and unable to catch fish. Everyone will be seriously affected. I accept that an egalitarian approach would spread the misery across the industry, but where is the hope for those who want to remain in the industry? I should be grateful if the Minister would address that.

There is a particular problem with the large white-fish vessels in the North sea. They will be subject to the same regime and a 15-day tie-up, but they are the vessels in which most investment is made, as regards quality, size and, in many cases, the acquisition of additional quota. Many of them need at least 300 days at sea just to break even and to continue to be able to pay the mortgage to the bank. Is any particular emphasis or assistance likely to be targeted on them?

I accept that the details of the scheme have to be worked out, but the industry faces other costs. From my discussions with the Minister, I know that the Department will look at having scientists on board vessels, although I accept that there are difficulties with that. Vessel operators have to meet other costs such as harbour dues and light dues. Such costs are relatively small, but every little bit of assistance helps. I should be grateful if that could be looked at.

As anyone who has listened to these debates and my contributions over the past few years will be aware, my major concern is the fish processing industry, where the bulk of jobs in my constituency are. I have heard it said that fish processors should not have too many problems because the bulk of fish that is processed is imported. That is not the case in the north of Scotland—40 per cent. of such fish is imported, but 60 per cent. is dependent on the North sea catch. In my own area, many processors have a particular requirement for small haddock, which cannot easily be imported. I urge the Minister to make sure that that is taken into account.

Mr. Salmond: The hon. Gentleman is talking a great deal of sense. However, I clearly remember that he has been quoted as saying that the processors could depend on imported fish. Was he again misquoted before Christmas?

Mr. Doran: When the hon. Gentleman asks such questions he usually pulls a newspaper clipping out to prove me wrong, so I had better be careful about what I say. I know that the industry has become much more reliant on imports—I have certainly said that in the past—but I have always acknowledged the importance of locally caught fish. I am simply trying to emphasise that point—and I know that the situation is exactly the same in the hon. Gentleman's constituency.

The fish processing industry is extremely important. According to the industry itself, there are some 200 fish processing companies left in Scotland employing about 10,000 people in direct jobs; there are another 2.5 jobs in the wider community for every job in the industry. There has been a considerable contraction since 1995, with the loss of about 150 companies. The industry has faced very difficult times recently, mainly in coming to terms with new requirements such as new water charges and the introduction of European hygiene regulations. One of the industry's main fears is that if there is further contraction—most people accept that that is almost inevitable—that that part of it that has invested most heavily in new equipment, and in coming up to scratch and providing the necessary quality of service would be least able to cope with the new pressures. I hope that when plans for support are drawn up, that will be taken into account.

There are other ways in which the industry could be helped. For example, the industry pays about £3 million by levy to the Sea Fish Industry Authority. That is an extremely important body, but the levy is a considerable drain on resources.

With reference to processors, will the Minister confirm that they will be invited to the meeting with the Prime Minister and will be part of the discussions on the future of the industry? It is essential that they are taken fully into account in all considerations.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac), who could not stay for the debate, raised an important point in her intervention. In the past, most of the help directed to the industry has been directed to vessel owners through the decommissioning scheme. She rightly recalled the decommissioning that took place in the late 1970s. Substantial sums were paid to the fishing industry to decommission the fleet in the immediate aftermath of the Icelandic cod war. At the same time, many hundreds—probably thousands—of men lost their jobs or were disadvantaged in other respects because of the consequences of the cod war. It is only in the past two or three years that those men have been compensated. They were completely ignored in the 1970s and subsequently when their case was presented.

Because of the particular nature of employment in the sea fishing industry, fishermen tend to have no contracts of employment. They are share fishermen or, in the case of my constituency, they worked in a pool system, with no direct employer. In 10 years' time, I do not want us to have to cope with the consequences of the fishermen who may be made redundant in the downturn that we all anticipate. I hope that the nature of their employment will be taken into account in compensation packages or schemes to support them.

A particular concern of mine relates to the fact that in the north-east of Scotland, when times have been difficult in the fishing industry, there have always been opportunities for fishermen in the oil industry. They have been able to get jobs on stand-by vessels or supply vessels and in some other parts of the merchant navy. Those opportunities are receding, not just because of the downturn in the oil industry—the price is high and the North sea industry seems to be suffering a little at present—but for other reasons.

For some reason that I find it difficult to understand, the work permit system that operates onshore does not apply in the offshore oil and gas industry or in most of our inshore shipping. For example, the new ferry from Rosyth to Zeebrugge operates under a British flag, but with foreign sailors. In the shipping industry that services the oil industry in particular, most of the employment is now going to what we might call cheap

foreign labour. There are substantial numbers of Filipino and growing numbers of Ukranian and Polish nationals. I ask the Minister to take into account the need for those job opportunities to be made available, which is not the case at present. I will be lobbying the Minister responsible for such matters for the extension of the work permit scheme to the offshore industry and to certain other shipping areas within our territorial waters. If we are to face difficulties in the industry, it is important that the work force—the day-to-day fishermen who may not own a fishing boat but are vital to the industry—are taken fully into consideration.

4.14 pm

Andrew George (St. Ives): I congratulate the hon. Member for Aberdeen, Central (Mr. Doran) on his considered remarks in this debate, as in other debates on such an important subject. I hope that the Minister will take on board the hon. Gentleman's penultimate point about the parlous state of share fishermen who are joint venturers in fishing ventures. In my constituency, the vast majority of fishermen are engaged in that way and will face particular difficulty if the significant decline that is predicted in many regions occurs. Bearing in mind your very appropriate strictures, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will do my best to contain my remarks from the Liberal Democrat Front Bench to 15 minutes plus any injury time incurred through interventions.

As I said earlier, I very much value the graciousness of the Minister, in this debate in particular, in taking the number of interventions that he does. Of course, that takes up some time, but, because he answers the questions raised in the interventions, a great deal of extremely useful debate is achieved by that method. I hope that, in future fishing debates, the Minister will not feel that he needs to curtail his speech, because many hon. Members consider this issue very deeply and come here with very sincere interests in the subject, and they value the way in which the Minister responds to the debate.

The Council dealt with two main issues in December. The first was the annual quota settlement; the second was the very important 20-year review of the common fisheries policy, which was clearly critical. The quota settlement was the issue that drew the publicity at the Council meeting. The problem with the blunderbuss approach of quota settlements and the crude use of days at sea is that they provide a stick without a carrot for the industry—a straitjacket without hope. As I said earlier, the approach treats fishermen as perpetrators rather than partners. We believe that they should be seen as partners in the future management of fishing stocks. There has clearly been a change in culture over the last five to 10 years in the way in which the industry approaches this issue, and it has come forward with proposals to contain and constrain its own activities by a number of measures that are certainly more sophisticated than the blunderbuss approach of quotas and days at sea. I believe that those measures should be very much part of the management regime of future stocks around our coasts.

My Liberal Democrat colleague, the fisheries Minister in the Scottish Executive, described the outcome as inequitable, unfair and crude, as the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) said earlier. Having looked at it in detail, I think that my colleague was pulling his punches. It was a disaster for many areas, and it was a great disappointment that the more sophisticated approach that I have tried to describe could not have been used in a better way.

I listened carefully to the response from the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes). It was the customary brass neck ritual rant—

Sir Archy Kirkwood: Followed by an exit.

Andrew George: Indeed. We are used to such responses to these debates. The faces change, but the ritual rant never seems to. I noticed that the Minister came to the last debate with a large pile of Christmas cards. I was judging the interest and importance of the speeches by the number of cards that he signed during them. I think that he signed most of them during the speech from the Conservative Front Bench. On this occasion, he and his staff probably had ample time to revise for and complete the psychometric tests that they are undertaking at the moment.

I referred to the Conservatives' brass neck because, if it were so apparent that the common fisheries policy needed to be revised in the way that they describe—they wish to repatriate it, as they say—why did they not do that during the 18 years of Conservative rule? Why was it never put on the agenda during that time? Why did it suddenly became apparent to them that they should have pursued that policy only on the day after the 1997 general election? We are invited to believe that they would have done more and done better, and that the leader of the Conservative Opposition would apparently have done more and intervened a great deal more than the Prime Minister has done. I have to say that the Conservatives appear to be suffering from the "benefit of hindsight" disease when looking at this matter.

When the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir) pointed out in an intervention that the Leader of the Opposition had not raised fishing in Prime Minister's questions, the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings said that that was a cheap remark. However, if fishing were the priority that those on the Conservative Front Bench claim it is, he would have raised it. The Conservatives still need to explain why, according to records made available under their 30-day rule—[HON. MEMBERS: "30-year rule."] Perhaps we should have 30-day rules. According to information released under the 30-year rule, it is clear that the Conservative Cabinet felt that fishermen's livelihoods were expendable when we were negotiating a future role in the common fisheries policy.

On the common fisheries policy, some significant agreements were made in respect of six and 12-mile limits and, as I understand it, increased unilateral powers to introduce conservation and management measures. I am looking forward to seeing such measures and I hope that the Minister will expand on that matter. Agreement was also reached on the continuation of relative stabilities, the Hague preference and multi-annual quotas. Five years ago, when I first suggested the introduction of multi-annual quotas to avoid the eleventh-hour brinkmanship that occurs at the end of each year and often continues two weeks into the next

[Andrew George]

one, the proposal met widespread derision. I do not know whether I can claim credit for it—perhaps others were making the same suggestion—but I am pleased to see that it has been agreed to, as it ensures that fishermen and their financial backers can plan for the future, certainly in the medium term. The regional advisory councils are another especially important development, but I shall return to them in a moment.

The Minister is right that the removal of subsidies for construction and modernisation, while limited grants for modernisation will continue, is a step forward. As he said, those subsidies should have been stopped immediately, but it is important for them to be phased out as quickly as possible.

I want to focus on two further issues. The Minister believes that there is a need for further research on industrial fishing. The hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings, I and other hon. Members have made it clear that we believe that sufficient information is already available. The illegal catches found on board two Danish vessels shortly before Christmas demonstrate the problem that we face. There is a lot of anecdotal evidence from fisherman to suggest that it would be impossible for such industrial fishing vessels to operate in areas where they have been seen to be operating without taking a very significant by-catch of white and other illegal fish.

It is therefore important that the Minister does not simply wait for further research, which is merely a delaying tactic on an issue that needs to be addressed as quickly as possible. The reason why the industry feels particularly cynical about the issue is that, even though mesh sizes as small as 16 mm are used by those in the industrial sector, they are given 23 days at sea, while those with much larger mesh sizes have the fewest days at sea available to them. Surely, that is a contradiction.

Those in the industry will need a lot of persuasion that the regional advisory councils will provide an opportunity for them to work in partnership in its future management. I hope that the Minister and his Department will concentrate a great deal of attention, time and resources on ensuring that the councils work. The industry is on the verge of becoming cynical. It doubts whether the advisory councils will have teeth and fears that they will be expensive, large and pointless talking shops. The Government must encourage the industry to make policy, not advisory proposals, for fast implementation.

There are many fertile spawning grounds around the coast that need protection. The Trevose ground, which is off the coast of the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), is one of the most fertile and productive spawning grounds in the UK. Juvenile spawning stock of cod, sole, pollock, whiting and haddock can be found there, especially from this time of year. It is worrying that the area is not protected.

I recently met Paul Trebilcock, general secretary of the Cornish Fish Producers Organisation. The organisation has devised responsible proposals for closing two areas around the Trevose grounds between 1 February and the end of April. It is vital that the Under-Secretary accepts such a responsible and appropriate proposal for closing down grounds at a time of year when they are often plundered by many countries.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his reference to Trevose. It vividly demonstrates his central point that some people in the industry are doing their utmost to act as partners in conservation. Language is therefore important. The more people treat those in the industry as genuine partners, not potential perpetrators of steps to remove conservation measures, the more likely our chances of success.

Andrew George: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for emphasising that. The industry will present the proposal that I mentioned as soon as possible, before the establishment of the advisory councils, which should be set up as quickly as possible. The test for the Under-Secretary is the speed with which the advisory councils can implement the proposal. There is no justifiable argument against it, and it should have been implemented years ago. It should now be effected as quickly as possible.

If the advisory councils were regional management committees with genuine power to make decisions and implement them, they would be able to effect the proposal quickly. However, they are advisory councils and we need a mechanism to ensure that good and sensible proposals have a fast track to the Council of Ministers so that decisions are not only made but acted upon quickly.

Let us consider dolphins and the cetacean by-catch. I know that the Under-Secretary is worried and frustrated by the many dolphins that have been washed up as strandlings on the beaches in my part of the world. Bass pair trawlers are likely to be one of the main culprits, and the Department was planning to trial new separator grids this year. That is welcome, but I believe that the Under-Secretary's efforts have been frustrated by an accident. Many people in Cornwall, including those in the industry, are also upset by strandlings. Those in the industry believe that they are being blamed for them, when they are innocent.

Mr. Morley: I am deeply frustrated by the delay in the trials. The matter is beyond our control because the vessel is damaged. However, on the point about strandlings in Cornwall in the past month, no British pair trawlers have been operating in the vicinity. That shows that there is a European Union problem, and we are therefore pressing the matter. The CFP regulations acknowledged that we must deal with cetacean by-catch and devise a strategy to eliminate it.

Andrew George: I am grateful for the Under-Secretary's remarks. The majority of pair trawlers are French and he is right to say that we must look to a European Union solution to the problem. However, I shall press him further on that important issue.

My time is up and I have taken a certain amount of injury time, but I want to raise one final issue—the need for a recovery programme. The Minister said that there is of course money for decommissioning, and that it will be made available to assist the industry. Such money will

be essential for the North sea. Government money is available to assist those communities facing structural decline, but it is clear that the Secretary of State for Scotland is discussing with her Treasury colleagues other ways of assisting the industry. It is important that we look seriously at a recovery programme and some transitional aid, rather than managed decline.

Three years ago, the Minister agreed with the Agriculture Committee that what we need is a clear British fishing policy to help direct the industry, and to help provide a clear guideline on the way forward. The Department has still not responded to that, and is still not producing the industry policy that we need. The setting up of the regional advisory councils will provide the framework that the industry requires to direct its future.

I am sorry that the Liberal Democrat motion, which the Minister might even have been tempted to support, was not selected. It addresses many of the issues arising from the Council meeting in December, and I hope that the Minister takes heed of the issues that have been raised.

4.31 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on a major success in these negotiations. I do so with a certain amount of grovelling servility, in that I am trying to use a nice cop, nasty cop routine within the confines of a single speech. It is certainly true that he was very effective in resisting what some people, including me, feared would be the consequences of renewing the common fisheries policy. To us, there seemed to be a threat of fishing up to the beaches, a threat to relative stability, a threat to ending The Hague preference, and a threat of a European fleet. All that has been averted, and in that regard I join in the congratulations that the Scottish Fishermen's Federation and the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations offered him.

However, the CFP has been extended, and we have to accept the fact that these cuts are directly attributable to the failures of the CFP. It is not a conservation policy; it has always been essentially political. The programme, which was foolishly accepted by a Conservative Government in 1972, is one of equal access to a common resource. That simply means doling out that common resource to other countries in the form of quotas, even though most of the waters—very fertile waters—to which access has been given are British. Such quotas constitute a very ineffective means of policing. That failure has culminated in the stark reality of the cuts that we now face. So there has to be a "nasty guy" element in my speech.

I accept that my hon. Friend was put in a difficult position. The main threat was to the cod, haddock and white fish that are in our waters and caught by our vessels, and for that reason he was on the defensive. However, as *Fishing News* argues, it seems that other nations were bought off. It appears that concessions were made to them in order to impose the main sacrifices on Britain. The list of those nations is long, and it includes Ireland. I should say in passing how appalled I was to see Ireland among that crowd of greedy predators. The Irish describe themselves as the friends of fishing, but that is a major betrayal. Ireland got away with no limitation on days at sea in the Irish sea, with another two years of subsidies, and with more herring quota.

Hake was dropped from the Spanish stock recovery programme, which suited them. They, too, will enjoy two more years of subsidy and support for new investment in fishing, which will result in a lot of building in Spain during that period. France got the 80 mm mesh for saithe in the southern North sea, and 25 days at sea per month for vessels fishing with that mesh. They had already had a better deep-water deal than us.

Denmark, the home of industrial fishing, was given 25 days a month for the purpose. All who have spoken today have described that as a major cause of the problem, a view echoed by the industry. I have a document prepared by Grimsby fish producers organisation. I think that I sent the Minister a copy; if not, I will send it to his Department hot-foot—or hot-fish. It says that the Danish and Norwegian industrial fishing fleets account for 20 per cent. of fish mortality. It is well documented that, in the winter of 2001–02, industrial fishing by-catch varied from 21 per cent. haddock to as much as 97 per cent. herring, and all that was illegal. As others have said, boats in Denmark have incurred the minimal penalty of not being allowed to put to sea for a month. As it was Christmas, they were not going to put to sea anyway.

That was presumably a concession to the Danes. As for the Netherlands and Belgium, cuts in plaice and sole were reduced to 5 per cent. and 1 per cent. respectively. The result was that all those states could concur that the major cuts in fishing effort should be imposed on this country, which has left us in a messy situation. It has hit the vessels with the bigger mesh, which are the most effective for conservation purposes. Fishing effort will be diversified into smaller meshes when we want to increase mesh sizes. Vessels will rush out of ports and catch the maximum that they can catch as quickly as possible within their limited fishing period, and then belt back with little regard for conservation.

We all indulge in nostalgia. There is a syndrome in the fishing industry which I call NITDIMW, or "Not If They'd Done It My Way". Those of us who believe that ownership of a nation's waters is the best guarantor of the protection and development of that nation state's fishing industry and of proper conservation think that, if we had not thrown that away in 1972, we would not be in our present position. The Scottish nationalists clearly think that a better deal would have been negotiated by an independent Scotland. I doubt that, because Scotland would have experienced the same pressures that hit the British Government.

Mr. Morley: My hon. Friend is partly right. Of course there are pressures, and of course member states vote in different ways. Outcomes will be influenced by majority voting and blocking minorities. The situation is more complex, however. Some member states that have traditionally supported our view, such as Germany and Sweden, want a complete closure, while others—including Denmark—which have been hit just as hard as us on cod have supported the days-at-sea proposals. In regard to the Irish sea, for instance, we pressed for no effort control because our industry was arguing for that. As for saithe, we have a big interest in that on Humberside.

[Mr. Morley]

What my hon. Friend described as concessions to other countries were actually measures that we wanted as well. The situation is not quite as simple as he suggests—although the way in which member states ally themselves of course has an influence.

Mr. Mitchell: I accept that, but the fact remains that because of the white fish difficulty, the main problems were incurred by us. It is permissible to ask, as some in the industry have asked, whether France would have gone gentle into that good night if they had been in our position.

Mr. Salmond: The hon. Gentleman is chairman of the all-party fisheries group and knows the answer to his own question. As he goes through the list of countries that have established fishing as a priority, he will realise what can be done. Surely he would never suggest that any Scottish Minister would have signed up to a common fisheries policy that regarded the Scottish fisheries as expendable? That is what the Conservative Government did in 1972.

Mr. Mitchell: I accept that that is true. I have long regretted that fishing is not given the same priority in this country, as it is not considered economically important. An independent Scotland might not have accepted the 1972 CFP, but I doubt that it would have been able to put up a better and more effective fight than did the British Government of the time, in which English and Scottish Ministers worked together.

In any case, there is no point wasting time on historical matters, however interesting. My argument is that the Government have accepted this settlement, and therefore must accept the consequences. They are that measures, mainly financial, will have to be taken to ensure that a viable fishing industry survives to inherit the benefits of what I hope will be more effective conservation.

My hon. Friend the Minister will have seen the report from the Sea Fish Industry Authority on costs and earnings. It says that the average profit of the white fish fleet was 2.6 per cent. That is pathetic. The report states that 35 per cent. of vessels in the fleet were fishing at a loss, and estimates that the new measures would impose a further loss of £135 million on the fleet.

An interesting table in the report shows the effects of various levels of profit reduction. Even the most minimal reduction would lead to 953 job losses in the whole UK on the catching side, and to 2,186 lost jobs on onshore industries. That is a total loss of 3,500 jobs, and a reduction in output, in financial terms, of £279 million.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister accepts those figures. It is often argued that the fishing industry often poormouths itself, and I agree: it often presents itself with its trouser bottoms hanging out, saying that it is going bankrupt. However, all the conversations that I have had with fishermen show that this time they are facing a disastrous financial situation. They cannot go on without substantial Government intervention to help them financially.

First, that help must certainly include a substantial decommissioning package. I disagree with other hon. Members in that respect, as it is clear that getting as many as 15 days at sea per month has required the acceptance of a 15 per cent. decommissioning package. Secondly, the quotas of the decommissioned vessels should be bought by the local producer organisations, so that they are kept in the locality. I hope that the Government will consider helping them with that, as many cannot afford to buy up quota in that way.

Thirdly, there has to be compensation for the men who are losing their jobs. They are share fishermen, and so not entitled to redundancy. However, it would be appalling if we were to allow another scandal to happen similar to what happened with the failure to pay compensation to the Icelandic trawlermen. They were later deemed to be employed, but it took 25 years to come through. The fishermen involved are losing their livelihood, and some form of compensation—I accept that it would be an ex gratia scheme—must be made available.

Two other things are needed as well. The first is operating support. It is a vexed issue, but vessels will not be profitable if they are allowed only 15 days at sea a month. Indeed, the Sea Fish Industry Authority estimates that 90 per cent. of the fleet will not be profitable in that situation. Therefore, there must be some support for the fixed costs that it incurs if it is to be kept going.

The World Wildlife Fund has proposed what seems to me to be an eminently sensible scheme. It points out that this is an investment in the industry, not a subsidy, to keep it going. If we do not keep it going, other countries investing in their industries, giving support to their industries, will keep theirs going. Therefore, there must be a measure of operator support and there must be aid for communities, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) argued earlier. Last time it failed, because it went through the regional development agencies and not directly to fishing. It went on lighting schemes, new paving on seafronts, and all sorts of other things, but did not go to fishing. It needs to be directed to fishing.

My hon. Friend the Minister must apply his very inventive mind and Department to other methods of support for the industry, which I hope would include paying fishing vessels to take scientists to sea, because the industry and the science are far apart.

Mr. Connarty: My hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, Central (Mr. Doran) made suggestions about how the fishing and sailing skills of people in the industry could be used in other areas if we changed the regulations on the people on vessels in Scottish waters. Particularly for Scotland, that might sustain those skills for a longer period, until the fishing industry can use them again.

Mr. Mitchell: I agree absolutely. My hon. Friend makes a very valid and important point.

We also have to face the problem of port and dock charges, which are quite substantial in this country, whereas in many of our competitor countries, fishing pays no dock charges. They are paid directly by the Government or the municipal authority. There are ever-escalating charges on the processing side. Our industry bears light dues, whereas European industries do not. It needs help with installing the satellite surveillance system, which was going to be financed by Europe, but now the industry has been asked to pay for it itself.

Any way in which the industry can be helped in its current difficulties should be used. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister is conversant with the problem. I hope that he will apply himself to developing a package for fishing that ensures that we have a viable fishing industry in three or four years, when the catches begin to pick up and we can inherit the future, to ensure that that future does not go to other industries whose countries are providing the support that we should give.

4.47 pm

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): The Minister behaved extremely well in the debate, and I pay tribute to the intelligence and concern that he brought to all the issues and to the fact that he took so many interventions.

I wish to make a few brief remarks in the spirit of trying to offer some constructive suggestions about how the position of this badly damaged industry could be bettered.

I draw the Minister's attention, first, to the question of how much fish is wasted. We see from the European Union documents before us that 50,000 to 75,000 tonnes of whiting are known to be dumped every year. The figures on haddock range from 55,000 to 125,000 tonnes. If we multiply that by all the different species of all the catches and by-catches, we must be in the realm of well over a million tonnes of fish being crudely dumped back into the sea. That is an environmental disaster, a biological disaster and an economic disaster.

I understand that the Minister wishes to wrestle with the problem, and I see from the good documentation before us that the EU, after these many long years, has at last made some suggestions that might begin to tackle the problem. I would ask the Minister to show a greater sense of urgency. I know that he has to work with 14 other member states and I know that the Commission often grinds very slowly when one wants it to do something—I attended enough meetings to find that out for myself—but there is much common sense on the side of those of us who say that we must stop this disaster in its tracks. We must be able to mobilise public opinion and ministerial opinion in the Community to do a better job.

The documents are long and copious. The Minister knows better than I do the various proposals that have been made. It would be possible, for example, to land all the fish that are caught and find some economic use for them. People are prepared to buy smaller fish if they are cheaper than bigger fish. Sometimes they are prepared to pay a premium for smaller fish if they are attractive and can be cooked in different ways.

We should certainly reconsider mesh sizes to ensure that fewer small fish are caught. There must be better guidance and systems of temporary control to deal with shoals of younger fish, which we need to protect to ensure that they can grow into bigger fish and to encourage recovery. We must be able to do something about the consequences of too much industrial fishing being undertaken, which is damaging so much of the seabed and the marine environment.

I also hope that the Minister will have another go at the overall quotas. Those who said that they are not fair are quite right. That problem has been greatly exacerbated by the final dénouement of the open policy, bringing in many vessels from elsewhere. We are cursed with a common fisheries policy, but, fortunately, from the point of view of the Spaniards, French and the others, we do not have common policies in areas where we could benefit.

Why, for example, do we not have a common wine policy, whereby we could supplement the grapes produced by our own wine growers with some of the higher quality grapes from Bordeaux? Perhaps we should have a quota. Why do we not have a common olive policy? We do not seem to grow many olives in Britain. Is it fair that the Spaniards and Italians grow so many but we do not have access to their resources, when they have access to the prime marine resource that we have brought to the Community, as we happen to have most of the important fish stocks and fish breeding grounds?

I know that it is more difficult to reopen all the quota issues—I do not suggest that the Minister should recommend other common policies, given the failure of this common policy—but it is vital, for the sake of the communities that are facing decimation as a result of the changes, that we have another go. I remember visiting the English ports a few years ago and seeing the consequences of previous quota decisions, which had been extremely damaging.

There has been a little bit of crude party politics in the debate, which is not particularly helpful. Many Liberal Democrat and Labour Members delight in saying that a Conservative Government first took us into the European Community and therefore that a Conservative Government first signed up to the common fisheries policy, but all those Members should remember that the 1974–79 Labour Government, supported for quite a long period by the Liberal Democrats, renegotiated our relationship with the EU and presented what they said was a much better solution to the British people in a referendum and the British people voted in favour.

At that point, if not before, all the parties in the House—particularly the Labour party, but also the Liberal Democrats—effectively signed up to the whole deal, including the common fisheries policy. So I am afraid that the blood of the fishing settlements and fishing industry is on the arms and hands of all the legislators of all the parties that have supported that renegotiated package and our continued membership of the Community ever since.

I have been a long-standing critic of the common fisheries policy. I was an unsuccessful critic of it in a Conservative Government, when colleagues did not agree with some of my views on how far we should go in demanding renegotiation. I was no more successful in trying to get the Conservative Government between 1995 and 1997 to accept my advice on this issue when I decided to return to the Back Benches and when I visited many of the fishing areas to see for myself the tragedy that was unfolding.

In recent years, I have been much more successful. My right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) was very sympathetic and changed Conservative policy on fishing in the light of the tragedy unfolding in the fishing communities and fishing industry. I am pleased to say that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition is carrying on with the work that was commenced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks.

[Mr. John Redwood]

I am not expecting the Government immediately to demand the fundamental renegotiation that the Conservative party now currently stands for and demands, but I hope that Minister will think again and see that for a long period, some 30 years, whatever party has been in power, our fishing industry has been in continuous decline, that far too much fish is being taken by vessels from other countries and that far too much damage is being done by the fishing techniques still permitted for a very precious marine environment off our coasts.

This could be a great industry and fish are a vital natural resource. The common fisheries policy is proven to be an environmental, economic, social and industrial disaster. I hope that the Minister will follow up at least my ideas on making better use of the fish that are currently wasted and changing the rules on what kind of fishing is permitted because the wrong kind of fishing is coming in from outside. I hope that, one day, we will get cross-party support for the idea that fishing could be better regulated and controlled in Britain than by the EU.

4.54 pm

Mrs. Joan Humble (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood): Usually when I rise to speak I say what a pleasure it is to engage in the debate, but unfortunately I find precious little pleasure in taking part in our discussions today. There is gloom not only among hon. Members but also in the fishing communities that we represent, with only a very dim light at the end of a very, very long tunnel.

However, I compliment my hon. Friend the Minister on the efforts that he has made on our behalf, because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) outlined, many people were fearful before the discussions at the end of last year and many of those fears have been allayed. Despite that, we should not underestimate the serious impact that the agreement will have on all our constituents. It was not as bad as we feared, but it was still a dreadful result for all too many of the fishermen we represent.

Tomorrow, I shall meet representatives of the Fleetwood Fish Forum. I want to be able to offer them some hope and reassurance, but I find myself in a difficult position. What reassurances can I give them about this year, next year or the years to come?

I was pleased that my hon. Friend the Minister assured us that he would look into an appropriate aid package. I emphasise the point that I made earlier: any economic assistance must bring positive benefits to our fishing communities. Such a package will have to include help with decommissioning, but it must also recognise that our fishing communities want to remain fishing communities.

In Fleetwood, there is still optimism. On a recent visit to my constituency, my hon. Friend met representatives of the local fishing community who told him about the investment that they were making. He met Chris Neve who was investing in new vessels. That is positive. Many people hold out hope for the future, but they want reassurance that their investments are appropriate for that future.

When I meet the forum tomorrow, I shall certainly ask its members to give me details of how the negotiated package will affect them in the future. I look on this debate as merely the start of discussions and give notice to my hon. Friend the Minister that I shall undoubtedly be writing to him after my meeting tomorrow to outline the concerns of my constituents.

However, I can reassure my hon. Friend that Fleetwood fishermen understand the need for conservation. Over the past three years, they have taken an active part in the Irish sea cod recovery programme; they understand that, without conservation, there will be no fish.

Mr. Weir: I am interested in what the hon. Lady says about her meeting because, tomorrow, I too shall be meeting representatives of fishing-based industries in my constituency. Does she agree that it would be useful if we could tell our constituents that there will be additional money from the Treasury for an aid package? Was she as disappointed as I was with the Minister's earlier answer on that point?

Mrs. Humble: I was not disappointed with the Minister's answer; I was pleased that my hon. Friend is considering the type of aid package that he outlined. I realise that my hon. Friend is at the start of negotiations and I shall do everything in my power to help him in his negotiations with other Departments and I look forward to an outcome that satisfies my constituents.

The position of my constituents is rather different from that of people in many of the fishing communities that were referred to in the debate. There is no effort limitation in the Irish sea; Fleetwood fishermen are allowed to go out and fish, but they are not allowed to catch much when they do so. The context for any aid package for them will be different from that for Scottish and North sea fishermen.

The Minister mentioned the nature of the Irish sea cod recovery programme, and it has been confirmed that the western Irish sea will be closed. I must remind him, however, that Fleetwood fishermen believe that the eastern Irish sea should also be included, as substantial cod stocks are to be found there. I know that his scientific advice disputes that, but I was told that in the first quarter of 1999, the model year used by the Commission, more cod was caught in the eastern Irish sea than in the western Irish sea. The Dutch and Belgian beamers that fish those waters, although they target sole, have a substantial cod by-catch. I am told that, last year, in area 7A, the Belgians had a sole catch of 674 tonnes and a cod catch of 283 tonnes. That is a considerable amount of cod. If cod stocks in the Irish sea are perilously low, we need to examine carefully the closed areas to make sure that we are protecting what cod is there, and other species.

As I mentioned, Fleetwood fishermen are allowed to go out in the coming year, apart from in the closed areas, but they are deeply shocked at the level of the cuts in quota. The Minister agreed that there had been some recovery in cod stocks, which is what the fishermen tell me. They say that they enjoyed a good year last year in terms of catches, so they are seeing benefits from the cod recovery programme, although they moderate their remarks by saying that it is a slight recovery. They think

that the 59 per cent. cod reduction, 55 per cent. haddock reduction and 56 per cent. whiting reduction imposed on them is not justified by the evidence that they see as fishermen in the Irish sea, and they are especially concerned about the 65 per cent. cut in plaice, as they tell me that the plaice stock is within safe biological limits. Will my hon. Friend therefore consider whether the scientific evidence justifies those quota cuts, and whether they can be re-examined?

I also want to raise a technical issue with my hon. Friend. He will recall that I corresponded with him in 2001 about extending the Irish sea cod recovery programme technical measures up to 56° north and 7°30 west. Many Fleetwood men go up into the northern channel, and they were concerned that the nets that they use and the technical measures imposed on them changed once they had crossed over an arbitrary line in their fishing ground. My hon. Friend agreed, and the Commission changed the rules so that there was one set of EU rules all the way up to 56°. There is some confusion now about whether the technical measures applying to the Irish sea cod recovery programme still apply up to 56°, because there is an overlap with area 6A, where the effort control measures now apply. Will he consider that issue, so that I can reassure the fishermen of Fleetwood that, as they take their vessels all the way up into the northern channel, they are sailing under one set of Commission rules, not two?

Finally, I want to reinforce the point that I made in an earlier intervention: it is vital that the voice of fishermen is heard in these discussions. I was pleased to read in the Minister's letter that we have all received today:

"In the Irish Sea, the 2002 cod recovery arrangements, including the closure of an area for a period in the spring, will be repeated. The Council envisages consideration of a more sophisticated effort control regime for all member states with vessels fishing the area concerned on the basis of a Commission proposal, which would be brought forward by mid-February, with the possibility of adoption by the second half of 2003."

That is a chink of light and a glimmer of hope for the fishermen of Fleetwood who want to engage in constructive discussions about the future of any proposals for the Irish sea. Will my hon. Friend assure me that they will be included in the discussions about the future of the cod recovery programme? They feel that they have a lot to offer to the debate. I shall certainly do my best to represent their wishes. I conclude my remarks now to allow other Members to make their important contributions.

5.6 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I return to the central paradox of the debate. We have heard that the Scottish Fisheries Minister—a similar point is made in the Liberal Democrat and Scottish National party amendments—accurately described the deal coming out of Brussels as unjust, unfair and discriminatory. He was thoroughly depressed. The Minister in this House agreed with that at certain points in his speech, but he also described the deal as the best-balanced process. We have even heard the word "success" used in terms of the outcome of the Brussels negotiations. If we have more successes like this, there will be no one left in the fishing industry to celebrate.

The Minister, the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) and I have debated these issues on innumerable occasions, and I have a memory for what people have said over the past few years. I could direct the Minister's attention to the debates on the Sea Fish (Conservation) Act 1992 when he described an eight-day tie-up—not a 16-day one—as a betrayal. If an eight-day tie-up under the Conservative party was a betrayal, what is the 16-day tie-up that the Labour party has agreed to in these negotiations?

I have other comments from the Minister in the debates of 11 years ago. It is excellent stuff. He said:

"We have long argued for an end to industrial fishing. The position is now so critical that our fishermen are being forced to tie up their boats in port compulsorily, and there is no longer any role for industrial fishing."

That is what he said 11 years ago when he was facing the Conservative party.

I have with me an industrial fishing net. It is like a hair net—absolutely nothing could get through such a net. Industrial fishermen fish in the same waters as other fishermen, but the Minister tells us that there is no real scientific back-up for an end to industrial fishing. Eleven years ago, he thought that there was absolutely no doubt about it. It could not be allowed to continue. It was unacceptable. There had to be an end to it. Eleven years later—for half that time he has been in office—we find that he believes that the science is ambiguous.

Mr. Morley: The hon. Gentleman knows me very well, because we have debated these issues for many years. I think that he will recognise that my remarks have always been consistent. If we are arguing for change in the face of deep-rooted opposition from other countries who do not believe a word that we are saying, we must have the evidence for our case. My problem—I shall be quite open about it—is that the evidence is not as definitive as I would like it to be. Nevertheless, the case is still there for tackling industrial fishing and its long-term consequences on the marine environment.

Mr. Salmond: The only European Union country with a real interest in industrial fishing is the mighty state of Denmark, with its 5 million people. It attaches great priority to its fishing industry and was chair of the Council meeting. The mighty state of Denmark was able to resist all the other countries and sustain its interest in industrial fishing with the type of hair net that destroys the feedstock and the future of the fisheries.

Even if industrial fishing was directed and did not result in a by-catch—such a suggestion is laughable—it would still destroy the ecosystem. One cannot destroy 600,000 tonnes of feedstock and sand eels from any marine environment without depressing the stocks of other fish. What do the cod, the haddock and the other fish eat? They eat material at the bottom of the food chain. Removing the bottom of the food chain removes the fish at the top. We do not need a degree in fisheries science to know that.

As the Minister conceded, the pout fishery is not a directed fishery. The thousands of tonnes of small and tiny fish caught in the pout fishery represent millions upon millions of potential large fish. So 1,000 tonnes in the pout fishery is many thousands of tonnes in a human consumption fishery. It is unacceptable that in the human consumption fishery, fishing with 120 mm nets with square mesh panels should be limited to 15 days a month while in the same waters, a fishery used for

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pigfeed, poultryfeed and for drying pellets for animal consumption gets 23 days and virtually no restriction on quota. The Minister knew it 11 years ago and it is to his shame that he is not more forceful about it now, and that in his five and a half years as Fisheries Minister he has not demanded the research that gave him the base to argue for that at European Council meetings.

The Minister made an excellent speech 11 years ago and I recommend he read it again. He said:

"There are other, more constructive ways of reducing effort than making boats tie up in port. Has the Minister considered arguing in the European Community for fishermen who use large mesh and receive a special payment?"—[*Official Report*, 8 June 1992; Vol. 209, c. 56.]

The Scots fishing industry, using the largest mesh in the whole of Europe, does not get a special payment. We get a special deal of only 15 days a month if we are prepared to accept another 15 per cent. decommissioning on top of the 20 per cent. decommissioning that took place last year. That is certainly a special deal for the Scottish white fish industry, but not the right one. I hope that the Minister will read his speech again and find constructive ways in which to assist an industry that has been trying to pursue a conservation fishery.

Of course there will be difficult negotiations, but the Minister's central failure is clear: it was not to extract the whiting and haddock quotas from underneath the cod quota and the recommendation. He had the evidence to do it in the groundfish survey, DEFRA's major annual survey. Incidentally, Mr. Fischler told me in December that he had never seen it—he thought that it was produced by fishermen. The Commissioner actually thought that the major DEFRA survey on fish stocks in the North sea was produced by fishermen and therefore discounted it.

The DEFRA survey on spatial distribution shows no cod in many areas of the North sea but very substantial quantities of haddock and whiting. How on earth the grounds could not have been prepared to extract the haddock and whiting allocation and quota from the cod recovery plan or the emergency measures, goodness only knows. I say that it is because of lack of preparation, thought and concern.

Mr. Morley: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the very good year class of haddock is based on the 1999 year class. The surveys since then, including the groundfish survey, show that recoupment has been very poor—in fact, some of the poorest on record. We must look at conserving the current haddock stocks and, in relation to mesh sizes, which the industry has agreed, minimising what has been an unacceptable discard rate, calculated at about 100,000 tonnes a year, of under-sized haddock.

Mr. Salmond: Yes, and the Minister sat with me when I asked DEFRA scientists whether they had been setting a haddock and whiting quota as a stand-alone measure. They agreed that it would have been about a 20 per cent. reduction in quota. How on earth did we arrive at a situation in which the cod quota was reduced by 45 per cent., with the stock under pressure, haddock by 50 per cent. and whiting by 60 per cent.? The Minister should listen and use the arguments adduced by his own scientists. It should have been possible to extract haddock and whiting by geography and by time of year out of the cod emergency measures, and the Minister knows it.

In addition, scientific voyages have taken place over the past year which, as the fishermen found out in November, had not even been presented as evidence to the European Commission at that stage. That research would have showed that, for whiting, up to 70 per cent. of escapes were of marketable quality. If fishermen are using 120 mm nets with square mesh panels, the haddock and whiting stocks are totally protected in that environment. The Minister is nodding. I hope that when he sums up he will be able to offer encouragement that trying to recover the ground that has been lost in terms of haddock and whiting will be a priority.

We have heard a fair bit of the history of the common fisheries policy. It is important to consider that. With due respect to the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) and his selective interpretation of it, the history tells us how we got where we are. It may even tell us how to get out of this situation. National control is an excellent idea. It would be far better than the current arrangements. The problem is how we achieve it. Unfortunately, the series of negotiations that started in 1971 make that difficult. The release of a 30-year-old document has allowed us to see that the fishing industry was considered to be expendable in the context of wider British European interests. In 1983, the great Lady Thatcher, that anti-European, signed up for the quota allocation policy. When the right hon. Gentleman was a member of the Government, the Maastricht treaty put the fisheries policy into treaty form. In 1994, the Spanish were allowed to rewrite their treaty of accession so that they could have early access to the west coast. The UK agreed to that on the basis of Spanish support for our opt-out from the single currency. On each and every occasion, fishing was traded away in pursuit of wider British European interests. The hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) did not satisfy us on how things would be different in the Conservative party of 2003.

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) was kind enough to explain that the evidence shows that if a country makes fishing a priority, it is able to extract concessions for their industry. Every other nation emerged from the Brussels talks with their industry intact although not totally undamaged. *[Interruption.]* I thank the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait) for her charity in providing me with a glass of water. It is definitely not good Scottish water. Even fish would find it difficult to survive in it. However, it has done the job and cleared my throat.

Those countries in which fishing is a priority emerged from the negotiations with their industry protected. Only Britain emerged with our industry, or part of it, under mortal threat. The industry has to be offered the hope that something will be done to rebalance the disastrous package over the next few months, including in next month's negotiations on the more formulated cod recovery plan. The deal cannot be allowed to stand for any length of time. If it does, there will be no way around it. It will mean thousands of job losses and that is that. The industry must be given a sign from the Dispatch Box that there will be an attempt to salvage something from what is a total and utter disaster.

In the meantime, a financial package should be provided to protect and keep intact the integrity of as much of the industry as possible. I very much agree with the hon. Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) who said that decommissioning, even if it is a necessary tool of policy, does nothing for the economic fabric of the fishing areas. It does a great deal for the clearing banks, however. Most of the decommissioning money goes straight into them because they are the first line of credit. Some of it does not even pull the fishing businesses out of debt and often other creditors get no money at all.

If the Minister believes that it is a balanced package and there is hope for the future, he should try to keep the industry intact so that it benefits from the recovery in stocks. A mere decommissioning scheme is not the answer. New money from the Treasury must be forthcoming. It will not be enough to rebalance existing budgets. I do not know about Blackpool and Fleetwood, but there is no huge surfeit of money in the enterprise budgets in north-east Scotland to allow the transfer of substantial sums into the fishing industry. The money simply is not there. The Treasury has to provide new money to keep communities intact.

Fishing has been given low priority. The total number of UK jobs is not huge by comparison with many other industries. At the Scottish level, fishing has about 10 times that level of importance and jobs are concentrated in key areas. In Fraserburgh in my constituency, more than half the employment is dependent on fishing, In Peterhead the figure is pushing towards 30 per cent. The level is about the same in the constituency of at least one other hon. Member. Up the Moray coast, in Arbroath and down to Eyemouth, places that depend on the white fish fleet as a key part of their industry are gravely and totally in peril.

If the Government did not give the industry the required priority in negotiations, at least it should be given priority in terms of an assistance package to tide it over until a better deal can be done.

I have asked the Library about the common fisheries policy many times, over several years. I always get the answer that the only way we can get out of the CFP is to achieve unanimous agreement at a meeting of the Council of Ministers to renegotiate the treaty. There might be a strong argument for calling for national control, on the basis that it would put Commissioner Fischler into the position of having to make concessions. One concession might be to zone all management—a policy first advocated by the late Dr. Alan McCartney. No policy can survive when the country contributing the vast majority of its resource base is totally opposed to the policy's nature and direction.

Although the Minister was not really supported by the Prime Minister in December—

Mr. Morley: I was.

Mr. Salmond: The fisheries Minister says that he was supported. There was a last-minute telephone call to Fischler. The matter was on the margins of the summit agenda. If we had hired Rory Bremner to telephone Fischler, we could have achieved more. We should have got Rory Bremner to telephone him and say, "I am the Prime Minister. I think that fishing should have the highest priority." Or to say, as the French representative did to Fischler, that Chirac would be there on Friday morning unless the French industry got out from under—which it did.

I have never doubted the Minister's knowledge of the industry but I wonder whether he was fully backed up and supported. When fisheries account for 70 per cent. of a country's resources, I do not understand how negotiations can be brought to a conclusion when that country totally rejects what is happening.

Angus Robertson: What optimism does my hon. Friend have that the Government will come up with a substantial aid package when the Secretary of State for Scotland cannot be present at an important fishing debate? He is acting as a tour guide for the Prime Minister at a Labour party meeting in Scotland. Or when a debate—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order.

Mr. Salmond: I take my hon. Friend's point. Hopefully the Secretary of State is lobbying the Prime Minister as we speak. At least that is a face-to-face meeting, not a telephone call from the right hon. Gentleman to the Prime Minister or vice versa.

It is absolutely vital that the Minister realises that the package cannot be allowed to stand for any length of time because it aims a dagger at the heart of an aspect of the Scottish and Yorkshire fleets, which have survived flagging out but will not remain intact if the new measures are allowed to stand. And while a better deal is renegotiated, there must be a substantial package of assistance funded by new money from the Treasury, in giving the industry the priority that it deserves but to which it is certainly not accustomed.

5.23 pm

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster (Hastings and Rye): Representing as I do the largest beach-launched fleet in the whole of Europe, never mind the United Kingdom, the fishermen of Hastings are thankful that my [illegible] Friend the Minister has once again shown his commitment to their industry. They are grateful to him for listening and doing his best in the negotiations.

Almost by definition, the under-10m sector comprises natural conservationists. The overall catch is minimal compared with the number of jobs dependent on the industry. It is not just jobs in fishing that are important to an area such as Hastings but also in tourism and related areas of employment that depend on the industry's survival. The fact that the under-10 m sector will be exempt from days at sea is a welcome concession, and is in marked contrast to the impositions made when the Opposition were in power and faced a similar crisis.

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Beckenham): I want to put that right on the record immediately, as I was the hon. Gentleman's predecessor. There was indeed a derogation from days at sea under the Sea Fish (Conservation) Act 1992 which allowed boats under 10 m not to take part in the scheme.

Mr. Foster: The hon. Lady knows better than I because she was MP for Hastings and Rye at the time,

[Mr. Foster]

and I apologise to her if what she has just said is the case. Undoubtedly, local fishermen did not think so, otherwise they would not have hung her from the yard-arm before the 1997 election. The present derogation is certainly important and the Minister is to be applauded for achieving it. My constituents are concerned about survival until better times are with us. Recent decisions mean that they will not be too distant, although we have some way to go.

My local industry has little interest in decommissioning and wishes to preserve its historic birthright—it does not want out, it wants a future. To be parochial, it is important that my local fleet has access to the reduced cod quota. At present, it has access only during the winter period, because that is when the fish are in the eastern end of the channel. Often by November and December, the quota for the whole channel is nearly exhausted. My hon. Friend has certainly made efforts on this, but has he made any progress on achieving a sub-quota for area VIId, which would allow the fleet its full allocation at the end of the year, when it became available naturally?

We need to look at alternatives during the short period when the fish are returning. My local fishing industry has a side catch of spider crabs, an important delicacy in southern areas such as Spain and parts of France. Is there any opportunity to provide, for example, capital for holding equipment, so that such a catch can be exploited? There may be other opportunities as well.

As hon. Members have said, financial support is needed while people get through these hard times. The Conservative proposals, some of which are quite outrageous, are not the answer. For example, the hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen) made an outrageous suggestion, with which those on his Front Bench seemed to have some sympathy, when he said that markets should be opened up. He said that there should be opportunities for quotas throughout the market. That is simply not on. To suggest that my constituents should bid for their birthright is as objectionable as it is impracticable. That needs to be stated clearly.

Most hypocritical of all, perhaps, was the Conservatives' suggestion that withdrawal from the CFP is a practical solution. In recent years, they have said that they would withdraw, then that they would not. Today, it appears that they are withdrawing again. My fishermen constituents are unequivocally in favour of withdrawal from the CFP, but they are unequivocally in favour of withdrawal from the European community anyway—there is no misunderstanding their position. The Conservative spokesperson refused to allow an intervention on the hypocritical proposal to withdraw from the CFP while leaving open the question whether the Opposition would seek to withdraw from the EU. I ask and hope that during the remainder of the debate, there will be some opportunity for the Conservative Front-Bench spokesman to say honestly whether it is their policy to withdraw unequivocally from the EU. That is the only possible way that they could withdraw from the CFP. In any event, fish do not carry passports, so it is within the EU that the answer must be found. We can achieve that and so much more through our membership.

5.30 pm

Mr. Anthony Steen (Totnes): First, we must all recognise that the Minister is Mr. Fish. If he were on "Brain of Britain", he would be able to answer every question about fish. Nobody knows more about fish. Secondly, he does his best. When he goes to Brussels, he negotiates as much fish as he can for Britain. There can be no doubt about that. However, under a system of quotas, he will always have to argue about how much is coming to Britain. He does his best, but it is never enough. The Scots, the North sea and the west country all want more. What is the Minister to do? All he can do is be a whipping boy. He comes to the Chamber every few months like a masochist. He gets beaten, goes off with his tail between his legs, and comes back for another performance. That is all he can do, as long as we have a common fisheries policy.

The hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Foster), in his customary way, misunderstood everything that I proposed. I have a great affection for him and expect him always to misunderstand me. I suggested that we need a different system. As long as we have the old one, under which we come to the Chamber and argue about how much should go to Scotland, whether we should have more cod, whether the scientists are wrong, and whether we can have more crab, please, we will just go on arguing about it. The Minister will be benign and good-natured, and do his best. I have been going round the course for 20 years.

Mr. Peter Duncan: Although we cannot expect Labour Members to come round in the immediate future to our way of thinking on the subject of withdrawal from the CFP, surely even they must be made to admit that that cannot be worse than the situation currently facing British fishing communities.

Mr. Steen: I am always puzzled by the fact that the Government go on arguing. They must know that that is the scenario. I shall explore a different idea, if the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye will bear with me. I shall go slowly, so that he can understand the argument.

The system already operates in New Zealand, Iceland and the Philippines. It sets a limit on the total available catch of any fish. Within that total catch, quotas are established, either by auction or by gift to incumbent fishermen, so incumbent fishermen get a share of the quota. The quotas are tradeable among individual fishermen. That offers an escape clause for some fishermen who are no longer able to operate economically. It encourages more successful fishermen to buy fishing rights and exercise their property rights responsibly by fishing within that quota and monitoring others to make sure that they do so, as well. It also encourages brokers to speed up transactions to allow environmentalists to enter the market and buy and retire quotas if they believe stocks are being overfished.

I do not know whether such a scheme is the answer. All I know is that the present system does not work, so we must find some alternative. The anguish of the Scottish fishermen is understandable. I agree with them and with my west country fishermen. The situation will not get any better.

Society wants to eat more fish. There is a recognition that fish is better for our health. There is also a recognition that there are 6 billion people in the world,

and that that figure will rise to 12 billion by 2060, according to the scientists, although they may be wrong. Where will the fish come from to feed them and maintain their health? Perhaps one should take a Machiavellian view and say that we should all eat meat so that we do not live so long.

I want to explore the topic of fish farms. I am concerned about the piece in the *Daily Mail* that hon. Members may have seen a few weeks ago which said that salmon fisheries were poisoned and that the fish were being fed pellets which were not good for them and which were coming into the food chain. I am concerned about fish farms. If they are to be the future of the fishing industry, are we going to get rid of our boats and have fish farms for all types of fish? Are we then going to feed those fish with chemicals and colouring which will come into the food chain and which is bad for us? The Minister needs to look at that issue.

If we are not going to change the common fisheries policy, are we going to have arguments like this every few months? Are we going to keep on coming back to the House and arguing that the Minister is not doing well enough? Or is he going to follow a new thought process about how we are going to produce more fish? Are we going to reduce the amount of fish by over-fishing and then develop fish farms, with all their consequent problems? I also wonder whether he is going to pursue the idea of an alternative approach to the quota system. Is there a proposal on the cards to change the other EU countries' approach to fish quota?

I am always ready to give way to anyone who would like to intervene on me, but I do not want to let the Lib Dems in; they have had a good run already.

Mr. Peter Duncan: My hon. Friend invites my intervention, which I am happy to supply him with. Does he share my concern that one of the important issues that we have to address in this debate has not been addressed by the Government? That is the targeting and direction of the aid package that is to be provided for fishermen in Scotland. Does he support the motion that is being proposed by Struan Stevenson, the Member of the European Parliament—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. This is rather long for an intervention.

Mr. Steen: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. He has made an important point and I am sure that the Minister will wish to say something about it. I shall wind down now; I have made my points and I want to give other parties an opportunity to make a contribution.

5.37 pm

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): I am immensely grateful to the hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen) for giving me three minutes in which to say something about an industry that, as the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) has pointed out, is responsible for one third of the economic product of Shetland, which is half of my constituency.

I could say a great deal about the conduct of this debate and of last month's Fisheries Council. I shall restrict my comments on the latter to saying that it showed the old common fisheries policy at its very worst. It involved protracted negotiations at all hours of the day and night and the worst sort of horse-trading at the very end of the year. Would any other industry tolerate having its future determined in that way? Manifestly, the answer is no, and there is a good reason for that. It is because to do so is frankly crazy.

The Minister has already referred to the new, improved common fisheries policy, and I sincerely hope that it is improved. It is very much on probation as far as I and my constituents are concerned. I was particularly pleased to see the retention of the six to 12-mile limit, the Shetland box, relative stability and The Hague preference. I was also pleased by the establishment of regional advisory councils. I am not suggesting for a second that they are a proper substitute for what we really need, which is regional or zonal management, but I accept that they represent a foot in the door. The fact that the councils will be answerable directly to the Council, rather than the Commission, is important.

I hope that the Government will take a leading role in establishing the first of the regional advisory councils and ensure that they work, and that the industry is involved right at their heart. That is the basis on which the common fisheries policy will have to be built if it is to have any credibility. The councils must be able to ease the Commission out of its micro-management of fisheries, because that has been at the root of the failure. If ever there were a good example of that failure, it was last month's Council in Brussels, and the lead-up to it.

I want to say a few brief words about the financial situation from here on in. It was not lost on me or other hon. Members that the Minister was asked directly whether there would be more new money from the Treasury but did not answer. There has got to be more money, it has got to be new money and it has got to come from the Treasury. We are in a dire situation and that is of the UK's making, so the money has got to come from the UK Treasury.

How is the decommissioning going to be determined? In Shetland, there is a critical mass below which the community is no longer viable if we keep decommissioning. In a situation such as ours, once the fishing is lost, the people will be lost. Once they are lost, that is it—the whole economic fabric of the community will disintegrate. There has to be recognition that island communities have a particularly high dependency on fishing.

We have been promised long-term benefits, and I am prepared to accept that we will get them if the Minister will see us through the short-term difficulty. In concluding his speech, he said that what was important was a sustainable fisheries policy. What we have got is simply not sustainable. It will not sustain the communities that I represent and that is what he has must solve.

5.41 pm

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Beckenham): May I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and your office for extending this debate from the three hours that were allowed on the Order Paper until six o'clock? I hope that the Leader of the House will note that even more than four hours would be helpful in future fishing debates because of the sheer number of people who wish to contribute.

I feel some déjà vu in returning to the issue of fishing. As the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Foster) mentioned, 10 years ago, I made my maiden speech on

[Mrs. Jacqui Lait]

the Sea Fish (Conservation) Bill. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) and indeed my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), who intervened earlier and was the relevant Minister at the time, have pointed out that, in respect of the difficulties in which the Minister now finds himself, and on which he has been negotiating and responding so effectively to our concerns, he was arguing precisely the opposite 10 years ago.

I should also like to pray in aid the hon. Members for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), for Banff and Buchan and for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Sir Archy Kirkwood). I am sure that the latter has been involved in fishing debates for a very long time, as has my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen). All of us are very familiar with the arguments and hope that we will not have to repeat these debates for much longer, although we suspect that we shall.

I hope that hon. Members will forgive me if I cannot comment on all their speeches. Many heartfelt contributions were made. The hon. Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble)—I have noticed that Fleetwood is in Lancashire, not Yorkshire; some Scots do not understand geography—and the hon. Members for Aberdeen, Central (Mr. Doran) and for Hastings and Rye raised their concerns. I hope that the Minister got the message after an hour and two minutes. He is very generous with his time, and as somebody who has been doing the job for 10 years or more, he is certainly an expert and handled all the queries well. None the less, I hope that he got the message from everyone who has spoken about their worries on the crisis that is facing the fishing industry. The situation has been bad before, but after my experience on the Sea Fish (Conservation) Bill, I never thought that I would say that an eight-day tie-up seemed very reasonable, as it does in comparison with a 15 or 16-day tie-up, which is what the fishing industry now faces.

Before I entered the Chamber, I read the amendments that the three Opposition parties had tabled and was intrigued by the similarity in tone between the Liberal Democrat and Scottish National party amendments. Both parties picked up on the hapless Ross Finnie's words—"inequitable, crude and unfair"—but there are other similarities. In the Scottish Parliament today, the SNP tabled a motion on Iraq, and I am advised that the Liberal Democrat amendment is no different in substance. Perhaps a new coalition is emerging in Scotland between the Liberal Democrats and the SNP. That means that the Labour party in Scotland could be in trouble, and we all look forward to that.

Hon. Members: Fish!

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Fish—and chips.

Mrs. Lait: The hon. Gentleman may have had his chips soon.

There have been many crises in the fishing industry in the past 10 years and many similar debates. The Minister has often responded to our anxieties about, for example, tie-ups and the need for conservation measures. He said that a proper package of conservation measures was needed and we have supported some of his proposals. Indeed, we argued for them for a long time.

The Minister said that there should be full consultation with the fishermen's organisations. After 10 years, the message is precisely the same. The fishermen's organisations continue to claim that whatever they say, the Government do something contrary to their interests.

Ten years ago, the Minister said that he supported greater co-operation between scientists and fishermen. Why, therefore, do such passionate disputes persist about the scientific facts? Today, he said that he believed that the need for such co-operation continued to exist. However, if one talks to fishermen—I spoke to the Scottish Fishermen's Federation today—they claim that they co-operate much more with scientists, especially in Aberdeen, than any other European fishing fleets. They find that science is quoted back at them and used politically against their best interests. It is sad that, after 10 years, the scientists and the fishermen still do not work together.

As other Conservative Members pointed out, there is a lack of urgency in the Minister's approach to fishing. There is no drive behind getting the science and fishing properly integrated and presenting a clear message to the Commission.

The debate has covered all the issues that affect fishing. There is much anxiety in all fishing communities and among almost all participants in respect of the package of help. We hope that a long-term conservation programme will allow the fleets to continue fishing. In the meantime, the Minister needs to make a genuine commitment to providing a package of help that will be in place from 1 February. Again, there was a lack of urgency before the Fisheries Council about preparing such a package.

Nobody has mentioned that, on 28 February in Brussels, a Scottish Conservative Member of the European Parliament is holding a summit on fishing. He is working with fish scientists throughout the Community, the fishing industry and the processors to devise a resolution to present to the Commission and hence to the Council, demanding £100 million from the EU in compensation. It is interesting that the Prime Minister has invited fishermen to No. 10 on precisely the same day. Is there some coincidence? *[Interruption.]* It is clearly deliberate sabotage of a helpful measure to get £100 million from the Commission into the fishing communities.

We have had an interesting debate, and I must agree that the Minister has been more than courteous in answering all our questions, but whether we are satisfied with those answers is another matter altogether. I doubt whether any of the fishing communities in Scotland, Lancashire or Yorkshire will be reassured by his saying that they have a future in the coming months.

5.50 pm

Mr. Morley: I begin by welcoming the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait) to the Dispatch Box on her first outing on fisheries. I believe that it is the first time that she has been involved in such a debate, and I certainly welcome her contributions and her courtesy.

As she was involved in the previous days-at-sea scheme, she will know that it took a very different approach; it applied to the whole of the UK and to the entire industry. However, as I have said before, I do not dispute that there are problems, not least with administering such schemes. Indeed, I made that point to the Commission.

On the alternatives, the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) made a strong case against quota control, but in doing so he simply played into the Commission's hands. The Commission advocated days-at-sea effort control because, in its view, quotas and traditional management methods have failed to deliver. All that he has done today is to give comfort to the Commission and credibility to its alternative proposals. The days-at-sea scheme is a possible alternative to quotas. It could deal with issues relating to discounts, and I have never been one to close my mind to different approaches.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, Central (Mr. Doran) made a very good point about the various processes and about crew nationality. The latter point is certainly worth considering in some detail, and I shall do so. The hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) mentioned industrial fishing, as did several other Members. He made some very positive suggestions, including one relating to the Trevose grounds. We are advocating that suggestion to the Commission, and we want to pursue the issue in respect of closed areas as part of fisheries conservation. I was very pleased to learn of the support offered by his local industry.

On mesh sizes, the chairman of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation presented me with what I suspect was an off-cut of the piece of mesh to which the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) referred. In turn, I presented it to the commissioner, in order to make the point about the impact of industrial fishing. The campaign will be ongoing, and other member states are indeed beginning to take an interest. That is what we need, because for many years mine has been the sole voice on this issue in the Council. Things are beginning to change, but we need the arguments to make the change that we are trying to achieve.

My hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) discussed the impact on fishermen, and, as he knows, I take that issue seriously. He came to see me today to make the case for his fishermen, and we will consider what he said as we put together a package for the industry. The right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) discussed discards. It is indeed an important issue, and I have made it clear that we want to make progress on it. Of course, there are problems with any approach. For example, there is a case for landing all discards, but enforcement is a real problem. Norway and Iceland have a discard ban, but my colleagues in those countries concede that it presents real difficulties—unless one puts people permanently on board ships to ensure that, for whatever reason, they are landed. There are also dangers associated with targeting. Nevertheless, I rule out no particular approach, and discard bans have been mentioned as a possibility.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) mentioned the cut in plaice, and the overlap with restricted areas. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and sea fish inspectors will give her fishermen details on the rules and how they work, but if she has any queries, I am only too pleased to help.

I recognise that the constituents of the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan, and of other Members, will be greatly affected, but I disagree with him in one respect. He said that there are problems with the settlement, and I do not disagree with that. I am not claiming that it is a huge victory or a great success; it will have severe consequences for the fishing industry. However, he did not touch on the issue that I cannot ignore: the scientific advice and the need to respond to it, and the effect in terms of mixed fisheries.

Mr. Salmond: Will the Minister deal with the question of haddock and whiting? He sat with the DEFRA scientists and me, and he knows that what I said was true. Can he get haddock and whiting "out from under" the cod crisis?

Mr. Morley: We are doing our best to decouple the issues, as I said earlier. We cannot ignore the fact that in a mixed fishery the fish will be caught together, but I would be only too delighted to reduce the impact on those two stocks if it is possible to do so. I am prepared to explore possible methods.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Foster) made some good points about his beach fleet. We are making suggestions to his local industry about differential cod quotas according to season that may address some of its worries. We will try that this year, and if it does not work we shall be willing to look again at decoupling. As for spider crab, there is a possibility of financial support through the financial instrument for fisheries guidance for marketing. I should be happy to discuss that further with my hon. Friend.

The hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen) is a veteran of these debates, and I always enjoy his speeches. I was interested by what he said about the New Zealand management system. The system has both strengths and weaknesses. As with all the issues we have been discussing, there is no perfect system: there is no system that has no disadvantages.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) welcomed the establishment of regional advisory councils, which I too consider important. I appreciate the potential impact of the settlement on Shetland and other fishing-dependent areas. These are predominantly matters for the Scottish Executive, who I know are addressing them.

Andrew Mackinlay: Bearing in mind direct rule, will the Minister make some reference to the impact on Northern Ireland's fishing communities? What assurances can he give those people? This is their Parliament now, and some attention should be paid to them.

Mr. Morley: I have been in touch with my ministerial colleague in Northern Ireland, and have also met Northern Ireland fishing representatives. We are trying to deal with their problems.

I was interested by the contribution of the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings. In quite a long speech, yet again there was no suggested solution

[Mr. Morley]

or alternative approach to the very real problems that we face. Not long ago, members of the hon. Gentleman's party were telling us that there was no way we would achieve relative stability after January, that there was no way we would maintain coastal limits, and that we would have an EU fleet with EU permits under EU control. None of that has happened in connection with the agreement on CFP reform.

The idea that what we are doing in relation to quota management will allow more quota for other countries is complete nonsense. What we are doing is improving UK national quota for the benefit of the UK national fleet. We have heard what has been said today about national control many times. Yet again we have asked the Conservatives what that means, how it will be achieved and how it will be applied. I think it is a cruel deception of the fishing industry to suggest that there is a magic solution when there is not.

The Conservatives have criticised the priority given to the fishing industry. We now know, as a result of the 30-year rule, what priority Conservative Governments gave the industry in terms of negotiation. The hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings says that we should have joined others to secure a better deal. I take it he means we should have joined Spain, which wanted access to the North sea. I take it he means we should have joined those who wanted to continue building grants, an entirely unsustainable solution to our problems.

The truth is that when it comes to trying to negotiate in Europe, the Conservative Government are regarded as even more of an irrelevance than the Conservative party is today. It does not help the fishing industry to take a pompous little Englander approach based on Eurosceptic nonsense that is a betrayal of environmental responsibilities and the genuine needs of this country's fishing industry.

There are real problems to address, but we believe that the industry has a future. We believe that we must respond to the science, even if it means tough decisions. We recognise that there will be consequences, but we will face up to them. We will work with the industry to give it a sustainable future, rather than making false and empty promises.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 132, Noes 318.

Division No. 55] **[6:00 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Fox, Dr. Liam
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
Mercer, Patrick
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, rh Michael
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Redwood, rh John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Salmond, Alex
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Mark Hoban and
Mr. Mark Francois

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Beith, rh A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Borrow, David
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen

Burnett, John
Byers, rh Stephen
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, hon. Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hancock, Mike
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Ingram, rh Adam
Iranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr. John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Rooney, Terry
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe and Jim Fitzpatrick

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Union Document No. 2341/2002 of 20th December 2002, a Council Regulation fixing for 2003 the fishing opportunities and associated conditions for certain fish stocks, applicable in Community waters and, for Community vessels, in waters where catch limitations are required; European Union Document No. 2369/2002 of 20th December 2002, a Council Regulation amending Regulation (EC) No. 2792/1999 laying down the detailed rules and arrangements regarding Community structural assistance in the fisheries sector; European Union Document No. 2370/2002, a Council Regulation establishing an emergency Community measure for scrapping fishing vessels; European Union Document No. 2371/2002, a Council Regulation on the conservation and sustainable exploitation of fisheries resources under the Common Fisheries Policy; and European Union Document No. 14886/2002, a Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on a Community Action Plan to reduce discards of fish.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Earlier today, when Mr. Speaker was in the Chair, I was obliged to point out that, yet again, a Minister had given information to the Press Association before bringing it to the House.

Sadly, I have to bring a similar matter to your attention, Madam Deputy Speaker. I heard it on my radio at 5 o'clock and it appears on something called a BBC website—I have a copy before me—and concerns a package "leaked" to a BBC political reporter in which the Secretary of State for Education and Skills appeared to speak about a massive increase in student tuition fees.

This is the second time that such a matter has occurred in one parliamentary week. Will you, Madam Deputy Speaker, be prepared to consider suspending the sitting until Mr. Speaker can be made aware that, for the second time, his firm instructions to Ministers have been casually disregarded and that a matter of such importance appeared on the BBC long before the House could have a chance to hear direct from the Minister responsible and to question that Minister? The point is of the utmost parliamentary gravity, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I ask you, therefore, to consider suspending the sitting until we can bring Mr. Speaker to the House to sort out the Government.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): I understand the grave concern that the right hon. Gentleman attaches to the matter and I give him my commitment that I shall personally make sure that Mr. Speaker is aware of the strength of the right hon. Gentleman's feelings.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Have you had any intimation from the Government that they might consider the benefits of tabling a substantive motion for the upcoming debate on the international situation, given the close vote in the Scots Parliament on just such a substantive motion this afternoon? Have the Government intimated the benefits of genuine democracy to the Chair ?

Madam Deputy Speaker: The Ministers concerned will have heard what the hon. Gentleman said. It is certainly not a point of order for the Chair and I have not been made aware that any Minister wishes to come to the House.

PETITIONS

Natural Health Products

6.17 pm

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre):It is an honour and a privilege to present a petition collected from 437 of my constituents in the excellent city of Lancaster and the fine town of Garstang who are concerned about a timely issue, given the debate that we shall be holding on Monday.

The petition of my constituents states:

The Petition of Consumers for Health Choice and its supporters

Declares that consumers in the United Kingdom have for many years maintained good health by choosing to take safe vitamin and mineral supplements and herbal remedies; and fears that the European Food Supplements Directive and the Proposed European Directive on Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products would severely restrict the number and range of such products on general retail sale in the future.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons requires that the Secretary of State for Health does all in his power to protect the rights of UK consumers by ensuring that such European legislation does not unnecessarily and unacceptably restrict the availability of natural health products.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Pilgrim Hospital

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Keith Hill.]*

6.19 pm

Mr. Mark Simmonds (Boston and Skegness): I would first like to thank Mr. Speaker for allowing me to initiate this Adjournment debate, which is of fundamental importance to me, as the democratically elected representative of the people of Boston and Skegness, to my constituents, and to all those other individuals who use Pilgrim hospital in Boston. I also thank the Minister for being here to respond to my comments this evening.

Pilgrim hospital is the major provider of secondary health care in my constituency and the immediate surrounding area. As such, it plays a vital role in the community and serves a very large rural catchment population. Indeed, some calculations show that its catchment is greater than that of Lincoln and Peterborough—both of them cities that currently have larger hospitals. The catchment population of the Lincoln hospital is estimated to be 335,000, and that of Peterborough is estimated to be between 280,000 and 300,000. The catchment population of Boston and south Lincolnshire is approximately 400,000.

Before I proceed further with the specifics, I would like to place on record my thanks and admiration for all the hard work that is done, day in and day out, by all those at Pilgrim hospital. I am aware that staff at all levels work as tirelessly and effectively as they can to provide a first-class service. That is in the context of a work force who are increasingly disheartened and a public who are increasingly disappointed as a result of the unattainable level of expectation to which the Government's announcements have given rise, and owing to a recent merger with Lincoln, which in many people's opinion is having a detrimental impact and effect on service provision.

Pilgrim hospital first opened in 1972 and has 670 beds and a small, private wing called the Bostonian. The hospital and associated hospitals provide for approximately 35,000 in-patients, 12,000 day cases, and, depending on how the figures are analysed, up to 120,000 out-patients per annum. Pilgrim is by far the greatest contributor to those figures. It has a 24-hour accident and emergency department, and, currently, all the main speciality departments. As the Minister will be aware, a strategic service review is currently under way, which will assess the provision of services across the whole Trent region. Clearly, I recognise that every hospital in the region cannot provide every service. For example, the small hospital in my constituency at Skegness obviously cannot provide cardiovascular surgery.

There are dangers in relation to encouraging and facilitating centres of specialism, however, particularly in large rural areas such as Lincolnshire. Some low-volume work may have high costs, both in financial terms and in terms of expertise. Some specialist centres will be needed, but it is essential that the specialist centres that are required are provided in Lincolnshire, not outside the county in Leicester or Nottingham. There is pressure from both Government and the royal colleges on consultants to deal with a certain number of cases per year, and that each consultant must deal with a sufficient number of cases to be safe and professional and to maintain a degree of expertise.

That maintenance of professionalism and expertise, however, must be offset against considerations of travel and convenience. A balance must be struck. It is not compassionate or practicable to ask people to travel miles for basic medical care. Many of my constituents are not particularly affluent, and would find it impossible to get to Lincoln or Peterborough, never mind Nottingham or Leicester. The current state of rural transport in Lincolnshire is not conducive to ease of travel.

The current situation in which Government targets are only being met by reprehensible list manipulation is unacceptable to me and to my constituents. Let me give the Minister a specific example. I understand that, if a Boston resident approaches a 12-month wait for an ear, nose and throat appointment, he or she is offered an appointment elsewhere—for example, in Lincoln—with no consideration of his or her ability to get to Lincoln. If that person refuses or is unable to make the appointment, he or she is struck off the list, thereby receiving no treatment but enabling the hospital and the trust to deal with the 12-month waiting list. I am not blaming the Minister personally for that, as I am certain that the practice takes place elsewhere. However, the Government must take some responsibility for applying such draconian pressure on hospitals and trusts to meet waiting list targets that they feel obliged to distort clinical priorities.

It is no exaggeration to say that clinical directions have very little to do with clinical priorities. I would welcome the Minister's confirmation of his disapproval of, and distaste for, this practice. I hope that he will pledge to look into the matter, so that my constituents receive the health care that they need in the hospital that they deserve.

Pilgrim hospital has a 98 per cent. bed-occupancy rate. Indeed, on my frequent visits to the hospital, including having participated on a night shift, I have been amazed by the constant crisis management that exists, shuffling patients around in an attempt to find beds. There are patients who are in accident and emergency who should be in medical wards; patients who should be in medical wards who are in surgical wards; and patients who should be at home who are in surgical wards. Some people should be in care homes, but several care homes have closed, primarily as a direct result of some of the policies that the Government have pursued.

Those problems are coupled with the fact that Pilgrim hospital has only a day contract with the ambulance service—that is, between 9 am and 5 pm—and that means that the hospital staff can only arrange for patients to travel by day. On the surface, that may appear to be fine and acceptable, but the implication is that patients admitted at night cannot be sent elsewhere or even to their home. In some cases, they are treated because there is no ambulance. They have to stay in the ward overnight because they cannot get home. The nursing and other staff arrange for an ambulance to take them home, but there is a 24-hour booking time so they have to stay another night. That means two potentially unnecessary night stays in Pilgrim hospital, and that blocks beds for others. That is madness. The transport

[Mr. Mark Simmonds]

bill to transfer some people home by taxi must be horrendous, and an already horrendous bed-blocking problem is exacerbated. The implication is that significant numbers of operations are cancelled. Many are cancelled the day before and some on the day of the operation. That is not acceptable, and the position must be improved.

It is my view that the Lincolnshire East Coast primary care trust is keen, like me, to retain local services for local people. I hope that the pressure will convince the trust to keep Pilgrim offering a full range of services. Any diminution of service would not be acceptable. Any removal of a specialism would be seen as a downgrading of the hospital. For example, I understand that conversations are going on about gastro-intestinal specialisms.

I am also intrigued as to who will make the final decision after the strategic review reports. Will it be the regional health authority? Will it be the hospital trust? Will it be the public, whom I understand will be consulted? After all, what is the point of public consultation if the consultative process is ignored? If, as I understand it, the decision will be made at the last port of call—the regional health authority—will it not stand in complete contrast to the Government's supposed devolved decision-making policy and agenda for the health service?

How does that decision-making process fit comfortably with the Government's plans for foundation hospitals? I very much hope that Pilgrim hospital will ultimately become a foundation hospital, with local decision-making and local accountability. It is ironic that, just as the Government, at least, superficially jump on the devolved power bandwagon, the reverse seems to be happening in Lincolnshire.

I am ambitious for, and committed to, Pilgrim hospital. I want it to be empowered and enabled to have greater autonomy and decision-making authority. However, my constituents—both patients and those who work in the hospital—have expressed many concerns about the merger with Lincoln. They are worried not just about the immediate impact, but about the medium and longer-term relocation of specialist services. I understand that the merger has not only led to a large overspend but has been an expensive option, eating into resources that could and should have been used to improve front-line health care provision in Pilgrim hospital on behalf of my constituents.

The merger with Lincoln has brought not just financial problems but actual service provision deterioration on the ground. For example, because of the assistance that was required in the form of staffing resources, waiting times for hearing aids in the audiology department in Boston prior to the merger were four to six weeks. They are now four to six months. A neonatal screening programme to test all children in Lincolnshire was due to begin in Pilgrim in early 2000, but because of the merger it was put on hold and may begin in 2004.

The possible threat in reduction of service provision is causing anxiety among my constituents. Indeed, only last year there was a risk to the ear, nose and throat department when a distinguished and highly regarded consultant, Dr. Graham Westmore, retired. Many patients were unnerved and deeply concerned and there is still concern at the current provision that a seven-day service may be reduced to five. However, I am delighted that tomorrow I will be opening the new ENT department at Pilgrim hospital. I am delighted that this service provision has been cemented in Boston for many years to come.

I am deeply concerned about security at Pilgrim hospital. To be blunt, I have been horrified by the anecdotal evidence from nursing staff in particular about the behaviour of some of the patients towards the hard-working and excellent staff. That applies particularly, although not uniquely, to those who work in the accident and emergency department. There is a particular problem with patients who have a drug or alcohol problem; they tend to be the most aggressive. The local police force have been extremely helpful and now have a presence in the hospital at particular times of the week. Will the Minister talk to his officials and colleagues in the Department of Health and the Home Office to find out whether any new source of funding could provide additional security—not only in Pilgrim hospital, as I am aware that this is a problem across the country? That could link in with the Government's new drugs policy which was debated in the House earlier this week.

I am also perturbed and uneasy at the revelation that the West Lincolnshire primary care trust appears to have run out of money. I understand that there has been a significant overspend in primary care surgery and all future surgical operations such as hernias, eyelid cysts and vasectomies have been cancelled for this financial year. The scheme is to provide patients with more convenient and local treatment in a primary care setting, with the expectation of reducing travel and thereby patient transport costs and avoiding hospital visits. The cancellations are opposed by general practitioners who wish to continue with the scheme and also put pressure on an already overstretched Pilgrim hospital staff.

I have with me an internal NHS document that lists the options regarding the overspend. The only item in the "Advantages" column is that cancelling the operations

"Avoids any overspend on this budget."

The disadvantages are numerous. The document says that this will cause problems with the providers and patients at a time when Lincolnshire is promoting the development of primary care specialists. It says that some of the providers may withdraw. The third item in the "Disadvantages" column is fundamental and quite unbelievable. It says that there is no scope for undertaking the operations at the acute hospitals as they are unable to deliver their existing activity, let alone any extras. Another disadvantage, according to the document, is that the cessation of this activity could mean that some providers may become deskilled.

That says to me that the myth being perpetrated that everything is fine in the national health service, that there is no shortage of money and that everyone is being treated where and when they want is clearly untrue. I do not expect an answer from the Minister this evening, but I would like him to talk to his officials and come up with an answer on how we can improve that aspect of health care, take the pressure off Pilgrim hospital and make sure that the operations that were being done under the remit of the primary care trust continue.

In conclusion, I want my constituents to be provided with the best possible health care. I also want to continue to facilitate a motivated and enthusiastic work force at Pilgrim. I will not accede to proposals to remove or downgrade services under the auspices of specialisation or any other excuse. I trust that the Minister will assure me that that will not happen.

6.35 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. David Lammy): I congratulate the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Mr. Simmonds) on securing the debate. I am aware that he takes a keen interest in health issues that affect his constituency. Indeed, he initiated a similar debate in November 2001 on the future of Skegness district hospital. Having been schooled in Peterborough, I am familiar with the area, so it is good to play a role in the debate.

I recognise the concerns of the hon. Gentleman's constituents to retain access to acute hospital services in their local area. All our constituents would be concerned about that. It is wholly understandable that they should demand modern, reliable and efficient services at a location that is convenient to them. I want to assure them from the outset that they need not fear for the future of their hospital or the future of the NHS under this Labour Government. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the hospital's finances, which I hope to deal with in a moment. However, he is at odds with his Front-Bench spokesmen who said that there would be a 20 per cent. cut in NHS investment.

Mr. Simmonds: I have raised some serious issues. The Minister knows that it is not Conservative party policy to cut NHS spending by 20 per cent. May I suggest that he adheres his remarks to those serious issues?

Mr. Lammy: NHS funding is an extremely serious issue. Labour Members voted overwhelmingly for investment in the NHS and I am concerned that the hon. Gentleman's constituents have the best services available. I am pleased that our allocation to Boston primary care trust will rise by 8.6 per cent. over the next three years. I want them to get that investment and the facilities they need. However, given the hon. Gentleman's manner and tone on finances, it is right for me as a Minister to explain that they would be cut.

Pilgrim district and general hospital has been providing services for the people of Boston and south-east Lincolnshire since the early 1970s. Since April 2000, it has been part of the United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS trust, when all acute hospital trusts in the Lincolnshire health authority area were merged. In the mid-1990s, the then Lincolnshire health authority reviewed services in the county. Among the recommendations proposed following the review was the transfer of ear, nose and throat services from Boston to Lincoln. I understand that that was not popular locally and the change did not proceed.

The restructuring of health services in 2000 prompted a further wide-ranging review of clinical services in Lincolnshire. A formal review has been commissioned by the local health authority. That is due to be completed in March this year. It would be inappropriate for me to prejudge the outcome but I understand that the trust wishes to see the Pilgrim continue its role as a vibrant hospital that provides a wide range of services. It may be that the outcome of the review sees some enhancement of facilities

That position is borne out by the significant investments that the Government have made at the hospital in recent years. In 1998, a five-year capital programme was agreed to improve the Pilgrim. A total of £12 million has been invested, which facilitated the creation of a new accident and emergency department; the revamping of the outpatients department; two new theatres and two new wards; and essential repairs to the general fabric of the buildings.

As part of the Government's Action On programme, there is United Lincolnshire Hospital NHS trust's bid for the creation of a new ENT and dermatology department at Pilgrim hospital. The Action On programme was developed in 1998 to target efforts to address areas of high waiting times. Four priority areas have been identified—cataracts, orthopaedics, dermatology and ENT—and specific programmes have been created. They are designed to ensure that local services are shaped around patients' needs, streamlining patient pathways and improving patient access. The programmes aim also at facilitating improvements in the quality of care through the dissemination of best practice—maximising efficiency, balancing capacity with demand and providing support to NHS staff.

Under this Government, the ENT and dermatology unit became operational last year and will be formally opened by the hon. Gentleman tomorrow. I am pleased because across the country, people are seeing investment, new hospitals and new services in their communities. Hon. Members in all parts of the House are able to open new facilities in their constituencies. I am delighted and want that to continue—which is why I proudly stand here at a Labour Minister against cuts that would see services disappear.

Those developments are indicative of the large investments that the Government are making in the health service. We are committed to ensuring that everyone, no matter where they live, has access to high-quality, modern and dependable NHS services. The Government recognise that for too long, patients in some parts of the NHS have not had access to the standard of care and treatment they deserve. Last week, we announced a further round of NHS capital allocations for the next three years. They show a growth of 31 per cent. for 2003–04, 14 per cent. for 2004–05 and 20 per cent. for 2005–06—the first time that day-to-day operational capital has been directly allocated to NHS strategic health authorities, trusts and primary care trusts and the first time that capital allocations have been made for three years rather than one. That arrangement will allow local NHS managers to plan for the future and make decisions about the services that they provide.

Right hon. and hon. Members on this side of the House take the view that the NHS cannot be run from Whitehall. We believe in shifting the balance of power, which is why we have localised the NHS, handing it to local communities through their PCTs—performance-managed by our strategic health authorities. I note that the hon. Gentleman disagrees with that position.

[Mr. Lammy]

He would like greater centralisation and me to intervene in some local decision-making processes in his area.

Mr. Simmonds: I did not say that and must correct the record. I certainly believe in devolving power to democratically accountable, decision-making bodies. I was trying to address the point that potential decisions about the future level of service at Pilgrim hospital will not be made by the people at Pilgrim hospital but by people in Trent regional health authority. That does not seem to fit comfortably with the Minister's view and mine that power should be further devolved, not taken away.

Mr. Lammy: The decision will be made by local people, the strategic health authority and the primary care trust working in conjunction, and may well bring enhancements for the local hospital. It is about localisation, which we support, and I am grateful that the hon. Gentleman seems to support that. I urge him to let that process take its course. His constituents can take heart in the fact that the Government are committed to a modern, enhanced 21st-century NHS, which is why we are investing in his hospital, and why he will be able to open those ENT facilities tomorrow.

The total provided for the United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS trust is almost £34 million over the next three years, allowing it to continue its programme of modernising and improving its facilities. The hospital trust is predicting a deficit this year on its annual revenue budget, but I have been reassured that a recovery plan is in place and is being monitored by the Trent strategic health authority. That plan does not include the reduction of services—the trust is instead considering alternative and more efficient service delivery methods. That deficit needs to be set against Government investment. We have significantly increased funding. For example, East Lincolnshire PCT is to receive an increase of nearly 9 per cent. on its budget for the year 2003–04. We are changing the way in which funding is allocated so that trusts can plan for a three-year period and make provision for the future.

The Government are keen to ensure that that investment is accompanied by reform. The NHS has delivered major improvements in health, but it falls short of the standards patients expect and staff want to provide. The NHS has to be redesigned around the needs of patients. As I have said, local hospitals cannot be run from Whitehall. The purpose and vision of the NHS plan, which was launched in 2000, is to give the people of Britain a health service fit for the 21st century which is designed around the patient. That change will improve the quality of care and affect how and where services are delivered across the NHS.

High-quality care is not just about good outcomes, but about giving people the kind of services that they want. Local people are being placed at the heart of the debate about their local health services. A new legal framework came into force on 1 January 2003 which places new duties on the NHS to consult the public in the ongoing planning and development of services, not just when a major change is required.

There are telemedicine links between Pilgrim hospital, Skegness and District hospital and other services that benefit the area. Those are just some of the ideas we have been exploring over the past few months as part of the work of the configuring hospitals project. I have been greatly encouraged by the fact that there seem to be real opportunities for smaller hospitals in particular to have a new lease of life, with service redesign and networked health systems offering the potential to deliver the kind of local health service that local people want.

We will shortly publish a document for consultation. I repeat that there is definitely a bright future for Pilgrim hospital. Any future developments there will be at the forefront—

The motion having been made after Six o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, Mr. Deputy Speaker *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at eleven minutes to Seven o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 7 January 2003

[MR. FRANK COOK *in the Chair*]

Foundation Hospitals

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

9.42 am

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): Thank you, Mr. Cook, and a happy new year to you and everybody. Thank you, in particular, for coming to rescue us today by taking the Chair. It is regrettable that we are starting 13 minutes late. I know that many hon. Members want to speak and so would like the debate to go on for the full one and a half hours. I will take the matter up with Mr. Speaker.

The Government have done much that is good in the NHS. There has been major investment and change such as nurse prescribing, the national service frameworks and the National Institute for Clinical Excellence. In Swindon we have a new hospital and a walk-in centre, and NHS dentistry has returned. Before Christmas a diagnostic and treatment centre on our new hospital site was approved. We would not have seen those improvements under the Tories. There is no question of the Government's commitment to creating an NHS of which we can all be proud. I, as a supporter of the Government's NHS agenda, and a Co-operative party member, am keen to look at the Government's proposals on foundation hospitals. However, I am not convinced that it is the right reform or the right time for reform.

The Government are aware that there are problems with organisational change. They describe the changes already taking place in the NHS as the biggest organisational change since it was set up. When much of that has hardly settled, more reform needs to be considered with great caution. The NHS plan is hugely ambitious; my constituents in Swindon want the maximum waiting time of six months by 2005 for all in-patients to be delivered sooner than that. It will be a massive improvement on what we experienced under the Tories. If the Government believe that more can be done for the NHS, delivering quicker and better treatments should be the priority. Will more organisational change best deliver the improvements in patient care? It is boring to keep existing targets and it may not create news headlines, but is not what is wanted a determination to deliver what patients need?

I want to deal first with some of the Government's reasons for proposing the introduction of foundation hospitals. The first motivation described by Ministers is the need to give incentives to the best trusts; I have dealt with some of them for many years and they have not cried out for incentives. There is no better incentive than delivering the best service possible for patients and spreading good practice elsewhere in the NHS.

The second motivation cited by Ministers is that the creation of foundation hospitals will stop the Tories privatising the NHS. That is a good motivation, but the Government do not need defensive policies; if the Tories were determined to privatise, although it is true that proposed legislation for foundation trusts would prevent privatisation, they could do so.

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): May I say categorically that the Conservative party never has had and does not have any intention whatever of privatising the national health service?

Ms Drown: I am pleased to hear the hon. Gentleman say that, but many statements from the Tory party give one severe doubts. However, my point is that if a future Tory Government wanted to do so, we could not stop them pushing through legislation to allow trusts to be privatised. It is not as if they do not have experience of getting unpopular privatisations through the House.

The NHS is all about care services, but not just for the best hospitals. Why did the Government come up with the idea of foundation hospitals just by talking to the best and not consulting the middle and the worst hospitals, MPs, GPs, social services and others?

A third motivation is that Ministers say that everything cannot be run from Whitehall, but that leads to a strange feature of these proposals. If the organisational changes are needed to improve the efficiency of some hospitals to allow initiative and flair to be shown, why are not the same changes being made in all hospitals? The fact that foundation hospitals are proposed initially for three-star hospitals only, brings me to the first major concern, which is that they could be divisive—why only three-star and not zero-star hospitals? If the proposal is to work, it needs to work in all trusts and we cannot expect three-star hospitals always to stay as such. We assume that Nigel Crisp, chief executive of the NHS, is good at his job. From 1993 to 1997 he was chief executive of what is now the Oxford Radcliffe, which one would expect to have been a top performing hospital, but only five years later it is a one-star trust. Good trusts can turn out not to be so good.

Paragraph 4.1 of "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts" states that foundation trusts will not be subject to performance management by the Department of Health or strategic health authorities, but will be held to account by the commissioning process. We must ask by what levers; if a hospital is not performing, commissioners can threaten to move patients elsewhere, or actually move them, but that is not necessarily the best solution. Should not the Government allow themselves the ability to step in and support change management in foundation trusts, as they do in others? In some cases, it will be the quickest and most efficient way of turning a trust around. If the Government think that the commissioning process alone is the best way of achieving the changes needed, there is even more reason to say that all trusts should be foundation trusts, not just the three-star ones.

The Government say that hospitals must have a track record to deliver on foundation status. They say that there will be no cap on the number of foundation trusts, but it is not clear whether that means that all trusts will be able at some point to become three-star trusts and therefore foundation trusts, or whether the Government will, in the next round or a future round, allow two-star trusts to become foundation trusts. It would be helpful if that were clarified.

[Ms Drown]

If public involvement helps to deliver faster improvements in patient services, surely it is even more important that the public are involved in zero-star hospitals than in those with three stars. The Government say that they cannot give those freedoms to poorly performing trusts, but ownership and freedoms are different. The one-star trusts could be given ownership, with the promise of freedoms when standards improve. That would be less divisive.

The logic of the Government's argument that not everything can be run from Whitehall is that the giving of more freedoms should apply to all. If enterprising managers and clinicians are prevented from doing good work, that will happen in three-star and zero-star hospitals, and in community services. Would it not be better to pilot for all the giving of freedoms from directives and then to widen those freedoms, rather than giving many freedoms to some? Should there not be help for the many, not the few? In any case, there are well and badly managed departments in all trusts. A simple one-star or three-star rating hides many variations within hospitals. Should not the good parts in all hospitals be rewarded?

Let us consider how the policy fits in with the new patients voice mechanisms. Foundation trusts will not have to set up their own patients forums. That suggests that the Government think that that type of central direction from Whitehall should be avoided, but they introduced that initiative only recently. I remember my hon. Friend the Minister ably defending the new systems at the Dispatch Box. She secured agreement to many of the changes in a way that many others would not have achieved, but if the new ways of involving patients are not necessarily right for all trusts, why was that not said at the time?

One of the freedoms proposed for foundation trusts is the freedom to pay additional rewards on top of national agreements. That could be hugely divisive and is understandably opposed by unions. Will it be reconsidered? The Tories tried to set up local pay to set one hospital against another; this Government cannot want to recreate that.

The Royal College of Nursing points out that such a system is wasteful in terms of bureaucracy, as local trusts have to have hyped-up human resource managers to negotiate individually with trade unions, and staff representatives have to spend time negotiating, rather than caring for patients. I remember the newspaper articles of 1996 saying that specialist nursing and therapeutic staff had to take time away from patients to negotiate pay deals. Recreating that system sounds illogical when a major new national pay agreement has just been announced.

Ministers will say that protections will be built in to ensure that foundation trusts do not undermine the ability of other NHS trusts to meet their obligations to provide NHS services. I take that to mean that the Government do not want foundation trusts to pinch staff from their neighbours, but how strong will the protections be? Will the neighbouring trusts have to sign off any pay differentials from the nationally agreed "Agenda for Change" deals? If the Government are serious about fairness in pay, should not the neighbouring trusts have the power to do so? I hope that the Minister will say exactly what is intended.

The next freedom for foundation trusts is the freedom to borrow, but from within the overall NHS capital allocation as agreed with the Treasury. The overall capital allocation for the NHS will be divided into two: a foundation pot and a pot for other trusts. However, we know that the Government want foundation trusts to succeed, so a suspicion will be created that such trusts will be given an unfair proportion of NHS capital in a way that does not put clinical needs first. Will there be a safeguard against that, such as an agreement on the allocation by Parliament rather than by Ministers? Given that any private borrowing for foundation trusts is counted against the same capital pot, that could lead to private money replacing NHS capital with no added gain for the NHS.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Is my hon. Friend aware that in transport we have already seen what happens in exactly those circumstances? If private firms are brought in, they bring with them consultants and enormous overhead costs, and the money goes into totally unnecessary contractual deals, rather than into good services.

Ms Drown: I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention. I am well aware of those concerns. It is important to learn lessons from other Departments so that we get the best as government policy is developed. I am sure that Ministers do not intend private capital simply to replace NHS capital, but will the Minister confirm that? If all borrowed capital comes from a fixed NHS pot, how will the Government ensure that that does not enable the Treasury to save on NHS capital?

Paragraph 1.32 of "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts" says:

"Subject to an overall duty to achieve value for money... capital schemes will not be subject to individual project by project approval by the Independent Regulator".

If so, how can the Government be sure that foundation trusts collectively will keep within their overall capital limit? What does value for money mean in this context? If a trust could borrow at 20 per cent. for a five-year pay-back scheme, could it take the loan even if it was known that NHS funding would produce a better result for the public purse?

Similar arguments can be made about the freedom to keep surpluses and to dispose of assets, so why should foundation trusts be given more freedom to keep surpluses when clinical need might dictate that other trusts need those surpluses more? What if a local commissioner would prefer a neighbouring trust, rather than the foundation trust, to keep its surplus?

Foundation trusts' freedom to invest is also bureaucratic. It means that finance directors are rewarded for extra responsibilities, but then have to get extra advice on investment. Surely that is not a good use of time? Rather than hundreds of finance staff investing small sums of money throughout the country, it would be better to leave surplus funds with the Chancellor of the Exchequer for him to look after until they were needed. A fundamental problem with creating different rules for different trusts on pay, keeping surpluses and

the ability to invest is that the effect is divisive, impacts on morale throughout the NHS and ultimately sets hospital against hospital.

I hope that the Minister will tell us about the other freedoms that the Government propose to give to the foundation trusts, which will be subject to the same standards and inspections and will still have to supply information centrally so that parliamentary questions can be asked and health committee analysis carried out. They will still have to adopt all the central strategies, such as those on information and sexual health, although the Minister may tell us that that is not the case. What will be the position of foundation trusts on the medical royal college recommendations, which sometimes delay or prevent recruitment for medical posts and seem to be an unnecessary barrier to expanding services? The proposal will be welcome if such a barrier can be removed, but that should be done for all trusts.

Will foundation trusts have to adopt policies such as family-friendly policies and zero tolerance of violence towards staff? Will maternity services have to provide women with the ability to choose where to give birth, and will the collection of maternity data have to be improved? Will the foundation trusts have to adopt catering standards such as providing halal meat, or comply with safety directives such as on the use of disposable instruments? I presume that they will have to follow all the standard directives, so which of the usual policies and directives will foundation trusts be free to vary or ignore? It would help our debates if the Minister clarified what those freedoms will be; answers given today could inform the debate to be held tomorrow on the Floor of the House.

However, the proposals include one major restriction alongside all these freedoms. Unlike many Members on the left, I support the treatment of private patients in NHS facilities. It is clear that in many trusts the treatment of private patients in NHS rather than private hospitals generates significant income for the NHS, which improves NHS care. Restricting the proportion of income from private patients to within existing limits will be a major disincentive for trusts to become foundation hospitals. Specifying a rigid limit on the proportion of private work could create extra problems for some hospitals.

I invite hon. Members to imagine a trust having its NHS income cut because a commissioner is moving work elsewhere. It would have to make a corresponding cut in its private patient income at a point when it is under pressure to cut budgets to make up for the lost NHS income to keep within the limit of private patient income as a proportion of total income. That would put further pressure on its budgets and would require it to create a fair system to decide which consultants have to cut back on which work. What purpose is served by this additional restriction on foundation trusts? This all seems a long way from a pragmatic, undogmatic approach to "public good, private bad". I thought that the Government were committed to pragmatic local decisions in the interests of NHS care.

It is interesting that the Under-Secretary of State for Health is leading the debate today. I suspect that she has been selected to speak about this newly emerging policy because she is one of the most eloquent and persuasive Ministers. However, when the logic of public health is to pursue community initiatives to stress the importance of primary care facilities and partnerships, where it might be easier to justify foundation status, it is odd that the creation of foundation trusts will start with acute and specialist hospitals. Thus the focus will be on acute care, rather than on the real public health goals of the Government's NHS.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I concur with my hon. Friend's remarks about our spokesperson on the Front Bench.

Does my hon. Friend agree that, if we seek mutuality in health care, we will need bottom-up rather than top-down solutions? Many of us would be happier if more effort were made in that area.

Ms Drown: I certainly agree with that.

I suspect that the Minister will say that fears about a two-tier service are unfounded, because there are already differing standards across the country, and there is currently a multi-tier service. That is true, but that multi-tier service has not been created in legislation. The Government are rightly trying to achieve consistent, high standards across the NHS. Foundation trust legislation would create two different structures for NHS hospitals, and Ministers have made it clear that one is considered to be better than the other. That raises concerns about unnecessary competition and divisiveness in the NHS.

I spoke earlier about the additional bureaucracy that will be created in pay structures. The reorganisation of the trusts and their commissioners involves extra bureaucracy that must be justified, because the time of civil servants and NHS staff could be better spent on other things, such as ensuring that the NHS plan is delivered for my South Swindon constituents as soon as possible.

Government documents show that extra support will be given to foundation trusts to pay for legal help for commissioners, who will have to arrange different contracts for the foundation trusts. We are spending time on the Floor of the House today and tomorrow debating the issue. Can we justify taking that time away from the delivery of quality services across the country? *[Interruption.]*

I am concerned that there is a bureaucracy creation machine in the Department of Health, a unit that wants change for change's sake, wants to ensure that there is always work for management consultants, and wants to keep the focus on organisational structures rather than on quality patient care. I know that Ministers care about the latter, but I wonder whether the former is getting the better of them. If so, the change for change's sake unit must be found and culled.

Will the Minister clarify the areas on which the commissioners will be negotiating with foundation trusts? Paragraph 1.34 of "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts" states that there will be longer-term, legally binding service agreements. I would like to know what period those agreements will be longer than, and what would happen if the commissioner did not want a longer-term agreement.

Finally, let us examine the response to the Government's proposals. I am sure that a number of trusts will be keen to take up this Government challenge.

[Ms Drown]

I am delighted that 40 per cent. of the three-star trusts are in deprived areas. However, the creation of foundation trust status only for three-star hospitals does not help my constituents in Swindon, whether or not they live in a deprived area. The Government may say that the new freedoms will give us an incentive to improve in Swindon, but we do not need further incentives. Swindon's NHS is full of hard-working individuals who want to improve patient services.

The NHS Confederation, representing the managers' point of view, is concerned that decentralisation for the few could detract from the more important task of decentralisation for all, and that the proposals will move the focus away from acute care. The Labour party reaction is cold. The RCN is hinting, politely, that it is against the proposals, and the British Medical Association has raised many of the concerns that I have discussed today. There appears to be no support for the pay proposals.

I hope that the Minister can answer the questions that I have posed. There is much good in what Labour is doing for the NHS—massive investment, sensible reforms and a willingness to take the tough decisions that are sometimes needed. However, there is a danger that the reforms will be a major distraction from the main work of delivering the NHS plan. It would be easy for the Government to obtain consensus in Parliament and across the NHS on reducing control of the NHS by Whitehall. Why not make the reforms focus on more freedom for all, not just for the few?

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Frank Cook (in the Chair): Order. First, I thank the Committee for treating my embarrassment over the mobile phone with such good humour. Clearly, I had failed to depress the button for the required two seconds: I am sorry. Secondly, the Committee will have noted my entry with a stick. Had I known that we were to debate foundation hospitals, I would have used crutches; my theatrical entrance was not intentional.

On a serious point, we have lost 13 minutes of debating time. Thanks to both Opposition spokesmen, who have agreed to cut their contributions by half, I am able to make an extraordinary rule to extend the debate by five minutes at the end, which could mean problems for subsequent debates. I therefore appeal to all right hon. and hon. Members to restrict comments to what is necessary, to avoid repetition, to make interventions in a sparing fashion and to conduct the debate in the constructive manner in which it has commenced. Only some of the hon. Members present have given me prior knowledge of their intention to contribute. For the moment, I call Mr. Lansley.

10.5 am

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute and I congratulate the hon. Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown) on securing the debate. As suggested by the choice of Opposition debate in the House tomorrow, the subject is timely. We all agree that it is important to debate this crucial subject early in the new year before legislation is introduced.

I represent two hospitals in South Cambridgeshire—Addenbrooke's, twice judged a three-star hospital in the performance ratings, and Papworth, a specialist cardio-thoracic trust. Specialist hospitals have been subject to the performance scheme only once and Papworth was given a three-star rating. The Commission for Health Improvement gave Papworth the highest rating of any hospital and singled out its excellent corporate and clinical governance.

By contrast with the constituents of the hon. Member for South Swindon, mine can see directly where the benefits lie if foundation hospitals, starting from a high base, deliver substantial increases in capacity and higher standards. My purpose is not to ask questions with a view to damning foundation hospitals with faint praise, but to make some points to ensure that foundation hospital policy works in the long as well as the short term.

I agree with the hon. Lady that it is not all about two-tier status. The NHS has different tiers, but the real question is how best to increase capacity and raise standards. Should it be done by moving everyone at the same pace, or should we accept that different hospitals have different attributes and that those with the strongest corporate and clinical governance should be given the first chance to introduce new approaches?

Several hon. Members may have been present at my Westminster Hall debate on nurses' pay two months ago. Taking Addenbrooke's as an example, I know that "Agenda for Change" is much sought after as a means of increasing pay flexibility and offering opportunities to adapt pay to labour market circumstances and the changing needs of the health service. Addenbrooke's wants to implement such a policy as early as possible.

I am not going to dwell on membership and the ownership of foundation hospitals. The issues are complicated. I certainly hope that good hospitals such as Addenbrooke's and Papworth, which already involve patient groups and the local community, will be able to do so more extensively under the new arrangements—but without excessive burdens. Some risks are associated with mutualisation, which could lead to substantial additional burdens.

It seems to me that the key issue is what the freedoms of foundation hospitals mean. Are they real and an end in themselves, or a means to an end? I submit that they are not real, that they should be extended over time and that they are not an end in themselves but a means to an end. We need to be aware of the end and to be able to adapt the whole system of foundation hospitals beyond the initial extension of freedoms from some bureaucratic controls.

I confess that, like the hon. Member for South Swindon, I am not sure how real the freedoms are. The establishment of an independent regulator is a new structure, but one that seems substantially to translate many of the controls that the Secretary of State might exercise over foundation hospitals into a different set of hands. The commission for healthcare audit and inspection, when it is established, will have similar controls. Complying with national clinical and quality standards does not give people in the hospitals that I represent any concern, but it does not necessarily mean bureaucratic reductions as a consequence. The control

of private services is a new control, and I suspect that the freedom to borrow, to which I will return in a moment, is a little more rhetorical than real.

The freedoms are not as great as they should be and could be made greater. I will not make a long series of points about that, but it is important that we do not see the NHS in isolation. We should look beyond it to what our experience tells us about the process of trying to stimulate enterprise in what have hitherto been monopoly services. Although we do not necessarily have to break up organisations to make them compete among themselves, by translating bureaucratic, Government and political control to independent regulation, as we have observed in other industries, we can achieve that aim if the independent regulator—whoever he or she may be—has a clear set of duties that point to stimulating enterprise and allowing freedoms to emerge over time. Experience of other fields of activity demonstrates that if the independent regulator is focused not on compliance but on standards, independent regulation outside political control with predictable, consistent decision taking that is transparent to those who are regulated can offer substantial benefits.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Am I to take it that the hon. Gentleman would like to recreate within the NHS the high standard of organisation and service that we find in the railway industry?

Mr. Lansley: The hon. Lady does not tempt me to speak about the transport industry; I want to speak about the NHS. My experience is less of transport than of other industries such as energy and telecommunications. My trade and industry background takes me in that direction.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Energy—there is a good one.

Mr. Lansley: I will not go down that route at length, but I can tell the hon. Lady that, in my experience, at different times in different industries the transfer from national ownership with direct control and intervention over matters such as borrowing to independent regulation where free companies are in a position to attract private capital in a more predictable structure of regulation has clearly been of benefit. It has allowed enterprising companies to deliver better services and greater capacity. The telecommunications industry in this country was transformed after 1984 as a consequence of telecommunications regulation as opposed to national ownership. I will not go further down that path.

My point is that the freedoms should be regarded as a starting point. When the Bill is published, the key issue for me will be the independent regulator's duties and whether they are structured in a way that drives towards the stated purposes and allows the independent regulator, if the foundation hospitals create and maintain high standards and improve on them, to progressively reduce bureaucratic compliance requirements. That is the issue, but the change is not an end in itself, as it concerns capacity. It seems to me that the foundation hospital structure is being created around the current necessity to build new capacity, rather than an attempt to create competition in the NHS. That is fine at the moment. We cannot create competition in a structure where demand substantially exceeds supply in most circumstances.

Angela Eagle (Wallasey): Does the hon. Gentleman then believe that the way forward for the NHS is more competition under a market-style mechanism?

Mr. Lansley: The hon. Lady is trying to anticipate my argument.

Angela Eagle: No, I am asking a question.

Mr. Lansley: All right, I will answer it. In the long run, the way forward for the NHS is to deliver social enterprise. That will happen where enterprising providers are allied to a system directed not by monopoly purchasers, but by patient choice. That does not necessarily mean a market, and it certainly does not mean privatisation. *[Laughter.]* If the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) will forgive me, I will explain, but briefly because other hon. Members want to speak.

I want NHS funding to be allied to NHS standards of service, which providers will have to meet, and I want patient choice and enterprising providers to be brought together. Developments will need to be handled properly, and much more needs to be clearly set out, but foundation hospitals are developing in a way that will allow providers that get the private sector behind them to add capacity and be more enterprising.

At the same time, however, we still have monopoly purchasers, and we must think harder and more long term about that. If we merely end up with local primary care trusts making five-year agreements with monopoly purchasers in their area, what opportunity will there be to exercise patient choice? What opportunity will enterprising providers have to vary what they provide? Local communities will be told that they own the hospitals, but what opportunity will they have to vary provision?

The issue is how we introduce patient choice into the system. If we introduce it alongside a diversity of providers who have the freedom to take an enterprising and innovative approach, we can create an NHS that not only adds capacity, but improves standards. That relationship between choice on the part of patients and enterprise on the part of providers will deliver higher standards.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Frank Cook (in the Chair): Order. Five hon. Members are seeking to catch my eye. There are only 28 minutes until I must call the Opposition Front-Bench spokespeople to begin their winding-up speeches. I therefore appeal to every hon. Member to make their remarks concise and pertinent.

10.16 am

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Mr. Cook, I shall be extremely brief. I had intended to go on at considerable length, because foundation hospitals are probably one of the worst ideas that the Government have come up with, and that inspires an articulate response in me.

[Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody]

We should congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown) on setting out, in considerable detail and very concisely, the objections to foundation hospitals. I hope that the Government will think again. My hon. Friend thinks that a unit somewhere in the Department may be eternally looking for change, but I think that the problem is worse than that. Why do the Government persist with this bizarre idea when they are faced with the appalling example of what is happening in the transport industry, where services work only if they are planned in a proper and co-ordinated way? One can only assume that someone somewhere has a quite disastrous commitment to encouraging private medicine in this country. The Government are talking not only about attracting long-term private sector schemes but about planning to put out to tender only to certain foreign companies services that must remain in the NHS.

I want to say just one thing this morning. I originally came into contact with the NHS through my family 30 years ago, when there was a real division between teaching hospitals, specialist hospitals and district general hospitals. The level of care is now infinitely better, and the quality of services is nothing like what we could have envisaged 30 years ago. None the less, we consistently run the service down and say that it is poor and unacceptable. If that is the case, we should not introduce more divisive measures, which is what the creation of foundation hospitals is. We should not divide one group of staff from another by introducing an absurd bureaucracy that makes each hospital fight for the terms, conditions and wages of its staff. We should not suggest that there is somehow a halfway house between private medicine and the national health service, such that foundation hospitals will not be able to earn so much money that they will in effect be fully privatised units.

We should also say strongly that the people of this country do not want large surgical factories, which push them through and out the other side, like so many sausages. People do not want a system in which some hospitals can attract staff, money, investment and support, while the others are allowed to sink into a mire of disillusion and abandonment. Very simply, they want high-quality diagnostic centres that provide high-quality services. People want involvement with their local community, but do not think that that is provided by the old-style, local committees that I remember from my youth, on to which anyone with a title was allowed, whereas anyone who had been locally elected was regarded as a totally unacceptable candidate.

People want a national health service for which new forms of development are considered, but not those that entail division, an absurd bureaucracy, or contract procedures that require management consultants, hangers-on, accountants or anyone who happens to come along. In the transport industry, one can see what that means, in terms of expenditure, inadequacy and poor services for the public. At some point, I shall make a long speech on foundation hospitals, but this morning I am grateful that we are beginning the debate.

I do not know who in the Government is pushing private medicine and relationships with private firms abroad, or who thinks that we have anything to learn from private, American medical centres, but such people need to be disabused. There are some things that the ordinary member of the Labour party will not accept: such proposals are pretty high up the list.

10.22 am

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): I congratulate the hon. Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown) on securing the first debate of the new year. It is interesting to have the year rung in, as it were, by mobile telephones, Mr. Cook.

The debate started somewhat tardily. In the spirit of keeping my remarks short, I shall skip most of my speech and start where it says, "I shall return to governance". I intended to say that I supported some of the measures, although we shall have to take a radical look at how services are provided in the new hospitals, if they proceed. In particular, I draw hon. Members' attention to the fact that the Government's guidelines stress that local stakeholders should be given

"real opportunities to influence the overall stewardship of the Trust and its strategic development."

One in five people in this country now use complementary and alternative medical—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."] Yes, it is predictable that I should raise that subject. I accept that point. If there is to be more local input and less top-down management, it is inevitable that more people on those boards are going to demand such services.

The thrust of my argument is to say to the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Salford (Ms Blears), that it now behoves the Government to develop a strategy that will enable foundation hospitals to deploy more effectively many of the therapies that can not only reduce the bill of the health service but give doctors greater freedom, give patients better services, and build on some of the work that has already been done, not least by the Minister of State, Department of Health, the right hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton). He uses complementary medicine himself and has recognised the positive contribution made by such therapies. He—I think it is he, unless it is the Minister—has been instrumental in introducing NICE guidelines for next year and setting up the Sheffield study, which is examining how such therapies work.

Ministers like to wax eloquent, sometimes in response to debates that I have initiated, about the King's Fund project, led by Westminster university, to create a network of primary care trusts that will use complementary therapies based on good governance. What they have not mentioned is that the clinical director of the school of integrated health at Westminster university is Dr. David Peters, a distinguished doctor who is also involved in the Marylebone health centre, which has pioneered an integrated health service and published a book for doctors explaining how to integrate complementary therapies into primary care. That practical guide for health professionals was produced by several distinguished doctors, who considered all aspects of how complementary therapies could be integrated.

Perhaps I shall be able to develop my point further in tomorrow's debate, if I am lucky enough to catch the Speaker's eye. However, the fact that there is now a

working model that can be deployed in new hospitals makes the Minister's task so much easier. I encourage her to look at the work being done at Marylebone health centre and to consider ways of applying it in the new foundation hospitals. On that point, I rest my case.

10.26 am

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): I wish you a healthy new year, Mr. Cook, and want to say how pleased I am that this debate is taking place because it gives us the opportunity to flag up issues of importance to Parliament. I am as disappointed as anyone that we have so little time to give the speeches that many of us have prepared. Westminster Hall is rapidly becoming the place where important issues are raised. The Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Ms Blears), knows my constituency well and understands the health inequalities that we face in north Staffordshire. My hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown) made an authoritative, courageous and fully informed speech, and I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to consider all the issues that she raised because I suspect that, if the truth be known, what she described is mirrored in constituencies around the country.

I appreciate all that the Government have done to improve health care. If improvements are needed anywhere, they are needed in Stoke-on-Trent, North. There are prospects of a new training centre and a new hospital in my constituency, but there is considerable progress to be made following the years of under-investment by Conservative Governments. How do we take forward the huge improvements that we have already seen? I do not believe that foundation hospitals, in precisely the form that has been put to Parliament, are the way forward. On Sunday, I spoke to a constituent who told me about her five-month wait for a cataract out-patient appointment, followed by a further four-month wait, which meant that she decided to spend virtually all her life savings on having the operation done privately and, even then, had only one cataract operated on.

My priority and that of my constituents is to take forward the agenda for change and modernisation and to ensure that we build on the real commitment of all our NHS workers to improve health care in the secondary sector, in our hospitals, in primary care and in services ancillary to medicine. I understand the point that has been made about complementary therapies. We must look to see how improvements in public health and healthier lifestyles, as well as all the Government's attempts to deal with poverty and inequality, can underpin and reinforce the work that is done in hospitals and in the primary care sector. That is where Ministers' priorities should be, whether they are Treasury or Health Ministers. They should be working with PCT staff to ensure that they know what is needed and can cut through red tape and bureaucracy. Mutual ownership should be introduced locally in the way that my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) mentioned, so that we can make progress. Foundation hospitals are not the way forward. I hope that the debate will comfort my hon. Friend the Minister and strengthen her negotiating position in further discussions within the Government.

I am full of praise for the three years' work that has been done in respect of "Agenda for Change". Many hours have been spent in drawing up a new negotiating position for our national health service workers. Speaking as a member of Unison, I do not want to see that work undone or lack of agreement on it because of the Government's position on foundation hospitals. Will the Minister address the points about pay that were made by my hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon? Have the Government considered the possible consequences of equal value claims? Will we really allow foundation trusts to pay whatever rates they want to? How will that link in with the good work of the three-year "Agenda for Change" process, under which, with a few exceptions, negotiated positions have been reached? I look forward to the Minister's response.

10.31 am

Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown), who has brought her long experience to bear on an issue that is of concern to all of us. She mentioned the huge strengths of the NHS, the public support for those who use or might need to use it, the public service commitment of those who work in it and the value to the public purse of that ethos. She also mentioned weaknesses, such as the inequalities that my hon. Friend the Minister and I have to address in our constituencies. A man from the inner-city part of Plymouth, Sutton is likely to die 10 years earlier than a man from the leafy suburbs. She also mentioned the frustrations of dealing with red tape and bureaucracy.

This morning, as this year's chairman of the Co-operative group of MPs, I want to advance the case for the mutual model and to show how, through foundation hospitals, we can build on the strengths and address the weaknesses of the NHS. There is a saying, "Tell me, I'll forget. Show me, I'll remember. Involve me, and I'll understand." My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) mentioned the importance of a bottom-up approach. Mutual models provide frameworks that allow local people to be involved on a much more meaningful scale than they are now. My hon. Friend the Minister has a clear and broad understanding of the track record, strengths and potential of mutual models through her service on the Co-operative Commission. I congratulate her on her contribution to the Mutuo publication "Making Healthcare Mutual—a publicly funded, locally accountable NHS." I hope that she will forgive me if I particularly recommend to those who are less familiar with the development of 21st century mutual models the contribution of Cliff Mills in the third part of the document.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Is my hon. Friend aware that recent history shows us that mutual societies are not in any way sacrosanct and can be destroyed by the activities of others?

Linda Gilroy: I understand my hon. Friend's point, which I will address in a moment, but I am talking about new 21st century mutual models.

I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will draw fully on her experience of the mutual sector through the Co-operative Commission. Will she address four matters in particular? First, new mutuals need special

[Linda Gilroy]

skills backed up by advice from established mutual societies who know what works and what does not work as regards governance structures and development, elections, elected member training and mentoring. Secondly, will she consider the application of mutual models to organisations that are not success stories? Mutuals have a strong track record in phoenix rescues of failing organisations—both social and business enterprises. Thirdly, will she consider the application of mutual models and principles to other parts of the health community? By doing that in primary and preventive health care, we can empower individuals to play more effective roles in corporate governance. Fourthly, my hon. Friend the Minister is enthusiastic about expert patient schemes, and I hope that she will draw on one of the richest traditions in mutual principle and experience—that is, education—by linking the NHS academy proposals to the experience of the Co-operative college, which has, for instance, developed NVQ 1, 2 and 3-level distance learning packages for housing management.

I look forward to hearing my hon. Friend's response. Her constituency faces many similar challenges in relation to regeneration and inequalities, and no one is better placed to tackle them through the mutual models that I have described.

10.36 am

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I shall be brief to allow time for the concluding speeches. I congratulate all hon. Members on their presentation of the case, and I want to add a few points. We should be able to move away from the rather sterile debate on whether we should rely on the traditional NHS model or privatise it, because, as my fellow Co-operator just said, there is a different way.

We have considered trusts and acute hospitals in relation to the potential mutualisation of some aspects of health services.

Angela Eagle: Does my hon. Friend agree that the most interesting area for developing such an approach is not acute hospitals but primary care trusts?

Mr. Drew: I agree entirely. Some in the Co-operative movement have said that we should have started by considering the application of mutual models to PCTs.

It is possible to see in the Government's document some of the principles of co-operation, including the devolution of power and practical models of public service delivery, which is what all Labour Members should be about. For 13 years, I have been involved in a site in my constituency—Standish hospital, which delivers acute facilities in the county of Gloucestershire. It will close in 2004; I shall not reopen the debate on whether it should close. With colleagues, I have recently worked on a mutual solution by which the site could be taken on by a community land trust to provide a different type of health care—not only for the immediate area but for the whole region. I shall approach the Minister and her colleagues in the Department to discuss specific matters such as alternative and complementary care, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick), diagnostic and treatment centres, intermediate care, and services for older people with behavioural problems.

When an NHS site becomes available it is analysed and evaluated. More often than not it has no potential use in the NHS, so it is put up for sale. I am challenging that in respect of this site. We would like to look at mutual solutions. I hope that the Government are allowing that to happen, rather than coming up with top-down solutions. Let the community see whether new models could be brought forward within the NHS, because the NHS should be the main provider on a site such as that in my constituency. We should also consider how that could—dare I say it—link with the private sector. That is my plea.

I have already said that our spokesperson is a great Co-operator. The debate is in danger of becoming a graveyard, and I hope that we can move away from that and open up opportunities. That will, however, take time. The NHS is not good at considering alternative solutions—that is its greatest weakness. I am beginning to get some interest from the NHS community, but it has been a devil of a job. Many doors have been shut. If I were not a Member of Parliament, they would have been not only shut but bolted and I would be outside the loop for ever and a day.

We must encourage people in the NHS to think about different ways of delivering the service. I intend to introduce a proposal on that in my constituency. I hope that my hon. Friend will take the opportunity to visit us and listen to what we are trying to do. That might provide a better way forward and it might be better than having what I regard as a rather sterile debate.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Frank Cook (in the Chair): Order. I shall be looking to the Minister to commence the Government's response at five minutes to the hour and conclude by five minutes past. I therefore expect the Opposition Members who wind up to split the time equally.

10.41 am

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): I am aware of the time issue. This is the first of two Opposition debates on this subject and we will have the opportunity to speak further tomorrow. [HON. MEMBERS: "No thanks to you."] That is the point. One debate has been initiated by a Labour Member and the other by the Conservative party. As we shall see, a curious feature of the direction of the Government and the Conservative party is that there is very little between them.

The Government should take note that senior Back-Bench opposition to the proposals goes beyond the usual suspects. It is, however, reasonable to say that the hon. Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown), whom I congratulate on securing the debate, is not a usual suspect. The hon. Lady has generally been loyal and she is also an experienced finance director. I know that she is a tough negotiator. I found that out when I was on the opposite side of the table to her during talks on junior doctors' hours. Her expertise is respected in many areas of health, including maternity services. The Government should take note of that.

The Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Salford (Ms Blears), is not only eloquent but capable of packing that eloquence into 10 minutes,

which is better than some others. I do not have her ability to do that, but I want to respond to the points that were raised by the hon. Member for South Swindon. I apologise to other hon. Members because I will not have a chance to comment on points that they have made in this excellent debate.

The hon. Lady mentioned the Government's motivation for bringing in these measures. First, they want to use financial incentives to improve the NHS. I agree with the hon. Lady that in that they fundamentally misunderstand the motives of NHS workers. Those people do not do their best so that a trust may be more financially successful; they do their best within their professional competence for patients. It is disappointing, to say the least, that the Government take that view. The second motive is, allegedly, to stop the Tories privatising the NHS. The Government and, in this respect, the hon. Member for South Swindon have missed the point. The private provision of NHS services is not the greatest threat to the NHS. No matter who provides it, the NHS stands for a service that is free at the point of delivery, which is paid for through general taxation and is comprehensive, regardless of the ability to pay.

The issue is not whether there are more private or voluntary sector deliverers, or whether there is increased private commissioning and purchasing in the NHS. I disagree with the hon. Member for South Swindon on pay beds in the NHS. Those are more of a threat because they use vital capacity for people who can afford it, rather than for those who cannot. The Conservative party has suggested previously that patients should be charged.

Linda Gilroy: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that people's reservations and opposition to privatisation are based also on profits, which go outside of the NHS?

Dr. Harris: Indeed.

Mr. Burns: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Harris: The hon. Gentleman will have a chance to rebut me later in his speech.

Mr. Burns: On that point—

Dr. Harris: No, I cannot give way now. The hon. Member for South Swindon said that foundation hospitals would be able to keep the income from land sales. That seems unfair, given that they may be sitting on land in a way that other hospitals are not. Since they did not inherit the land by dint of being managers of a foundation hospital, the income should be shared more equally.

The hon. Lady said that the Government's other motivation was their desire not to run everything from Whitehall, or at least to give the appearance of not doing so. I believe that it is a matter of appearance. She drew attention to several worries, most of which I share. The measures are divisive. The ridiculous star-rating system is not based on sensible clinical outcomes; it often runs contrary to the more reasonable measures of performance such as the in-depth studies undertaken by the Commission for Health Improvement.

The measures are a way in which to create a league table to enable the Government to allocate blame for failures in the health service to those who are at the bottom of the table. As I know from the excellent five-star hospital in my constituency, failure is due not to poor performance or incompetence but to inadequate capacity, the inability of social services to place people and a shortage of nurses. That is why no-star trusts are found in areas where there is a shortage of staff, which delays discharges.

The hon. Lady said that she was concerned about the absence of performance management. However, she can be reassured because the Government are not letting go; foundation hospitals will still be subject to targets. Commissioners will have to commission according to targets and through the Commission for Health Improvement, which is not independent because it must inspect according to the Government's targets.

As for local pay, the Government are seeking to be all things to all people. At the same time as saying that local pay will be flexible, they say nonsensically that there will be no poaching. We have many worries about the proposals. They are based on continued structural change, not real reform. They concentrate too much on the side of the providers rather than commissioning in respect of democratisation. They are divisive and attempt to devolve blame, not freedom.

10.47 am

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): I congratulate the hon. Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown) on initiating this important and timely debate. In many ways, it is the hors d'oeuvre for the main banquet tomorrow. In what was an elegant speech, I congratulate the hon. Lady on the clever way in which she walked the neat tightrope between outright rebellion and seemingly constructive criticism of her Government's actions.

It has been fascinating listening to all the contributions to the debate, but particularly those from Labour Members. The illustrious and formidable hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) gave an extremely interesting, robust speech. I hope that she will catch Mr. Speaker's eye tomorrow when she will have a greater opportunity to elaborate her views. With one exception, it was noticeable that no Labour Member seemed to support the Government's action. We must bear it in mind that the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Linda Gilroy) is a Parliamentary Private Secretary in the office of the Deputy Prime Minister, unless she has recently resigned or been replaced.

Linda Gilroy: The hon. Gentleman is right, but I am here today in my capacity as the current chair of the strong parliamentary Co-operative group.

Mr. Burns: However much the Government have modernised matters in other ways, I assume that the code of conduct for Parliamentary Private Secretaries is the same as under previous Governments and that they are bound by collective responsibility. One would not expect them to criticise their own Government's policies in a debate, because Parliamentary Private Secretaries are linked into that responsibility, as are Ministers.

[Mr. Burns]

The Opposition support the general principle of foundation hospitals and the freeing of hospitals within the NHS. However, we have considerable difficulties with the way in which the Government seek to move that agenda forward. We will have a better opportunity tomorrow to analyse the policy in greater detail. We believe that hospital freedom should be a priority because the most important factor within the NHS is to ensure that it thrives to provide the highest and best quality care for patients. I emphasise, so that there can be no misunderstanding or slurs from the Liberal Democrats, that that care must be free at the point of use for patients. That is what I have always supported and will continue to support in my future political career—if I have one.

I part company with the Government on one issue, however. As the hon. Member for South Swindon rightly said, in the early stages—which tend to be rather long—the Government will restrict the opportunity of foundation hospital status to three-star hospitals. That is a significant and fundamental error. It will create a two-tier health system, regardless of what Ministers within the Department of Health may say.

The Government should have been bold. At the Labour party conference last year, the Prime Minister himself said that the Government were best when at their boldest. They are not being bold: they are being timid, which is a weakness. I suspect the reason for that timidity. We must not forget that foundation hospitals are the brainchild of the Prime Minister. However, as always with this Government, a shadow is cast over No. 10 from the neighbour at No. 11.

We know that the Chancellor of the Exchequer is not at all keen on the Prime Minister's big idea or on the Secretary of State for Health's pursuing it. One gets the impression that the Chancellor would like to emasculate the policy at birth. The policy is in the best interests of the NHS and enhanced patient care, but I urge the Government to extend it from the outset to all hospitals. All should have the opportunity to be foundation hospitals, rather than some getting the fast-track treatment because they have three-star status and the vast majority being excluded. That will create a two-tier system.

Time does not allow me to go into the minutiae, but in December the Government published "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts", in an attempt to flesh out details of the Government's proposals in the absence of published legislation. The trouble is, as the hon. Member for South Swindon highlighted in a series of relevant questions, that the document raises more questions than it answers. Statements, proposals and ideas in the document directly conflict with what the Secretary of State said in previous statements when announcing the movement forward on foundation hospitals. Due to the time constraints, I cannot reiterate the concerns, conflicts and outstanding questions that require answers, but the hon. Member for South Swindon did so. I hope that the Minister will use the time that she has available to her to treat the debate with the relevance that it deserves, and that she will answer as many of the hon. Lady's questions as possible rather than simply read out a brief, as I fear that she will, that tells us how wonderful foundation hospitals—as the Government propose them—will be for our health.

10.55 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): I am delighted to respond to the first debate of the new year, which I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown) on securing. I have never been referred to as an hors d'oeuvre before, but we shall have several opportunities to discuss these important issues both over the next few weeks and when the legislation comes before the House. I am genuinely pleased that we have started that process. My hon. Friend raised a series of important points, and I shall endeavour to reply to as many as I can. However, I can tell every hon. Member who made a contribution that I shall take on board all points that were made as the debate unfolds and the policy develops.

First, I want to set the context of the changes. We all have to acknowledge that we have had the biggest ever increase in investment in the national health service and that improvements are starting to come through on waiting, getting more staff and equipment and reducing deaths due to cancer and coronary heart disease. All those things in the NHS plan, to which my hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon referred, represent an incredibly ambitious programme for this country's health service. All Labour Members have made it clear that they welcome the investment and the changes that are going on, and recognise the contribution made by NHS staff in delivering the improvements. That is the context in which we are introducing foundation trusts and extending new forms of ownership and social enterprise in the health service generally.

My hon. Friends the Members for Stroud (Mr. Drew) and for Plymouth, Sutton (Linda Gilroy) made the important point that the policy is not limited to the acute sector of the NHS. I hope that it will permeate everything that is done in the NHS during the months and years to come. There should be a broad range of providers, and we should encourage enterprise in local communities so that we can provide services that are more responsive and accessible to patients whom we serve.

We must have reform to go with that massive investment if we are to ensure that we get maximum value from every single extra pound that we put in. If the Government ask the public to pay extra money to fund the NHS, it is our responsibility to ensure that the investment has the maximum impact. The public should see increased capacity and a reduction in waiting times. My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) said that she had talked to a constituent who had had to wait for a cataract operation. The public's top priority is waiting and, therefore, the challenge that we all face is creating extra capacity and new ways of doing things. We must spread modernisation throughout the system so that patients can move through the system more quickly while still receiving high-quality services. The proposed reforms come from a need to increase capacity and treat patients more quickly.

Until 1997, we did not have the kind of national health service that we are trying to create. We talk glibly about the NHS as if it was a national uniform service.

However, most hon. Members recognise that before 1997 the service was a collection of organisations that functioned differently, as my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) said. Since 1997, we have introduced the National Institute of Clinical Excellence, the Commission for Health Improvement, national service frameworks and the NHS plan. My hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon asked whether this was the right time to go forward with further reforms. I absolutely believe that it is, because a series of national standards is in place for the first time, meaning that people up and down the country know that they are all entitled to the same level of service. We have shifted the balance of power, and have given power to the primary care trusts; that will provide security of long-term commissioning. Those are the foundations that had to be put in place, and it is the right time to proceed apace with faster, more radical and deeper reform.

Foundation trusts give us the chance to have the best of both worlds. They give us national standards together with local community-based ownership. That, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud says, is a means of getting away from the sterile, polarised and adversarial arguments either that the existing system is good enough or that it is not and there must be outright privatisation. Things do not have to be that way; we can have national standards with local community ownership. That will unleash creativity and innovation within the service and keep a key local connection not just with communities but with the rest of the NHS.

The new foundation trusts will be under a duty of partnership to work with every other part of the NHS, including primary care, social care, and the public health service. The foundation trusts will not be free-floating entities somewhere up in the ether; they will be connected to the rest of the service. They will also have a duty to exercise their freedoms in a way that does not undermine or damage the rest of the NHS. The foundation trusts will be drawn into the same system, but will have freedom and flexibility to push forward with the modernisation and change that all hon. Members recognise is needed if people are to be treated more quickly and given a higher standard of service.

My hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton referred to the models set out in the guide. Those models build on co-operative themes and principles and on mutual traditions. I was a member of the Co-operative Commission for 12 months, during which we explored not just the successes of the Co-operative movement but, crucially, its risks and its failings. We are not going into the project with rose-tinted glasses. We know that mutual models can present difficulties and need special support. If local people are to be involved, there must be a great deal more emphasis on education, training, citizenship, governance, and working with the Co-operative college. I take all those points on board, and those are issues that we want to pursue.

I want to make two distinctions between our policy approach and that of the Conservative spokesman, the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns), and the Liberal Democrat spokesman, the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris). The Tories should be open and honest about their view; however, the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) has been a little too honest for his comfort. The hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) made a reasoned argument, and the hon. Member for West Chelmsford wanted to put on record his personal commitment to a service free at the point of use, but the hon. Member for Woodspring is on record as saying that he wants to raise money—perhaps by means of health insurance—through self-pay.

Hon. Members should be under no illusion; their agreement with the foundation trust principle is about keeping the NHS connected to local communities and within public community ownership. The Tories' agenda is very much about self-pay and making sure that there are a variety of purchasers, and would lead us back to a two-tier system. That is the first distinction.

The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon seems to want localism and diversity at the expense of all national standards. The policy has to proceed in the context of national standards. People pay for a national health service; they want to know that they can get the same services wherever they are. Diversity and decentralisation must be married with good national standards and a national framework. That is the second distinction between our approach and that of the Opposition.

Concerns about a two-tier system are at the heart of the issue. Our policy on foundation trusts is about being on a journey, not about a destination for a few, leaving behind the rest of the system. The policy is about saying that in time we want everyone to have the freedoms, flexibility, innovation and creativity that the system will set in train. It is absolutely right that we should start with the best performers, because that way we can manage the risk of this very big change—make no mistake, this is a bold policy. It is right to want to manage that risk in an incremental way.

Organisations that are not yet at the level of the best need extra help. We want to be able to concentrate on supporting them in order to bring everyone up to the standards of the best. Our policy is about promoting excellence for everybody, not about setting hospital against hospital. It is about having a duty of partnership, but getting energy, creativity and dynamism into the system, so that we can make a significant change for the people who pay for, use and work for the services, and who, at the end of the day, will be running and owning them too. That is an exciting prospect, and I look forward to the debate continuing.

Regional Policy

11.4 am

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): Before I begin my speech, I wish to draw hon. Members' attention to the fact that I am a director of an economics consultancy, as is set out in the Register of Members' Interests.

Regional issues have moved up the political agenda over the past two years, so it is fitting that we are discussing regional policy so early in the new Parliamentary year. Since the previous Parliament the Government have radically redefined their position on regional policy. Three years ago the Prime Minister, armed with a Cabinet Office report, declared that the very idea of a north-south divide was misleading and misplaced—but since then the Government have had to accept the undeniable evidence that there are significant regional economic disparities, and they have even set themselves the target of reducing those disparities over the long term. It therefore came as a surprise to read that Mr. Ed Balls of the Treasury was back in regional divide denial mode. Just before Christmas, he told a conference in Leeds that there were vacancies in every part of the country: in Sheffield, Wakefield and Bradford—and, no doubt, in Pontefract and Castleford. However, I hazard a guess that the vacancies in Leeds, North-West, Halifax and Hull, North were at the forefront of his mind.

Most Members present would accept—at least in private—that the United Kingdom economy is deeply divided and that those divisions are widening. That was all but admitted in a remarkably candid Treasury publication produced at the time of the pre-Budget report of 2001, which set out what the Government have dubbed their new regional policy. The Government are more honest about the regional divide than ever before, and more focused on it. They have even talked about bridging the growth gap by the time of the next general election. However, the problem is that the policies that have so far been espoused neither bear any relation to the scale of the problem nor offer any realistic hope of providing a solution to it. In other words, the Government have willed the ends without willing the means, and I wish to explore that contradiction.

To put the matter in the simplest terms, the northern half of the UK is poorer than the south, and it is getting still poorer. According to the OECD, the UK has a higher level of inequality of prosperity between its territories than every other OECD country except Mexico. That prompted the TUC to claim that the UK was suffering greater regional equality than parts of the third world. Even the Government's own figures, from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's state of the region tables, the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' regional quality of life indicators and the Department of Trade and Industry's regional competitive index, all point to a persistent gap between the economic performance of northern regions and the UK as a whole.

Until the mid 1970s regional inequality was diminishing. However, that gap has grown again over the past 25 years, and has become a gulf. The figures are startling: in the mid 1970s no British region had GDP levels lower than four fifths of the south-east average, but by 1999 no British region outside the prosperous inner core had value added levels as high as four fifths of those in the south-east. In the north—the north-east and north-west taken together—GDP per head fell from 86 per cent. of the south-eastern level in 1975 to only 70 per cent. in 1999; in Wales it fell from 81 per cent. to 66 per cent.

In 1997 it was widely thought that the incoming Labour Administration would adopt a more redistributionist approach to economic policy that would help to slow, if not arrest, the growing disparities in wealth and economic performance between south-east England and the rest of the UK—but the opposite has been the case. A recently published competitiveness index for the UK shows that the three best performing regions—London and the south-eastern and eastern regions—have widened their lead over the three worst by more than 30 per cent. since 1997, and that the gap between London and the north-east has grown by more than 35 per cent.

It is true that regional differences in claimant count unemployment have narrowed, and they are now at their lowest levels for 30 years. Ministers have often used that as evidence that the UK has solved its regional problem, and the north-south divide is dead. That is a deeply flawed and dishonest argument, because, as Labour knew all too well in opposition, the claimant count data seriously underestimate the true extent of joblessness in the economy as a whole, and in the weaker regions in particular.

As the recent study by researchers at Sheffield Hallam university and the university of Warwick has shown, the official unemployment count excludes about 2 million people who were parked on sickness benefit, pushed into retirement or prevented from claiming jobseeker's allowance. Hidden unemployment masks a more severe north-south divide than that which shows up in the official figures. The rate of real unemployment in Liverpool, Glasgow, and parts of the north-east and south Wales is running at more than 20 per cent., compared to about 3 per cent. in the south. The scale of the challenge is clear. The question remains whether the policies are sufficient to the task.

The so-called new regional policy is based on the idea of indigenous development and at its core has been the creation, in England, of the regional development agencies, which have been given the task of raising the regions from below. However, regional policy was not, classically, a matter of raising regions from below, or of their lifting themselves up by their bootstraps. It was a matter of redistributing wealth and activity between regions. If the new regional policy is based on what Ed Balls famously dubbed post-neoclassical endogenous growth theory, the old regional policy was social democratic and Keynesian. Its focus was on the ideal of territorial equity.

The Government's commitment to that ideal remains unclear, because they reject classical regional policy, which they say was based on subsidy and failure. It may have been crude, and it was certainly expensive, but regional policy in the 1960s and 1970s was certainly no failure. In a relatively short time a new layer of industry was grafted on to places such as the north-east of England, south Wales and central Scotland, along with

motorways, new towns and other infrastructure to support them. That process created hundreds of thousands of jobs in the areas of greatest need.

Many of the firms that were diverted into the assisted areas in the late 1940s, or in the 1960s and 1970s, are still there today. Morgan Marine in my constituency was attracted to Llandybie in 1967 and is now the largest private sector employer in the area. The end—or, as I like to think of it, the beginning—of the M4 is the last place where a supplier of prefabricated sheds for utility companies, often requiring a police escort for delivery, should be located. It is there as a direct result of what Mr. Balls has disparagingly called ambulance chasing, but I prefer to see as intelligent intervention.

Unfortunately, the policy of active relocation of industry was one of the early victims of the oil crisis, and latterly of Thatcherism. Between 1975 and 1995 the real value of UK regional aid was reduced to less than one ninth of its 1975 level, and it has remained at that level ever since. Solving the regional problem outright would have required three times the number of jobs that were actually created in the 1960s. However, at least a serious attempt at convergence was made, with funding on a scale far better than anything in new Labour's new regional policy. It worked for a while—but then the mechanisms were dismantled and the north-south divided opened up again.

The Government have set themselves a target of closing the growth gap, but, apart from the rhetoric, no formal policy or sustainable strategy is in place for achieving that ambitious objective. The new regional policy does not deal with the north-south divide. It could well exacerbate, rather than alleviate, the disparities, precisely because it is designed to raise regional growth across the board, rather than to make improvements in the north relative to the south. If the new regional policy were really intended to bridge the divide, regional development agencies would have been created only in the north. The same would be true of the regional venture capital funds.

The fact is that the Government will not acknowledge in clear and unambiguous terms the need for explicitly discriminatory measures to encourage development in regions that are lagging behind. If the issue were not so serious, it would be comical to suggest that depressed regions could somehow regenerate themselves from within, against the backdrop of the overwhelming economic dominance of the south-east.

London and its dormitory regions have captured the science base and the trained human capital that are the key drivers of competitiveness in the knowledge economy. Proportionately, London has three times as many graduates as the north-east. In the east and south-east, spending on research and development is about 3 per cent. of regional GDP, but in the north-east it is only 1 per cent. That is partly due to the fact that there is currently no Government research and development expenditure in the north-east. Wales fares little better.

This is a "winner takes all" economy. Successful regions in the south can continually add to their existing advantage by attracting more, and better-qualified, workers, while poorly performing regions are locked into a vicious circle of underdevelopment. Adopting a policy of refusing to intervene in the location decisions of firms condemns those of us who live in the separate countries and the regions of the north, not to the status quo, but to a worsening spiral of decline.

Mr. Wayne David (Caerphilly): The hon. Gentleman is developing his thesis. Is it not a problem that the competition rules of the European Union, of which Britain is an integral part, work against the kind of strategy that he suggests?

Adam Price: There is a debate at the moment about renationalising regional policy, but that would bring its own set of problems. During the Thatcherite period, European regional policy provided us with an alternative and some degree of alleviation, and I am keen to protect that possibility. As I understand it, we are way below the level of state aid to regions that would be allowed under European rules. There is significant scope for the budget available for regional aid to be increased radically. I will return to European competition policy later.

My case may be dismissed in some quarters as special pleading, but the reality is that regional disparities hurt us all. As the Treasury has pointed out in its report on the new regional policy, regional inequalities can exacerbate macro-economic volatility. With economic growth so heavily focused in the south-east, firms run into bottlenecks and that leads to inflationary pressures. That happened in the United Kingdom in the late 1980s, when an inflated property market and high levels of debt in the south-east and London turned an expansion into a severe recession. Hon. Members will be forgiven for feeling a frisson of déjà vu.

The same spatial disparity explains the two-speed economy of service boom and manufacturing bust that we have experienced over the past six or seven years. Inflationary pressures generated in the overheating south-east have prompted higher interest rates and a higher exchange rate, which have limited output in the under-heated northern economy. We all remember the public relations gaffe made by the retiring Governor of the Bank of England, who said that higher unemployment in the north was a price worth paying to keep inflation in the south under control.

London itself has a price to pay. The capital may have cornered the market in top-paying jobs, but it cannot provide a matching quality of life. The rising cost of accommodation forces people to make longer and longer journeys, and staff shortages in the public sector have an impact on the general quality of life. Without an active regional policy, there will continue to be an inexorable tilt of population and resources towards an already overcrowded region in the south. That in turn will add to congestion, increase the pressures for greenfield development, push up house prices even further and overload an already overstretched public sector.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): That is the crux of the matter. The difficulty with traditional regional policy is that it does not take account of the fact that regions are not homogeneous. My region, the south-west, which on paper is one of the better-off regions, contains Cornwall, which has the lowest GDP per head in the country. Surely regional policy has to reflect that situation by moving resources within regions. I accept that the south-

[Mr. David Drew]

east is a particular problem because its economy is overheated, but because we cannot move resources from the south-east to the north we need to be more sophisticated within the regions. Surely that is what the hon. Gentleman should be talking about.

Adam Price: Those options are not mutually exclusive. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the data prove that disparities both between regions—the north-south divide—and within regions are growing. That is why we need a combination of regional economic planning and local economic development strategies. Wales is a national microcosm of exactly the same problems. The overheating in the south-east of Wales, which is caused by a concentration of economic activity, is to the detriment of other regions. Disparities occur between regions and within regions, and we need both sets of policies.

Throughout the history of regional policy, it has been axiomatic that the problems of underdevelopment and overdevelopment are two sides of the same coin. The Barlow commission was set up just before the second world war to prevent unbalanced development and to investigate those issues. It concluded that the congestion problems in London and the south-east and the limited opportunities in other regions were two parts of the same problem. Its core concept, which provided the rationale for the regional policies that had such an impact in later years, was to control growth in the south-east and to direct it to other areas. Barlow was to territorial equity what Beveridge was to social justice. It is arguable that the present Government have killed off both Beveridge and Barlow—but at least Beveridge, unlike Barlow, has been given a decent burial.

The Crow report on regional planning guidance in south-east England, which set out the agenda to let growth rip regardless of the consequences for either sustainability in the south or deprivation in the north, is the praxis for regional policy to date. It is scandalous that the Government are considering building more than 1 million houses in southern England when cities such as Liverpool and Manchester are clearly underpopulated. Building houses to ease house prices in the south-east is like easing traffic by building extra lanes on the M25: in the end, one ends up with greater congestion, greater environmental destruction as new homes are built on the green belt, and traffic nudging closer to gridlock. In George Monbiot's words, the Government seem to have resigned themselves to setting Britain's regional inequalities in stone by letting the south-east build the towns required to house the north's economic refugees.

The argument for redistribution is as strong today as it was in the 1940s because unequal economic growth across the UK regions is a major factor in economic instability and environmental damage. Balanced growth is the key to achieving the Government's stated aim of sustainable growth, but that assumes that they practise joined-up thinking as well as preaching it. The chances of denting the north-south divide are remote when they are planning to build a fifth terminal at Heathrow, and those chances will be remoter still if their regional policy sticks to the principle of treating unequal regions equally. The key issues are whether they are prepared to embrace a policy of positive discrimination in favour of the most deprived regions, and the form that such a policy would take.

The Government's defence is that we operate in a global economy, so if one contains growth in Brighton it will go not to Bridlington but Barcelona. Nobody is suggesting, however, a return to the old policy of doling out licences and industrial development certificates. We advocate a policy of inducing business investment away from the affluent south-east to outer Britain through a powerful package of incentives.

In response to the point made by the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. David), I might add that Britain is near the bottom of the European league for regional spending aid, to which we devote half as much money as France and one sixth of the sum spent by Germany. In the heyday of regional aid, which was 25 years ago, more than £3 billion a year at today's prices went in regional aid to the poorer regions, but regional selective assistance is now down to about £400 million a year. We need to ratchet it up to what it was under Labour Governments in the 1960s and 1970s. We also need to return to a system of automatic rather than discretionary grants, in order to send a clear signal to firms that they will receive financial support for investing in certain areas.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): I am following the hon. Gentleman's argument with great interest and with feelings of solidarity, if I may use a social democratic term. Does he agree that the public sector should provide an example? One of the most important consequences of the Barlow report was the relocation of public sector activity to less favoured regions. My own region is one of the greatest recruiting grounds for the British armed forces, yet it has no civilian Ministry of Defence employment. That is a very good example of something that could be done without worrying about what the European Union might say.

Adam Price: Absolutely. The hon. Gentleman anticipates my concluding point very well. Government is a key driver, through employment and procurement policy.

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): If that is the hon. Gentleman's final point, perhaps I might raise an issue that he has not mentioned. He talked about service boom and manufacturing bust. Surely the cause of that is an uncompetitive exchange rate. Would not some of the problems be solved if we were to adopt the single currency?

Adam Price: I am not minded to test the patience of the Chair by delving into that debate.

Before I deal with the issue that the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) raised, I wish to discuss tax incentives. The Chancellor can play an important role. He created the stamp duty exemption and the community investment tax credit, but they are fairly small measures, given the current state of play. The Basque country and Navarre very effectively use their power to lower corporation tax rates, as part of the regional economic strategy for regions in north-west Spain. There is no reason why the nations—and, in time,

the northern regions of Britain—should not be allowed to do the same, provided that the powers are devolved to meet European Union competition rules.

Automatic grant aid on the scale of the 1970s, together with the use of tax incentives, would have a dramatic effect on jobs and investment. However, such measures are designed to compensate for one thing: the hugely distorting effects of the concentration of wealth in London and the south-east. No other European state is as centralised as Britain. London is not only the administrative capital but the financial, media and corporate capital as well. In almost every field of endeavour, people have to come to London to reach the peak of their profession. London is by far the largest net gainer of graduates, and it is draining the brains from the rest of Britain.

In such circumstances, it is astonishing that instead of using public funding as a counterweight to the concentration of private capital, we do precisely the opposite. An army of half a million civil servants, as well as the headquarters of virtually every public body, are based in London.

Another example is provided by the media, as Phil Redmond argued recently. Channel 4 and Channel 5 could have been set up in the regions, as could satellite broadcasting and facilities for the recently awarded BBC digital licences. Without directives from the Government, it is always more convenient for such companies to centre themselves in London, close to the rest of the media. At the same time, ITV, which is the one truly regional broadcasting structure, has been allowed to merge into what is virtually a national broadcaster. If the Government cannot come up with an answer to the north-south divide, at the very least they should not compound the problem.

I have a very simple—some would say simplistic—and radical suggestion. Let us move the capital north. Economists suggested it 30 years ago, so it is clearly long overdue. Moving out of London would be the greatest single contribution to the regeneration of the regions that the Government could make.

Mr. David: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Adam Price: I would like to make some progress, if I may.

All other major English-speaking states have their political capitals away from their biggest cities, and the Japanese and South Koreans are currently discussing moving their capitals. If the capital moved from London, property prices there would become more realistic, and roads and railways a little less clogged. London would still be a great global city—indeed, it is arguable that it would become an even greater one, because it would work better. It could remain the capital of England, and Westminster might one day become an English Parliament. There would be costs, but they would be dwarfed by long-term savings such as lower office costs, cheaper housing, cheaper child care, no need for London weighting and next to no commuting.

Liverpool has nine of the 20 poorest postcodes in the UK, so let us reverse life's location lottery and put the UK Parliament there, in an anglo-celtic city that is ethnically diverse and infectiously inclusive. The Treasury could do its bit by relocating to Bootle. Jobs would spread, as they have in the south, from the north-west to other regions, including Wales and the midlands. And why stop there? What better way to enshrine the independence of the Bank of England than to send it to Newcastle? We might then get policy decisions that hurt the north a little less and help manufacturing a good deal more.

Moving the capital would signal unequivocally that the Government take the north-south divide seriously. It would regenerate the north, take pressure off the south and symbolise a reformed and genuinely decentralised Britain. It would do nothing but good—which is why it will probably never happen.

The Government must do something in their power to break the southern-centric bias. As has been mentioned, they could give serious consideration to relocating quangos and whole Departments, as part of an explicit policy of redistributing Government employment to the regions.

Mr. David: The hon. Gentleman talks about moving the capital of the United Kingdom. Would he extend his thesis and suggest moving the capital of Wales north from Cardiff? In particular, I can think of no better place for it than the valleys of Caerphilly.

Adam Price: There are those who would call Caerphilly an outer suburb of Cardiff—but I am certainly not one of them.

The Wilson Government adopted just such a policy following the 1963 Flemming report and the 1973 Hardman review. As a result, the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency went to Swansea, the Department of Employment to Sheffield, the social security records office to Washington—*[Interruption.]* Washington in the north-east of England, that is. The administrative functions of the Inland Revenue moved to Cumbernauld and Bradford. So far, new Labour's major achievement in that regard is the relocation of its offices from Millbank to Sheffield—although one wonders whether necessity was the mother of reinvention in that case.

History and international experience show us that regional economies are not entirely at the mercy of the market. Policies of regional redistribution, whether of private or public sector employment, can and have had positive effects. Central Government's role is crucial. Although local needs for regeneration are best determined locally, and regional development agencies and the devolved Administrations have a vital role, we can start to tackle regional disparities only if we have a judicious mixture of top-down and bottom-up policies.

Regional inequalities are substantial, and reversing them will require considerably more than the new regional policy currently offers. As the recent Institute for Public Policy Research report argued, the fact that these disparities have persisted for decades, and have been ignored and even denied by UK-wide institutions, exacerbates the sense of injustice. Those to whom

[Adam Price]

injustice has been done now look to the Government to discover how the wrongs of the last century can be righted in this century.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Edward O'Hara (in the Chair): Order. It might help Members if I say that it is desirable for the winding-up speeches to start at 12 o'clock. Members wishing to speak may gauge their contributions accordingly.

11.33 am

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) on securing this debate on regional policy. As nationalists, we are rather more interested in national policies for economic equity, but let us not quibble over nomenclature this morning.

This debate is not on regional policy only as it relates to Wales, although the situation in Wales is especially instructive, but on regional policy per se. My hon. Friend has already referred to the Government's welcome, if belated, recognition of the deep regional economic divisions in the UK, divisions that extend to all manner of fields—wealth, housing, health and employment as well as economic activity. No one would deny that there are divisions within, as well as between, the regions as the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. David) mentioned earlier. One reason why the "region" of Wales has cause to be glad that it has a National Assembly is that body's early decision to produce a proper index of multiple deprivation in Wales. Using measures that are appropriate to Wales—especially rural Wales—that index has exposed disparities that were previously masked or disregarded. They include accessibility of services, quality of housing and proper appreciation of the drain on family finances that running one car can cause, let alone two, as is often the case in rural areas.

Areas in my constituency hitherto regarded as rural idylls have emerged as areas of deep and real deprivation. That was dramatically exposed recently by research undertaken by Gwynedd county council. It showed that in the Llŷn peninsula, which has some of the worst housing conditions in Wales, there is pressure on prices in housing markets from comparatively rich outsiders from the overheated regions mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr. The price pressures combined with low local incomes meant that no one on an average wage could buy any property that was advertised locally. Some 20,000 local people on average wages could not access the local housing market.

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that that is also a problem in London and large areas of the south-east? It is not confined to rural Wales.

Hywel Williams: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. However, the point I am making is that prior to that small piece of research, the problem was not as apparent as it now is.

One of the most telling lessons of that thorough examination of deprivation in Wales is that regional disparity within our country has lessons for us. It startlingly mirrors divisions in the United Kingdom. Many of the south Wales valleys and the south-west and north-west of Wales are in an objective 1 area, so defined by the European Union because of the low GDP in the area. The areas that do not come under that definition are the south-east and the north-east, which are the areas that have experienced huge Government investment in infrastructure, industry, research and development, and in the case of Cardiff a glut of Government jobs and a growth in GDP.

The effects of that direct investment are clear: the overheating of the local economy, labour shortages, huge house price inflation and pressure on infrastructure. The investment is directed—and I use the term "directed" advisedly. The choice is not between regional investment or no such investment, but between investing in the poorer regions or investing in the rich south-east. That is, in part, an economic decision, and the effect of relying on the economic imperative is quite clear. For example, I was interested in the autumn to see a report from the Venture Capital Association that revealed that 48 per cent. of all venture capital investments were in the south-east of England. Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the regions of England did not get the share that they would expect on a per capita basis, let alone on a needs basis.

Investing in the poorer regions or in the rich south-east is a political choice. As in all political matters it is a question of priorities and, as my hon. Friend has shown, the Government's priority is far from redistributionist. The case of Wales is instructive for the UK as a whole, where the not-so-hidden hand of Government favours the rich south-east of England. The south-east of England is massively rich and has a declining environment, making it difficult for people on average incomes to live there.

To move on to a further constructive point, politicians from Wales and Scotland—and elsewhere in the UK—are often accused of whinging, complaining and always rattling the tin, so I want to describe the positive effect of a proper regional policy. The regions have something positive to offer to the great pensions debate in addressing the so-called demographic time bomb. We all get very worked up in the pensions debate about the dependency ratio—the proportion of those in work to support those in benefits. That ratio has been falling for many years and is one of the grounds cited in the arguments for pensions reform. However, the contribution of regional policy to that debate has been largely ignored.

I refer to an interesting exception: the recently published Catalyst report, "The Challenge of a Longer Life—Economic Burden or Social Opportunity" published in December 2002. Briefly, it points out the scope for increasing economic activity rates among older people. The regional element is clearly illustrated by the fact that in the period March to May 2000, the activity rates among men aged 50 to 64 and women aged 50 to 59 was 61.3 per cent. in Wales compared with 76.8

per cent. in the south-east of England. That suggests that any effects of greater prosperity leading to earlier retirement are outweighed by the strong demand for labour, which keeps older people in jobs. The report concludes that:

"Given a strong demand for labour and the greater willingness to employ older people, it is not difficult to envisage sufficient increase in activity rates to maintain the current ratio of workers to non-workers across the population as a whole".

Not only would a proper and successful regional policy tackle regional inequality, the gross waste of human resources and the issues of poverty, health and housing that I referred to, but it would have the utility of being part of the answer to one of the most pressing problems of social policy.

11.40 am

Mr. Wayne David (Caerphilly): I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) on securing this debate. It is vital that we focus on the development of a coherent regional policy in this country, and I agree that that has not attracted sufficient attention, at least in the recent past. I am delighted that he supports my campaign to have the capital city of Wales moved north from Cardiff into Caerphilly. That would be a positive step forward for the economic development not only of Britain, but of Wales.

I have some reservations about some aspects of the thesis that the hon. Gentleman developed at length. There are no absolutes in this debate—it is not a question of black and white alternatives. Regional policies are, of their very nature, complex economic instruments, and it is often a question of where one places the emphasis. I have reservations about the notion that regional policy can be based on the idea of redistributing resources from rich regions to poor regions—today's world is far too complex to allow a policy based on such a premise. We are in a new situation, with the development of the internal market, which will increasingly become more integrated, especially if we join the single currency. In addition, the process of globalisation is having a profound effect on the nature of our economies, and that effect will become even more profound in the near future. It is therefore essential that we develop new policies, not simply policies that are based on the assumptions of the past.

I agree with the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr that regional policies such as those pursued by Labour Governments in the 1960s and 1970s were effective, but it is wrong to assume that such policies can work in this new century. Rather than a strategy that is based solely on redistribution and on the idea of attracting footloose investment into less prosperous areas, we need a new kind of regional policy. Emphasis must be placed on developing indigenous entrepreneurship. The hon. Gentleman might be dismissive of such terms as "endogenous economic growth", but it is nevertheless true that the poorest regions in the United Kingdom lack entrepreneurial activity. That is an historic problem that cannot be solved overnight, but it must be addressed in our regional policy.

The development of the entrepreneurial action plan in Wales points the way forward. It is vital that we pursue a cultural change in many of our older industrial regions, but our approach to economic development is rooted in our educational system and lifelong learning. It has as its end result a change in the cultural attitude to growth and economic development.

Mr. Roger Williams: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the poorer regions of Great Britain and of Wales in particular have often been sold to potential investors as low-wage economies with low unit costs? We should take a more positive approach by improving skills and infrastructure, so that they are better places in which to do business, rather than places with low wage rates.

Mr. David: I agree absolutely—in fact, that was my next point. Rather than rely simply on attracting inward investment to less well-off regions on the basis of low wages and, often, poor health and safety standards, we should aim to create an economy that is based on high added value and high skills—on the quality of the people and the work force. That is where the emphasis of regional policy should lie.

Following on from that is the need for a regional policy that addresses fundamental weaknesses not only in the economy, but in the nature of our societies. The hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr referred to the high levels of economic inactivity in many of the poorest areas and he was absolutely right. The question facing us is one not only of unemployment levels, but of how many people are economically active.

A great problem in many of the older industrial areas is the large number of people who are physically ill. It is vital that that issue is linked to the welfare to work debate. As part of the regional policy concept, we must consider ways of improving the health of large sections of the population. In some wards in parts of south Wales, for example, as many as one in four of the working age population is economically inactive owing to illness. If we are serious about increasing the GDP of such areas, we must improve the health and well-being of those people, so that they are potentially able to enter the labour market and eventually secure employment. That is one crucial element that we must consider.

Such ideas were not seriously considered 20 or 30 years ago. It is vital that we are not concerned simply with turning the clock back and looking at what Barlow said or what previous Labour Governments did. We must address the situation as it exists in our country today and plan for the future. As I said, this is not an either/or question. We need an holistic approach that pulls together the best of our experience and creates a vision for the future. That is what I hope our regional policy will consist of in this new century.

11.48 am

Mr. John Grogan (Selby): I congratulate the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) not only on securing the debate, but on an outstanding speech. In its breadth, it was a model of its kind. My contribution will be more modest, but given that the debate has a distinctive Welsh flavour, and in the week that Michael Vaughan was voted the man of the Ashes tour, I thought that a contribution from God's own county would be appropriate—*[Interruption.]*—especially in view of the constituency represented by the Minister.

[Mr. John Grogan]

I shall take as my text just one line from the regional economic strategy document prepared by Yorkshire Forward. This year's report says:

"The over-arching target of above European average growth in Gross Domestic Product per head is being achieved, but the gap with London and the South East is widening and strong growth in services contrasts with a shrinking manufacturing base."

I am a fan of Yorkshire Forward's work, but I shall point out three different issues relating to Yorkshire—there may also be implications for countrywide policy—on which a difference could be made in respect of reducing the gap.

First, one of the big challenges in regional policy in Yorkshire over the next year will be the closure of the Selby coalfield in my constituency. That has implications not only for my constituency, but for the whole of Yorkshire. According to the report by Lord Haskins, it will involve 2,000 jobs directly and about 5,000 indirectly, spread out across 600 firms in West, South and North Yorkshire. One of the great challenges in formulating Yorkshire's regional policy is to see whether the coalfield can close in a different way from the way in which coalfields closed in Yorkshire and throughout the country in the 1980s and 1990s.

I briefly draw hon. Members' attention to Lord Haskins' report, in which he says that the economic "shock" of the closure of the Selby coalfield, which was due in spring 2004 but now looks as though it could happen at the end of the year, will amount to £160 million. Lord Haskins has produced a package of measures and asked for £11 million of new Government money to attract inward investment, retraining and so on. I urge the Minister—a young man with good connections—to urge the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to reply quickly to the report. The matter is urgent and we want the taskforce's recommendations to be implemented speedily.

The hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr characterised the Government's regional policy well when he said that, rightly or wrongly, it built on the strengths of the existing economy. He talked about the importance of science in reducing regional disparities. I bring to the Minister's attention an example in the grain of the regional policy in Yorkshire—the European spallation source project. I will not go into great detail, but the project is currently Europe's leading scientific project. It involves a neutron particle separator that will be the Hubble telescope of condensed matter.

Last year, it was my duty to ask a local parish councillor in Selby whether they fancied a European spallation source next door to them, as there is a site in Burn in my constituency. Yorkshire Forward's No. 1 project is to attract that facility to Yorkshire, which will build on the strengths of the White Rose Consortium of Leeds, Sheffield and York universities. As I said, the Minister is a young man of impeccable contacts, and I urge him to secure a meeting between the Yorkshire universities, Yorkshire Forward and Lord Sainsbury to discuss the project. At the moment, Lord Sainsbury says that it is too early to determine how the process would work throughout Europe, but it is never too early to discuss such matters. The bid for the project is the equivalent for Yorkshire of an Olympic bid, and I hope that we can secure a meeting to discuss it.

I add to the comments made by the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr by stressing the importance of regional media. In a debate on regional assemblies, the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) said that we did not need a regional assembly in Yorkshire as we had a cricket team and an attitude. I do not agree with his conclusion about regional assemblies, but the remark about the cricket team and the attitude is true. However, we also have Yorkshire Television. Regional media are terribly important to a sense of identity and to the economy, and Yorkshire Television has produced a fascinating document outlining all its contributions to the local economy.

I draw hon. Members' attention to early-day motion 260 in my name, to which there are almost 80 signatories, to strengthen the Communications Bill by strengthening regional television. According to the Producers Alliance for Cinema and Television, the number of regional opt-out slots on ITV has decreased from 8,700 hours to approximately 6,600 hours over the past year. The number of regional productions on the BBC has increased slightly to a total of 5,300 hours. My early-day motion would strengthen the requirements for regional production on the ITV network and allow the ITV companies to be regarded for the first time as independent companies in bidding for the BBC's independent quota. London luvvies—companies based around London—currently dominate that quota. ITV companies such as Border and Yorkshire should be able to bid for that national quota.

Finally, the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill is now in the House of Lords. It would be enormously strengthened if transport were placed entirely under the auspices of the new regional assemblies. There is much strategic planning in the Bill, but the regional assemblies do not have a sufficient job to do. Transport is the most obvious sector with which regional assemblies should deal. We should not continue with passenger transport executives and authorities in Yorkshire. It is ridiculous to have a passenger transport authority in both West and South Yorkshire and a regional assembly to deal with the strategic planning of transport. Only one body is required across the region, which would allow a regional travel pass and perhaps a concessionary pass for pensioners. We should popularise the idea of having a regional assembly.

Finally, the Minister referred to consultation on the timing of referendums. I am a supporter of regional government and I know that the level of support in Yorkshire is different from the level in the north-east, for example. Business supports a regional assembly more in the north-east and the north-west than in Yorkshire, so the county should not be in the first wave of referendums for regional government: the other regions should go first.

11.55 am

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I came here for the previous debate and initially had no intention of participating in this one. However, I am moved by the excellent contribution of the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) to make my own contribution.

My hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) rightly stressed the importance of contextualising regional policy within the wider debate. Greater interest

might follow from understanding the importance of the economic redevelopment of regions. People might see more clearly the need for political and administrative improvement. I have always supported some form of regional government because otherwise we end up with unelected quangos freewheeling and taking decisions off their own back, which is neither acceptable nor fair. We can advance the regional debate only when we reconnect economic decision making to the political aspect of governance, which is the proper starting-point. I disagree with the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr on his historical analysis of regional policy. We need to look within regions as well as between them.

Rural deprivation is strongly connected with agricultural decline. It is difficult to see in terms of the aggregation of numbers, because the agricultural industry in this country is small, but many Labour Members are worried about agricultural decline. We must not just talk about diversification, but make sensible and cogent arguments for it. Rural decline is nothing new: it has been with us virtually for ever, dating back to the agricultural revolution. It has been heightened by the more difficult and rapidly accumulating problems that the industry faces today.

I am a little surprised that the decline in manufacturing has not been emphasised. I would link regional decline clearly with the decline of our manufacturing base. It will be felt more harshly in regions where manufacturing has traditionally been more important. We may be clouding the issue too much. A proper regional policy should be running alongside a proper manufacturing policy. Whereas I am critical of our inability to deal with our agricultural decline, at least we have a policy across Europe, through which resources are channelled into the industry—perhaps in the wrong way and insufficiently, but we are trying to deal with the problem.

It is one of the European Union's greatest weaknesses that it has a policy supposedly based entirely around competition rather than support. That is foolhardy in various ways, most clearly because it is not working—if it is working, why is manufacturing decline taking place throughout this country, Europe and the developed world? Some may say that such decline is inevitable because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Selby mentioned, companies will always seek out low-wage economies whether we like it or not. However, that does not excuse us from examining policies to deal with manufacturing.

The daftest element of all the daft things done by the EU is the idea that we cannot intervene in manufacturing decline because it would be a form of state aid, which is contrary to competition policy. We know that that is blatantly unrealistic and dishonest. All countries intervene, but some do it more covertly and cleverly than my own Government. I wish that we were more overt and said that we were going to intervene, and why and how we would do that. My argument is that the regional policy debate cannot be masked by one that avoids the inevitable need for a proper debate on where we want manufacturing in this country and the rest of western Europe to go. Surrendering and saying that the decline is all down to the market is not acceptable. It is time that we recognised that sensible, strategic planning, proper use of infrastructure investment, and support for what could be called losers, as well as the winners, to turn them into more successful companies can achieve our aims.

Regional development agencies can help in that process. I speak highly of the South West of England Regional Development Agency, because it has intervened in my constituency in a big way by taking on a site in Dursley in which to reinvest and regenerate. That is a model for action that could be taken elsewhere, although it is always against the background of the threat of the European Commission's declaring such action to be unacceptable and anti-competitive. However, we cannot pretend that we can run a country with any manufacturing basis unless we have that level of intervention. We should be open and honest. We should encourage the debate initially and then encourage action; otherwise, regional policy will become irrelevant as we see a massive decline of core employment. I am not a believer that an economy can be run on that basis. That was the greatest fallacy of Thatcherism—

Mr. Bill O'Brien (in the Chair): Order. I understand that the hon. Gentleman is aware that the winding-up speeches start at 12 noon.

12.2 pm

Matthew Green (Ludlow): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) on securing the debate and giving a wide-ranging and entertaining speech. Hon. Members should be made aware that he has been sharing his views on moving Parliament to Liverpool with Derek Hatton on Radio Wales in recent days, so he has some interesting allies for his proposals.

The hon. Gentleman spent a long time highlighting the problems, and although his solution has some attraction in principle, it is a little simple. He avoided some of the more obvious problems that are creating the disparities that he highlighted so well. I will not try to repeat what he said about those, but one subject that he avoided, which is pertinent to the issue, is the comparative strength of the pound and euro. The disparity has hit manufacturing, farming and tourism, which are key component industries of the north, Wales and Cornwall.

We cannot escape the fact that the disparity exists, and if we were in the euro, we would not assume the same disparity in economic growth between London and the south-east and the rest of the country. The hon. Gentleman's party has the problem that it would probably prefer a separate Welsh currency—a Glyndwr, or something similar—which would have problems of its own. He omitted to mention the exchange rate, which is a key component of the debate, and which has probably resulted in the loss of about half a million manufacturing jobs since Labour came to power. Much of the blame for that can be laid at the door of the Government's reluctance to call a referendum on the single currency.

The hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr rightly highlighted a number of other problems, and I will draw attention to a couple more of the issues. The hon. Gentleman spoke about housing, and there is no doubt that there is a great housing problem in London

[Matthew Green]

and the south-east. However, a housing needs survey that has just been carried out in my own constituency, in South Shropshire district, just on the English side of theWelsh border, revealed that for anyone on average local wages, there have been no houses available to buy for the past six months. The reason why that situation is different from that in the south-east is that we are punished by the property values in the south-east. People retire to Shropshire, and that drives up the house prices, so people who work in the area can no longer afford to live there. As has been highlighted, Cornwall and other areas face the same problem.

More worryingly, there is an acceleration of the regional divide in issues such as broadband. Because there is a high population density in London and the south-east, as well as many businesses that use a great deal of money, organisations such as BT will fall over themselves to provide broadband in those areas. However, in the less economically active and more sparsely populated areas, the unit cost of installing broadband is greater, and BT will be reluctant to do so. In my own area, Advantage West Midlands is doing wonderful work in trying to get broadband into rural areas, but it remains a struggle, and we are years behind. The availability of broadband will encourage business growth in London, the south-east and the major economic centres, and the Government must address that issue in a way that will help the other regions of the United Kingdom.

The hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr mentioned that there was some attraction in moving parts of government out of the south-east. I will not discuss further what those parts of government might be. There are, however, other solutions that must be considered.

A key issue is the need for a proper regional government policy for England, and the need to strengthen regional government in Wales. One of the ironies of the proposals being put forward for regional government in England is that the regional governments will in effect have a tax-varying power. Wales would then be the only place in the UK that did not have such a power. The Government have not commented on that, but I assume that they will eventually realise that that situation cannot continue, and will address it—but there are different views within the Government as to how they might deal with the issue.

If regional government is to be set up in England, the lesson to be learned from Wales, compared with Scotland, is interesting. The Scottish Parliament was given substantially more powers than the Welsh Assembly, and has probably been more successful because of that. I support the Welsh Assembly and the work that it does, but it has not performed as well as the Scottish Parliament, probably because it does not have the same powers. The same thing will happen in England. The proposed regional assemblies will have almost no powers at all. They will have an overview of the quangos that already exist, but will not be able to control them.

I will give two examples. The regional assembly will be able to decide on its preferred regional transport strategy, but the decision whether that strategy will be implemented will be made at the centre, because central Government will decide which schemes are funded. The money will not go into a big pot for the regions to decide where to fund schemes. The regions will come up with the idea, and Ministers will make the final decisions on whether to proceed. The same will be true for health: there will be a regional health adviser, but he or she will be appointed by the Minister.

The regional assemblies are in danger of being toothless—a fact that was touched on many times in Committee on the preparatory legislation. I do not want to go into too much detail, but there is an issue in some parts of England about the boundaries of the regions, which were set by the Conservatives for administrative purposes. We tease them about "their" regions—but that is why they were set up, and they are now being used to set up regional elected assemblies. There are problems in parts of the south-west, the south-east and the west midlands, which do not feel that they belong in the Government's current regions. We must address the boundary issue before we are likely to get a popular, referendum-winning solution.

The hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr avoided mentioning the Barnett formula, which is 20 years out of date. We cannot carry on pretending that it does not exist; it needs to be properly reviewed by a commission, although I do not pretend to know all the answers that may come out of such a review. We need radical housing policies in the south-east and in other parts of the country, to allow houses to be built by means of shared equity, renting or golden share schemes to keep them out of the open market. That is what is needed to keep the economy going.

The problem is that the Government do not have a firm idea of their regional policy—that is the title of the debate. They have a tentative approach to regional assemblies; they do not understand that they mean decentralising from Westminster, moving civil servants away from London to the regions and giving those regions power over things that are currently decided in Westminster. That is what real regional policy would do; that is what would help to drive the economy in the regions and bring lasting benefit to people throughout the United Kingdom, including those in London and the south-east who suffer from the negative aspects of the boom—the housing and transport problems, and the congestion. A positive rather than a tentative approach from the Government would be welcome.

12.12 pm

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) on securing the debate. I confess to having been puzzled when I saw the title "Regional Policy" standing in the name of a Welsh nationalist Member. I wondered whether the debate would be about English regional policy, or what I might call old-fashioned regional economic policy. I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on having carefully crafted his arguments to keep the debate in order.

I have much sympathy for the hon. Gentleman's argument about the north-south divide, and I see it as two sides of the same problem, as my constituency is in a part of the country that suffers from the problems of economic overdevelopment. However, the hon. Gentleman and I are not likely to agree on the solution.

Neither my party nor I are attracted to the Gosplan approach that he favours, of redirecting investment. One or two hon. Members fell into the trap of talking as if the vast bulk of investment were public investment, whereas in our economy most investment is private. Private investment can be coaxed, persuaded and incentivised, but it cannot be directed.

The hon. Gentleman looked back with nostalgia to the '60s and '70s and proclaimed that the era of direct subsidies was "no failure". However, he readily acknowledged that when the direct subsidies dried up in the '80s and '90s, the regional economic disparities reappeared—thus neatly putting his finger on the problem with using direct subsidy as a solution. I would argue that the measure of the success of regional economic development funding is the achievement of long-term, sustainable, self-generating growth within a region.

I would argue, too, that as we move from an economy with a regional pattern largely based on the existence of natural resources to one overwhelmingly based on human resources, the infrastructure and skill deficit must be addressed in any effective long-term regional policy. We must ensure that we improve transport infrastructure in a way that delivers immediate effects. This is a chicken-and-egg problem. Although everyone would like railways and airports in their regions that will help to generate economic development, such transport investments depend on volume and critical mass to deliver effective services. I am afraid to say—because it flies in the face of much Government thinking—that only roads, as a form of transport infrastructure, are likely to deliver the short-term immediate benefits to the regions where economic development needs kick-starting.

The hon. Member for Ludlow (Matthew Green) picked up on one of the most important issues—communications infrastructure. As our economy is transforming into a human resource and service-based economy, the broadband revolution held out the prospect of removing the problems of isolation and remoteness, and creating an equality that could not have been dreamt of even 30 or 40 years ago. Unfortunately, the Government failed to deliver on their ambitious targets for the introduction of broadband. Local loop unbundling has been a miserable failure, with the result that genuine broadband is a big city phenomenon and ADSL is a large town and suburban phenomenon. Even where I live, just 26 miles from the Palace of Westminster, we do not have ADSL, and there is no prospect of getting it in the near future. The Government have compounded the problem by taking £20 billion that would otherwise have been available for investment out of the telecom sector, through the third generation telephone licensing round. That has meant that technologies that might be able to deliver in remoter areas, such as wireless local loop technologies, remain undeveloped.

Mr. Cousins: Does the hon. Gentleman propose that the Government should give some of that money back?

Mr. Hammond: I do not suppose that the Chancellor of the Exchequer would be keen to do so, given the predicament in which he currently finds himself, having adopted a tax-and-spend policy and then discovered that tax receipts will be somewhat lower than expected. That is certainly an interesting suggestion, however. Perhaps the Minister would care to put it to his colleagues at the Treasury.

The hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. David) identified one of the key issues that must be addressed in any effective regional strategy: the development of entrepreneurship in regions that, because of their industrial past, do not have strong traditions of entrepreneurial development. I hope that regions, both in England and beyond, in the devolved Administrations, will build on their advantages and regional strengths and promote clustering as a way of developing self-sustaining local indigenous growth. The EU-funded science project in Selby is just such an example, which has a genuine prospect of securing an effective self-sustaining local cluster.

Of course, the Government's approach is that elected regional assemblies are a vital part of securing regional economic growth and balancing regional economic development. We see no evidence of that. Indeed, the Scottish example seems to suggest the opposite. Since devolution, growth in Scotland has lagged behind growth in the United Kingdom. There is no evidence that an extra tier of politicians and bureaucracy will narrow regional differentials, and throughout the European Union, inequalities between regions have been growing during the past 15 years, despite the fact that many EU countries have strong traditions of regional economic growth.

Even the director general of the CBI is sceptical. He says:

"Business doesn't believe that regional assemblies will deliver. We feel that they won't make people's lives better. If anything, we believe that there is a real danger they could make a bad situation even worse."

The Government are politicising the current RDAs by grafting a tier of elected oversight on to them. They hope that that will provide a panacea, but it will have the opposite of the desired effect.

If I am to give the Minister 10 minutes in which to reply, I can speak for only one more minute, so I shall make just one more point. I rather expected a Welsh Member to mention the availability of match funding, but no one has done so. Such funding would allow full use to be made of the EU structural funds that are allocated to Wales for 2001–06. Where do the Government, and in particular the Deputy Prime Minister, stand as regards the Barnett formula?

In an interview under the heading "Scots and Welsh face subsidy axe", which was published in *The Guardian* just before the last general election, the Deputy Prime Minister said that the forthcoming review of local government finance, which was promised soon after the election, would

"include a detailed examination of funding throughout the UK."

He promised that there would be "blood on the carpet" as a result of the review. Are the Government committed to retaining the Barnett formula, which might be seen as disadvantaging Wales, given the measures of genuine deprivation there? On the other hand, are they now prepared, as the Deputy Prime Minister suggested, to take on the Scottish lobby and risk the tartan backlash by revisiting the formula as part of their review of regional distribution in England?

12.21 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Christopher Leslie): I have only a short time to respond to the debate, which has generated several intriguing ideas. First, I congratulate the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) on proposing the subject. The debate has been very wide-ranging, moving from an exposition on the single European currency by the hon. Member for Ludlow (Matthew Green) to issues such as broadband communications. All those issues are relevant, but I shall try to restrict my contribution to matters that fall within my ministerial responsibilities, and those that relate more directly to regional policy.

The Government take regional policy very seriously. We recognise that the need to increase our regional focus on economic development is not only about fairness and prosperity but about ensuring that there is strong cohesion between all parts of the United Kingdom. We want to work hard to ensure that that objective is taken forward and that regional and national prosperity goals are fully integrated into all our delivery mechanisms.

The hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr recognised that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, together with the Treasury and the Department of Trade and Industry, has responsibility for a public service agreement target specifically on regional economic performance. Our target is to make sustainable improvements in the economic performance of the English regions and, over the longer term, to reduce the persistent gap in growth rates between them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) highlighted the fact that that would be a particular challenge in certain parts of the country, including our home territory of Yorkshire, which we are both proud to come from. He mentioned the coal industry, and said that the Government's response to the taskforce must be strong and relevant. He also mentioned the campaign on the location of the spallation facility in Yorkshire, and I will examine any representations closely.

The gap in economic growth rates has persisted for many years and under all Governments. Now, for the first time in a generation or more, we must focus on tackling some of the disparities in economic performance between the regions and nations of the United Kingdom. We must all focus on creating the conditions for growth. The Welsh Assembly, the Scottish Executive—I will make sure that I get my brownie points by being the first person to mention that—and the Northern Ireland Administration, similarly, focus on economic performance.

I am not entirely convinced by the solutions that the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr would pursue. He mentioned, for example, his opposition to building new homes in areas where pressures are high and workers—particularly public sector workers—face significant difficulties. When he talks about redistribution, I suspect that he really means telling people where they should and should not live. I am not sure that that approach is possible. We cannot have an approach that constrains, smothers or suppresses prosperity. My hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. David) rightly highlighted the need for a more sophisticated approach appropriate for today's environment, rather than looking back at previous policies. We need to stimulate demand and growth where those are lower than their full potential.

The hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr and others touched on the issue of location in the public sector. His argument was about moving the capital to Carmarthen. Some may argue that the capital should be in Bradford—but although I might see the moral argument for that, it is not the Government's policy.

We will take further steps to improve our regional policy, such as ensuring that awareness of regional devolution features strongly in civil service training and development, with the aim of increasing the mobility of civil servants between headquarters and regional offices. Whitehall Departments will also be encouraged to consider the balance of their staff between the centre and the regions, in terms of effective policy design and implementation. In particular, Departments will have to demonstrate the case for not locating new streams of work outside London and the south-east.

Hon. Members are familiar with the idea of the north-south divide, but they should not be surprised to hear me say that that notion is a rather simplistic and possibly inaccurate way to describe the imbalances in economic performance in the UK. I do not deny that there are such imbalances between regions, although it should not be forgotten that differences in economic performance within regions can be even more marked than those between them. We are committed to tackling disparities wherever they occur. We must make sure that we consider the imbalances both between and within regions, and create the conditions that reduce the gap in growth rates between the south-east and the east, and the other six regions. We must tackle disparity and disadvantage wherever they occur.

The office of the Deputy Prime Minister is not the only Department that has the objective of reducing such disparities; that objective is built into the whole range of the Government's policies. The Government set the framework, but from the centre, we can only do so much. When it comes to revitalising a region, we accept that Whitehall and Westminster do not necessarily know best. We were elected on a platform that included bringing devolution to Scotland and Wales, and we set up regional development agencies as strategic drivers of economic development in England. Their work has been successful so far. They are already tackling the causes of low economic development in regions. Firms are being helped, neglected neighbourhoods are being regenerated, and regional strengths are being augmented. Hon. Members may have seen, for example, the contribution of the North West Development Agency in transforming east Manchester, during the recent coverage of the Commonwealth games.

Many hon. Members representing Wales have spoken. Although it is outside my ministerial responsibility, I think that we have a proud record of devolving responsibility for economic development to the National Assembly for Wales. That has helped the successful economic approach that the Welsh Assembly Administration have taken. The First Minister has taken a personal role in assuming responsibility for northern Wales. Such approaches have helped to lead to success in a number of ways.

Much as I would love to talk about the Conservative party's record on regional government, I am running out of time, and it would not be right to let the debate pass without mentioning the move towards elected regional assemblies for England, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) alluded. They could be crucial to the success of the regions by making sure that the politics links with the economic policies for the future. Our vision is that the UK will perform more strongly; all our regions and nations will have to improve their economic performance if we are to succeed. The Deputy Prime Minister has consistently championed regional policy, and I am proud to have the opportunity to work alongside him.

Common Agricultural Policy

12.30 pm

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): Thank you, Mr. O'Brien—or, to judge from your name card, Mr. O'Hara. Has your name changed over Christmas?

I want to debate the cost of the common agricultural policy, because those of us who believe in Europe, and I count myself very much in that camp, are mocked by it every day. Its financial cost is high and in the view of those who want to further the European project, its political cost is even greater.

I hope to hear more from the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), about the Government's proposals for CAP reform. More importantly, I want to know what the Government are doing to promote the reform proposals both to the British electorate and to the Governments and electors of other European countries. I hope that by the end of the debate we will be in no doubt that fundamental reform of the CAP is a vital British foreign policy interest, essential to Britain's future in the European Union and to the future and credibility of the European Union.

About half the EU budget is spent on agriculture. Many people—certainly in my constituency—could be forgiven for feeling that we belong to a common agricultural union rather than the European Union. Some of us would like more emphasis on the advantages of EU membership than on agricultural subsidy.

The common agricultural policy is almost wholly without merit. Its beneficiaries are rich farmers and giant agribusinesses, special interest groups, bureaucrats and, sadly, fraudsters and organised criminals. Its casualties are the citizens of Europe who must pay the bills for the CAP, both as consumers and as taxpayers, as well as the third world, the environment, wildlife and farm animals throughout the EU, law and order throughout the EU and, not least, public confidence in the integrity of the EU.

According to the Consumers Association, the common agricultural policy adds more than £16 each week to the average shopping bill of a typical British family. Our food is twice as expensive as, for example, that in New Zealand. New Zealand is well favoured agriculturally, and New Zealanders, unlike Europeans, do not labour under excessive subsidies and tariffs. The CAP costs the taxpayer £50 billion a year. If my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer put 2p on income tax, there would be an outcry, yet that is what the CAP costs every UK taxpayer.

Whatever its failings for Britain, one might feel better if the CAP helped the poorest farmers or rural communities in Europe. It does not do that adequately; 70 per cent. of payments end up in the pockets of the richest 20 per cent. of farmers in the UK and the EU. According to the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development, the CAP awards £500,000 to that horny-handed son of toil, the Duke of Westminster.

Even worse is the effect of the common agricultural policy on the third world. Many warm words come out of this place about the third world, but the CAP denies export markets to third world countries and destroys

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their home markets by dumping surplus foodstuffs on them. In doing so, it benefits bad Governments and middlemen in the third world and destroys the price structure for local farmers, perpetuating debt and poverty. Of course, the EU is not alone in dumping produce on the third world, but the CAP makes nonsense of our hopes that the EU might offer it a new and better pathway out of poverty and support the superb work that is being done by my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for International Development and the Chancellor.

Not content with dumping food on the third world, the CAP dumps tobacco there as well. That tobacco is low in quality and high in tar and is rejected by Europeans. The same EU that rightly tries to protect its citizens from such tobacco is happy for it to be used to kill African and Asian people at the European taxpayer's expense.

Because of the CAP, each cow in the European Union receives a subsidy of $2.20 a day, according to CAFOD, an income greater than that of half the world's population.

In Europe, the CAP has done more to harm the environment than two world wars. It has promoted intensive farming—a better name for which is perhaps chemical farming; it has destroyed hedgerows and habitats; it has poisoned land, rivers and streams; and it has killed wildlife across Europe. Since 1970, the European Union has suffered a 40 per cent. loss in farm birds—an issue that is, I know, dear to the Minister's heart. That is the fastest known loss of species. If Shelley were alive today, he would write not an ode to the skylark, but an elegy. I shall seek another Adjournment debate specifically on the loss of bird life in the United Kingdom.

The CAP is a magnet for fraud, racketeering and organised crime, and if the scale and consequences of that fraud were not so terrible, it could form the basis of a new generation of Ealing comedies. One of the most memorable examples is the great olive saga. Realising belatedly that most of the CAP's £1.5 billion olive tree subsidy was being spent on non-existent olive groves, the EU used a £130 million satellite to spy on claimants. However, the technology was foiled when the claimants filled their bare fields with plastic olive trees. That may be yet another blow to the environment from the CAP.

Above all, the CAP has created a climate of cheating and corruption across Europe. For millions of European people it has become normal, even praiseworthy, to steal the resources that belong to all the people of Europe. Through the CAP my constituents not only pay higher prices and taxes, but finance crime.

The problems that I have outlined are well known and deep-seated. I do not say that there should be no regime to support agriculture. However, the regime should be open, honest and clear. Of course we need to protect our farmers and ensure that a proper food supply is maintained. That is a central tenet of any Government or union of Governments. Nevertheless, our current way of proceeding does not fulfil those objectives; rather than giving credibility to the wider concept of Europe, it undermines it. The problems will probably deepen when Europe broadens and expands, with the accession of new member states from eastern Europe, bringing millions of new agricultural claimants.

In Poland alone more people are dependent on agriculture than is the case in the United Kingdom, Italy and France put together. There is some optimism—although I hope that the Minister will not reply over-optimistically—about the possibility that enlargement will force the EU to reform the CAP. I am afraid that at the moment there is little evidence of that. Indeed, the French and Germans effectively kicked reform into touch until 2006. The accession states are being promised a rising percentage of payments from the CAP year on year up to 2013. I am afraid that it is far more likely that the accession states will create new allies and opportunities for opponents of CAP reform. While the Minister is battling away in Brussels for sensible CAP reform, the forces against his and the Government's efforts are not diminishing, but increasing.

We need a broader campaign. We must support our Minister, our Department and our national objectives on a wider scale. We can achieve that if the Government as a whole exert stronger pressure for CAP reform. I have no doubt that the Government are committed to reform, but that commitment must be more visible and volubie.

I have the greatest of respect for my hon. Friend as I have known him for many years and know the hard work that he puts in. Even so, the Prime Minister must take a strong personal lead in support of reform and make it part of his commitment to reform the European Union so that it has greater credibility among the people.

I would like our proposals on CAP reform to be accompanied by an unprecedented diplomatic and political offensive. I want every Government and every citizen of the EU, present and future, to be aware of a prime ministerial plan for European agriculture—a Blair plan, if I may call it that. I want the Blair plan to influence the political agenda of every country in the EU because I am convinced that citizens throughout Europe have as much to gain as we do in the United Kingdom.

Of course, 5 per cent. of European Union voters make their living from the land and agriculture, but 100 per cent. of EU voters are consumers and are waiting for a lead. Let us tell those voters why and how the Blair plan would mean lower food prices and lower taxes. Let us tell them why and how the Blair plan would help their small farms and rural poor, rather than the giant agribusinesses and racketeers. Let us tell them why and how the Blair plan would save their environment and their irreplaceable wildlife and give them healthier, happier animals and food of better quality. Let us tell them why and how the Blair plan would improve living standards and create new opportunities for some of the poorest people in the world and make a difference to them. All such things can move European voters as well as our own, and I am sorry that a Blair plan was not sold in such a way to the voters of France and Germany during the run up to their elections last year.

Let us waste no more time winning over every possible supporter for European reform of the CAP. The Government have everything to gain from a high-profile crusade for CAP reform, and it is a worthy cause for my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, who is

invariably at his best when he sees and expresses an issue in clear moral terms. This issue lends itself to that form of expression.

It is not only a practical necessity, but a moral duty, for the Governments of the EU to reform the CAP. It is a wasteful policy with wicked consequences, and nothing would do more to restore faith in the European Union throughout the UK and the EU than CAP reform. If I may veer into crude politics, it would also do my right hon. Friend a great deal of good in terms of the domestic political agenda. Indeed, I go further and suggest that CAP reform is essential if the Prime Minister is to win a referendum on the euro. If the EU remains incapable of running a successful common policy on agriculture after 40 years, why should anyone believe that it is capable of running a common currency and a common economic policy? As I said at the outset, the costs are not merely financial and to do with the waste of the common agricultural policy; there will also be heavy political costs if we fail to address the issue and fail to ensure that half of current spending in the European Union has the credibility that it deserves.

I hope that the Minister will address some of those issues. I am sure that the topic is on his agenda and that he works hard on it; however, it will not go away, and assumes greater significance as we approach a closer union, not merely in terms of the euro but in terms of the European project as a whole. Much rests on fundamental reform of the common agricultural policy.

12.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen). He makes a powerful case on all that is wrong with the common agricultural policy and on the kind of problems that our Government—every European Government—face in terms of the pressing need for the reform of the common agricultural policy. He is right in identifying the costs of the scheme; it currently costs about €45 billion in direct support. It is calculated that there is an additional €50 billion effect in relation to higher prices, which are due to protectionism through the interventions of various regimes. That has put prices up for the consumer. On top of that, member states' exchequers pay another €15 billion for a range of support for the agricultural sector. In the United Kingdom, that works out at some €15,000 per farmer per year, but as my hon. Friend rightly stated, there are distortions to that sum because of the structure of agriculture in our country.

The common agricultural policy has not been very successful for the consumer, the environment or, importantly, farmers. In many cases, the CAP, which is some 1.4 per cent. of the EU's gross domestic product, distorts markets. As my hon. Friend rightly states, the CAP has an impact on developing countries with agrarian economies, particularly when we very expensively support agricultural production with intervention prices and, to add insult to injury, dump surplus products on to international markets at subsidised prices. That simply depresses world prices, which in turn distorts proper world trade and has an impact on developing countries. It also has an impact on our producers, particularly those who are not subsidised under the CAP but have to compete with sectors that get those subsidies.

My hon. Friend is also right to say that the CAP has led to intensification in a range of agricultural production. That intensification has, in many cases, caused environmental damage. It is often pointed out that farming shapes and maintains our landscape, and that is true. In many cases, it maintains a landscape that people think is particularly important and valuable. However, it is also fair to say that the intensification of agriculture has shaped our landscape in negative ways, too. One impact has been the decline in farmland birds, plants and insects. There has also been a loss of a range of fragile habitats, such as traditional hay meadows, flower meadows, and wetlands, which subsidies have made it worth while to convert for different forms of agricultural production. In some cases that change is driven more by the subsidy than by market demand and consumer requirements.

My hon. Friend is right to say that there is clear potential for fraud in all countries. There is also a costly infrastructure to administer. Farmers often complain about regulations and bureaucracy; the Government understand and have some sympathy, but if large-scale payments are to be made through public funds, there must be accountability and traceability, and that requires enormously expensive infrastructure. He is also right to say that the enlargement of the World Trade Organisation is driving reform. I agree that the Prime Minister and the Government have a role in terms of arguing the case for reform. Indeed, it is important, from an EU position, to argue the case for reform and to explain the potential benefits for the agricultural sector and its importance for consumers and society in general.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): Does the Minister agree that the one thing that is least likely to bring reform of the common agricultural policy is a Blair plan that is couched in the kind of moralising terms that we have just heard and which describes the whole CAP as a caricature of corruption? If the United Kingdom wants reform, would it not be better to cease talking that kind of language and begin talking in more practical language about how to help farmers, consumers, the environment and people generally, instead of saying how wicked the whole thing is? The CAP was put together by intelligent politicians for a reason.

Mr. Morley: The right hon. Gentleman is being a bit hard on my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North, whom I did not think used that tone. I understand exactly the right hon. Gentleman's point. The CAP and its structures are rooted in a 1945 policy made during austerity and food shortages, when the priority was to maximise food production in a post-war world. In that context it was successful.

The right hon. Gentleman understands these issues and I agree with him that the CAP and its structures have outlived their usefulness. We are moving into another dimension in relation to food production, distribution, supply and agricultural support. There is more interest these days in environmental support, in how food is produced, in the quality of food and what is imported, in the treatment of animals and animal welfare. There has been a shift in attitudes and opinion. Of course, as my hon. Friend pointed out, and as the

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right hon. Gentleman knows, the WTO dimension regarding enlargement cannot be ignored. If the EU is to be enlarged, a move that the Government and I support, the CAP must also be reformed. I know that the right hon. Gentleman was making a point about how that should be discussed, but there is no disagreement on the need for that reform and for the case to be made.

Certain changes have been made. At the European Council in October an agreement was made to fix market support—pillar 1—expenditure for 2007 to 2013 to the levels set in 2006 plus 1 per cent. per year. That is an important restraint on EU expenditure, especially in respect of enlargement, and it must accommodate the phasing in of direct payments in new member states and the financing of further reform. That will not be open ended in relation to the kind of enlargement and changes that we are discussing.

We are also embarking on the mid-term review, to which Franz Fischler is committed. I have attended the Agriculture Council and I know that Franz Fischler has made it clear that decoupling is essential if we are to make progress in the WTO negotiations. We must move away from our present rigid agriculture support. We expect formal legislative proposals on the mid-term review on about 22 January. We support Commissioner Fischler's aims to secure agreement by the end of the Greek presidency in June 2003, although we recognise that that is a somewhat challenging timetable.

We think that the mid-term review is going the right way on the main points. There will be much negotiation on and examination of the detail, but we welcome the essential commitment to decouple payments from production, because that removes immediately some of the perverse incentives to over-produce that exist in the present system.

We are also interested in the cross-compliance and farm audits, which the Commission has proposed. As with everything else, the devil is in the detail—I shall press that point strongly.

Mr. Allen: Ordinary people must be persuaded of a couple of things and they need to be won over if we are to enhance the current European project. First, the careful detail that my hon. Friend has put forward must not be overturned by two or three important leaders getting together late at night and stitching up a deal. We must show people that we are working towards something that Her Majesty's Government have laid out and they must be able to see progress. Secondly, they also need—as I do—such things to be explained in clear, ordinary language. I understand why the Minister's explanation is technical, but to convince people about the reform pathway for the common agricultural policy, the argument must be put across to people. Some of us may understand the language—the distinguished Chairman of the Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), in particular may understand the terminology, although I do not pretend to—but we need to find a way to bring people along with us.

Mr. Morley: My hon. Friend is quite right again. Those of us who work in these areas tend to get absorbed in the jargon and take it for granted that people understand the points being made.

Mr. Curry: Before the Minister starts on decoupling, let me say that the hon. Member for Nottingham, North complained that the CAP directed the largest amount of money towards the richest farmers. Will the Minister confirm that the Government's policy in the mid-term review is to defend the direction of money pro rata to farmers irrespective of the size of their farms and to oppose the Commission's proposal to place a financial ceiling on the amount that individual farmers can receive?

Mr. Morley: Yes, I can confirm that the right hon. Gentleman is correct, but I should explain why. There is a proposal to put a ceiling on payments, and our problem with that is that our farms are bigger than the European average and the effect would fall disproportionately on the United Kingdom. There is also a practical problem: once one introduces ceilings on farm sizes, it is not difficult for people to split up holdings and register them in other family names, which would cause all sorts of management difficulties.

We want to move away from subsidies. We want to decouple completely, and we do not want to get involved in any proposal about ceilings because that, as far as we are concerned, would merely tinker with the system. We are committed to a more fundamental review. Although the right hon. Gentleman's comments are accurate, they should not be taken as a Government commitment of support for the big farmer against the small one, because that is not what we do.

We have enlarged and increased the English rural development programme by applying modulation in the UK, which no other member state currently does, although it is likely that others will follow. It could be argued that the biggest and wealthiest farmers contribute the most by putting money back into the scheme. Modulation takes a proportion of the subsidies—currently about 4.5 per cent.—and puts it into the rural development programme. That increases the finance available for schemes such as countryside stewardship, which is popular with farmers—it has a great deal of support in relation to applications—and with consumers because, given a choice between supporting environmental management or production payments, the vast majority will choose the former.

Countryside stewardship is a way of supporting farmers who provide benefits for the funds that they receive and is a far more targeted, transparent and productive way of using the money than at present when commodities are sometimes produced for which there is no real market.

Mr. Allen: My hon. Friend is generous in giving way again. He has little time left. Does he agree that the credibility of some of the wider European issues is being undermined by failure to reform the CAP?

Mr. Morley: I accept that point absolutely. It is also well recognised by the Prime Minister. If one wants to

argue for big changes such as adopting the euro, one must address what my hon. Friend rightly describes as an embarrassment. The problem provides a rich seam to mine for those hostile to the concept of Europe and of member states working together. As my hon Friend said, all sorts of nonsensical policies and potential frauds are involved, which tends to undermine European institutions. Therefore, reform is essential not only for farmers, consumers and the environment but for the credibility of the European Union.

Underground Storage Tanks

1 pm

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): In 1996 and 1997, there were two serious petrol leakages from underground storage tanks in my constituency. Those incidents occurred at Bontddu near Dolgellau and at Llanrwst. Different things happened in each incident, but I wish to refer briefly to what happened in Bontddu.

Details of that pollution incident were received by the Environment Agency locally on 19 September 1996, but some of the villagers at Bontddu had complained of petrol odours to Gwynedd council's trading standards officers in the previous week. It is reasonable to conclude that both were linked, and that the discharge had begun several days before 19 September.

It was subsequently found that there had been a leakage from underground tanks at Bontddu service station into a stream that flows into the Mawddach estuary, which is one of the most environmentally sensitive areas in Wales. The quality of the stream was severely impaired; there were high fish mortalities and some estuary invertebrates were also affected.

During the initial investigation, the Environment Agency ascertained that a volume in excess of 30,000 litres of petrol had leaked from the underground tanks and drained from the immediate vicinity of the site. A meeting was convened on 27 September 1996 between the Environment Agency staff, the garage proprietor, Liquid Cargo Management—an oil recovery specialist—and officers of Gwynedd trading standards and environmental health departments. Certain remedial works were agreed—for example, booming off the river, excavation of the tank in question and flushing the contamination from the ground. By now, the leaked volume was estimated to be in excess of 60,000 litres—twice the original estimate. Families were then evacuated.

Things were proceeding very slowly. The Health and Safety Executive was reticent about becoming involved. Eventually—in November—the HSE was dragged to a public meeting that I chaired; its representative said that it could not become involved unless there was a risk to public safety. With a spillage of 60,000 litres of the most flammable products known to man, it might have been reasonable to conclude that there was a risk—but that was not the case, according to the experts. The HSE continued to say that there was no risk until the first explosion occurred.

The situation dragged on—seemingly interminably—for several months. It became obvious to me—and to many others—that too many players were involved in this drama. The local councils—Gwynedd in the Dolgellau example and Conwy in the Llanrwst example—the HSE and the Environment Agency were all wringing their hands and running around, but none of them were able or willing to take control of the situation. It appears that although there is abundant legislation, none of it gives any authority a lead role; consequently, the whole situation is a bit of a mess.

When I refer to the abundant legislation, I am not exaggerating. For example, there is the Petroleum Spirit (Motor Vehicles etc.) Regulations 1929, the Petroleum

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(Mixtures) Order 1929, the Petroleum (Compressed Gases) Order 1930, the Petroleum (Liquid Methane) Order 1957, the Highly Flammable Liquids and Liquefied Petroleum Gases Regulations 1972, the Petroleum (Regulations) Acts 1928, the Petroleum (Consolidation) Act 1928, the Petroleum Spirit (Plastic Containers) Regulations 1982, and many others.

Given this plethora of legislation, it is incredible that when leakage occurs the HSE will not become involved unless there is a danger to the public. Most people would consider that a danger arises as soon as highly flammable liquid escapes. However, as I have said, that is not the view of the HSE. A senior fire officer from Gwynedd decided that my warnings about the situation being dangerous were without foundation. In my absence, he convened a meeting of local councillors and interested people at Bontddu: he threw a lighted taper into a ravine to show that there was no danger, but caused an explosion and ran for his life. I do not know whether he has now been promoted, but he probably has. That incident shows that danger is occasioned as soon as the liquid escapes.

Despite the fish kill and some birds being killed, too, the Environment Agency did precious little. The situation dragged on for many months, ending up in costly litigation for some families. On 19 November 1997, I raised such worries in an Adjournment debate, in response to which the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths), the then Under-Secretary of State for Wales, stressed that under the Water Resources Act 1991 a criminal offence was committed when pollution was caused in controlled waters. Reference was made to the Government's intention to bring into force the provisions of that Act, thus enabling the Environment Agency to require that anti-pollution works be undertaken. That was a useful suggestion. The then Minister also referred to the Government's intention to impose a duty through regulation to make safe all tanks and pipes that were no longer in use. He said that the Government intended to lay such regulations, supported by new guidelines, before the House towards the middle of 1998.

No one would deny that such suggestions were useful, but given the scale of the problem that we will undoubtedly encounter in the next five to 10 years, might it not be better to adopt a proactive stance by assisting retailers to upgrade their tanks now, before the inevitable happens? Financial assistance is a must for many independent retailers. Access to expert advice would be helpful, too. The last thing anyone wants is an acceleration of the already critical rate of closure of independent petrol retailers, especially in rural areas, where the garage is often a general store as well.

I do not want to create panic, but we might be sitting on an environmental time bomb. I was advised in a parliamentary answer in 1997 that from January 1995 to 1997, the Environment Agency had recorded 55 incidents of water pollution from underground petrol storage at filling stations in England and six such incidents in Wales. By contrast, it is estimated that the London fire brigade registers 70 to 80 seepages per annum. In 1994, Shell UK suggested that up to one third of all underground tanks—as many as 10,000—may be faulty. Indeed, most of the United Kingdom's buried petrol storage tanks have already exceeded their original design life. There are major leaks from underground storage tanks each year. In the past few years, most major oil companies and several supermarkets have been fined and forced to pay high clean-up costs. Today, *The Independent* reminded us of the fine of £50,000 that was imposed upon British Petroleum for that reason.

It would be better to be proactive, not reactive. It is all very well to say that the polluter pays and so on, but steps can be taken to deal with the problem before it hits. Margins in the petrol retail market are currently low, so tank owners are reluctant to replace or upgrade tanks. In the past 10 years, the number of UK sites has dropped by almost 35 per cent. More will close if regulatory burdens are increased. I am in favour of a strong regulatory regime to control the underground storage of petrol—a regime that will protect public health and the environment—but any changes must, of necessity, recognise the fragile nature of the industry. The Government's proposal is to remove the licensing of petrol stations and replace it with a system that puts more responsibility on station owners to assess their own risks and to implement improvements. That is a cause of great concern. The new system could lead to greater risks to the public and the environment or to more service stations closing, neither of which would be a good outcome.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has published the approved code of practice, "Groundwater Protection Code: Petrol stations and other fuel dispensing facilities involving underground storage tanks". Under the Groundwater Regulations 1998, the owner of an underground tank would have to provide documentary evidence to demonstrate to the agency that they were following the code, or risk legal action to prevent them from storing fuel underground. If tank owners adopt the recommendations of the code, they can prevent leaks without incurring crippling costs. The main concern, however, is that the agency does not have the resources effectively to enforce the code.

The Environment Agency recently published internal guidance on the design and decommissioning of tanks and it has established a small team to provide guidance to agency staff and to promote better practice in the industry. The 1998 regulations require the agency to check that adequate surveillance is put in place where groundwater may be affected, but many pieces of anecdotal evidence suggest that its enforcement of the regulations is patchy. Most of its staff rely on an ad hoc arrangement with petroleum operatives for day-to-day monitoring of any risk, because they have not resolved the conflicts of interest that have been generated. For most service stations, the only protection against leaks is regular monitoring of fuel stocks. The agency is concerned that most site owners and managers do not have the necessary skills or resources adequately to carry out that task. It is preparing guidance and encouraging training, but until that has an effect, there is a real risk of environmental damage.

On 15 November, the Health and Safety Executive promoted a new set of regulations entitled the Dangerous Substances and Explosive Atmospheres Regulations 2002. The first part will remove the licensing of retail petrol stations, but the main effect will be to bring operational practice into line with the principles of risk management that are common in other

areas of health and safety legislation. However, problems could occur when the licensing regime is removed, probably next year.

Current proposals suggest that all stations will be given automatic approval based on their existing licensed status and will be required to ask for permission only to make major changes. That might be a disincentive to operators who are planning to invest in their sites to reduce the risk of leaks by installing corrosion protection tank pipe monitoring. It is possible that a conscientious owner trying to reduce risks would be charged by local authorities to obtain permission, but an owner ignoring the problem would avoid scrutiny.

The DEFRA code is welcome, but better co-ordination between the Environment Agency and the Health and Safety Executive is required and greater priority must be given to enforcement. The Government's proposals would create a fairer system, but possibly one with weaker enforcement. The changes could result in an increased risk of environmental damage or harm to human health.

I respectfully put some solutions before the Minister and ask him to respond in writing, if he is not able to do so in this debate. We should consider establishing an agency or appointing an individual to co-ordinate the activities of the Environment Agency and the Health and Safety Executive in this field and to provide an annual report to the appropriate Ministers. We should research the condition of underground tanks to quantify the cost of cleaning up leaks and the potential risk to human health. A condition audit could be attached as a requirement of any new licensing regime. Soft funding should be provided to small independent retailers to help them to upgrade their tanks and pipework, as was the case in Scotland under the old regime before devolution, and continues to be so post-devolution. We should increase resources to train enforcement officers and to strengthen the quality control standards required for wet stock monitoring, and regulate companies providing an off-site service, which is what happens in the United States. Most of those recommendations were incorporated in early-day motion 389, which I tabled and which was well supported.

The Minister is interested in environmental matters, and I am sure that the issue is of concern to some of his ministerial colleagues, too. We are sitting on a large time bomb: in five to 10 years, we will see regular leakages occurring in every locality and the current regulations will not provide any assistance. It is much better to deal with the problem before it occurs than to react to it. It is surely time that the Government took a proactive stance, rather than leaving matters until crises, which will have to be dealt with in haste, inevitably occur.

1.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): I congratulate the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) on securing the debate. He made some sensible suggestions on the important subject of the environmental management and control of underground storage in this country. I understand the problem in his constituency and the severe consequences that stemmed from it. It is an example of why it is important to ensure that we have proper control.

I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's point that there are currently some 14,000 petrol stations in England and Wales containing 60,000 to 70,000 underground storage tanks. In addition, there are underground tanks at commercial, industrial and domestic properties, airfields, ports, vehicle fleet depots and a variety of other sites. The issue is important and we need to take it seriously. Given the large number of underground storage tanks, the overall environmental record is good, which is largely because of the stringent regime.

I can assure the hon. Gentleman that there are no proposals to remove the licensing of underground tanks, which will remain within the regime. Of course, we recognise that we cannot be complacent. The Government, the Environment Agency, the Health and Safety Executive and petroleum licensing authorities need to ensure that the risks are minimised and that the points that he raised are taken seriously and addressed properly.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the Groundwater Regulations 1998. They came into force in April 1999 and enhance the groundwater protection afforded by the Water Resources Act 1991. They make it an offence to allow hydrocarbons to enter groundwater, and provide the Environment Agency with powers to prohibit or control activities, including the storage of hydrocarbons, which could pose risks to groundwater.

I understand the hon. Gentleman's point about lead responsibility, and he mentioned the idea of establishing an agency to co-ordinate activity. The Environment Agency is, however, clear that groundwater pollution, along with any other kind of pollution, is its responsibility. It works closely with the Health and Safety Executive, local authorities and petroleum interests to develop codes and to make sure that the issues are addressed. Co-ordination is therefore quite good, but I shall make sure that the hon. Gentleman's suggestions get the detailed replies that they deserve.

The regulations also allow Ministers to approve codes of practice. The hon. Gentleman mentioned, rightly, the recently produced groundwater protection code, 2,000 copies of which have been distributed to all the main trade organisations. I am sure that he has a copy of it because he referred to it, but he is welcome to have the one that I have brought with me. The code was launched in July 2002 by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment. It sets out principles for groundwater protection, along with relevant advice to help those involved with underground petrol tanks.

The hon. Gentleman pointed out that there are a lot of independent petrol retailers. Like him, I represent a rural area and understand the pressures on rural petrol retailers, whom I do not want to be overburdened by costly regulations. Practical guidance is a good idea because it gives people advice on how to address particular issues.

The code also lists four main principles for environmental protection that would apply to all fuel dispensing facilities involving underground storage tanks. First, there must be a suitable environmental risk assessment, which should identify site-specific risks and indicate the appropriate engineering and operational controls required to protect groundwater. Secondly, appropriate engineering measures identified by the risk assessment should be implemented as soon as is reasonably possible.

[Mr. Elliot Morley]

Thirdly, management systems and controls should be in place and should include leak detection, environmental monitoring and the keeping of records on site operation. Fourthly, emergency plans and procedures should be in place and should include an appropriate pollution incident response plan, which should form part of the environmental management system. Those four important basic principles are the framework for a successful risk-based approach to groundwater protection. They are also in line with the type of measures necessary to protect health and safety.

In addition to those four principles, the code sets out the key considerations necessary at each stage—commissioning, operating and, importantly, decommissioning—in the life cycle of an underground storage tank and its related facilities. The section on commissioning facilities provides advice on issues to be addressed during planning, design and construction and emphasises the need to avoid problems in the first place, rather than ironing them out through engineering and operational solutions.

Installing tanks is a lot easier than it was because there is very clear guidance about new designs of tanks and about tank linings. For instance, there is guidance about double-skin tanks, which have detection equipment within the skins so that leaks can be detected straight away. There is a better and wider range of available technology to minimise risk than there used to be.

Mr. Llwyd: I am following the Minister's argument, and I understand the current guidelines and what is being done in relation to newly commissioned sites. My great concern is about the old sites—the small independent sites in particular. At such sites, people may not know whether there is a leak until it is too late.

Mr. Morley: I quite agree, and I was going to come to that point. I was just emphasising that the standards for new-build sites are much higher and the risks are therefore much lower. The hon. Gentleman is right: there are a lot of existing tanks, some of which are becoming quite old.

Another aspect of the code relates to advice on delivery, storage, dispensing, drainage, maintenance and leak detection. The preferred approach in environmentally sensitive areas is to use controls that detect leakage immediately, before it has any significant environmental impact. The assessment of the minimum detectable leak that can be identified by the leakage detection system should be addressed in the environmental risk assessment for the facility. The guidance for existing tanks, particularly in environmentally sensitive areas, is that leak detection procedures should be in place and equipment should be there to monitor that.

The third section of the code relates to decommissioning when tanks have reached the end of their useful life. The code includes advice on emptying and removing tanks and pipework and making safe any tanks that remain in the ground. Finally, the code provides references to more particular advice on, for instance, training and engineering. This is a practical code for existing operators.

The Government have a range of ways of enforcing the provisions. If there is any suggestion of a problem, the Environment Agency can consider whether to issue a prohibition notice under the groundwater regulations. In making its decision, the agency has to take into account sensitive aquifers and the proximity of drinking water sources, rivers and other receptors. The agency has produced groundwater vulnerability maps, which have been helpful in relation to risk-based assessments and risk-based enforcement. So the agency has that information with which to work.

The agency has also identified groundwater protection zones around abstractions used for sensitive purposes such as water supply or food and drink manufacturing. That is relevant in relation to planning permission for future developments, although I appreciate that the focus of the debate is on existing provision.

The agency has also been developing contacts with individual petrol companies and the Petrol Retailers Association to ensure that the need for environmental protection is clearly understood. The Environment Agency has that range of tools at its disposal in dealing with the existing situation and has other powers under the Water Resources Act 1991. It can serve notices that require preventive or remedial works to be carried out if it considers water to be polluted, or at risk of pollution. The agency will prosecute polluters wherever serious pollution is caused and there is adequate evidence to support the case.

One of the points that the hon. Gentleman raised concerned financial support for certain retailers or owners that have tanks requiring such work. That is a difficult issue, and I will respond in more detail in my promised letter. For his information, the Government are guided in general by the "polluter pays" principle. The general rule for potential polluters is that the costs fall on the individual or company concerned. However, local authorities that have the lead responsibility in dealing with contaminated sites may receive financial support. I appreciate that that is not quite what the hon. Gentleman was talking about, but I will give him a more detailed response after the debate.

In addition to the groundwater measures, the Government have brought into force part 2(a) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, which creates a regime for dealing with contaminated land. That regime supersedes the previous statutory nuisance powers for land contamination issues and places responsibility for identifying and remedying contaminated land on local authorities. That will allow a single operator—normally a local authority—to deal simultaneously with land that is affecting, or is likely to affect, controlled waters. That creates a focused and co-ordinated approach to contaminated land, which also relates to the hon. Gentleman's point.

As well as the new environmental measures, the Government have brought into force the Dangerous Substances and Explosive Atmospheres Regulations 2002. Those regulations are a safety measure aimed at protecting workplaces in which dangerous substances may be present and explosive atmospheres may occur, such as petrol stations. The main requirements are risk assessment, measures to eliminate risk, accident and emergency planning and suitable training. As was mentioned in the previous debate referred to by the hon.

Gentleman, the HSE is also carrying out a review of the petrol licensing regime with the aim of modernising the regulatory framework, and his concerns will be fully taken into account in that review.

The result of those measures is a modern, good practice framework for managing environmental risks and safety. From the perspective of petrol station owners and operators, there is nothing fundamentally new in the good practice framework. I expect that many of them are applying it as a matter of course, because they are well aware of the risks. Besides issues of safety and contamination, the fact that petrol is not a cheap commodity guides their desire to ensure that tanks do not leak into the ground what they have bought and want to sell for profit. There is a powerful incentive for the petrol retail trade to ensure that the tanks are in good condition. That applies to any other organisation buying fuel or chemicals that are held underground; they are generally an expensive resource. It is in those organisations' interests in terms of good business management to ensure that such tanks are in good condition. That is a powerful incentive.

However, we are not complacent. There will be problems in any system, and there will always be a small minority of people who do not apply the standards in the way one expects. Therefore, we need a dual approach of advice and support through the statutory codes with the back-up of enforcement action if necessary. In that framework, the measures should enhance standards and reduce risk to health and safety and the environment. I appreciate that that is the underlying theme of the hon. Gentleman's remarks. Not only did the incident involve a risk to his constituents, but I can see from his comments that there were severe implications for the environment. Although we recognise the need for such activities as part of legitimate business practice, it is important to have standards.

I congratulate the hon. Gentleman again on raising the matter. I assure him that we take it very seriously. I have listened carefully to his points, and I shall reply to his specific questions in detail. I appreciate the positive and constructive way in which he has raised this debate and put forward his case.

Smokeless Tobacco

1.30 pm

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Since the House last met in late December, the number of Britons who have died from smoking is twice the number who were killed in the terrible attack on the twin towers. We have a dreadful toll of 120,000 deaths every year, and we are not reducing that number. The last report of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence on Zyban and nicotine reduction therapies tells us that the number of people smoking has not decreased since 1997, and has probably increased. Some 25 per cent. of 15-year-olds now take up smoking.

The Government are to be congratulated on many of their initiatives. They have plenty of conviction, have made resources available and are determined to reduce that toll. Looking at past records, there is a little room for optimism. This Government will be the first to ban tobacco advertising. The ban will have a substantial effect in terms of discouraging new smokers, although the maximum change will probably be 2 or 3 per cent. fewer new people taking up the drug. There is another good campaign for nicotine replacement therapies, which is imaginative and resourced, and will have an effect. The Government will campaign, advertise and provide education programmes more energetically than previously.

However, one example of a campaign shows what the Government are up against. It is likely that many campaigns, unfortunately, will fail because of the enormous power, resourcefulness and greed of the mendacious lobby from the tobacco industry. It will stop at nothing to sell its products. A campaign in Wales in the mid-1990s, known as Smokebusters, was designed to reduce smoking among young people and was judged a success at the time. It was very energetic and involved a lot of initiatives. Many young people were contacted, and the general feeling of those who launched the campaign was that it was a great success.

Unfortunately, a 50 per cent. increase in smoking among teenage women coincided precisely with that campaign. I have told that story in various countries, as a member of the European Health Committee of the Council of Europe. The response each time—in Malta, Ireland and Canada—has been that there was a similar increase in smoking among teenage women in those countries at that time. The reason was not that campaigns had failed or been counter-productive, but that young women were taking up smoking because they were presented with the idea that smoking was good because it helped them to slim. Peer pressure and role models gave them that ideal of smoking.

We have seen that Governments, with all the best intentions in the world, have had very little success in reducing smoking levels. I can tell the Government that I read their policies and agree with all that they are doing, but we must look at what is happening elsewhere, including an example that has been largely unknown or disregarded: the extraordinary experience in Sweden during the past 20 years of a product almost unique to that country. Known as snus, it is a form of moist snuff. It is interesting that snuff is the only form of tobacco that we are offered freely in this House. It is available from the Doorkeeper, although now little used.

[Paul Flynn]

The amazing result of that product has been an extraordinary reduction in smoking in Sweden and an equally extraordinary reduction in cancers and other health results of smoking. To understand why, we must challenge our preconceptions about the effects of tobacco. Tobacco is not a killer—nicotine is about as dangerous as caffeine. It becomes lethal when we set fire to it. As Martin Jarvis of Cancer Research UK said, 300 lethal toxins explode in a cocktail of carcinogens when a cigarette is lit. The smoke causes problems in our lungs and the carcinogens cause difficulties such as bronchitis, heart disease and so on.

A method that would take nicotine into our bodies and deliver the fix that smokers want without the health risks would be the holy grail. A solution seems to have been found by accident—not by some genius working it out—in Sweden. The result is that the number of male smokers in Sweden has dropped from 36 per cent. in 1980 to 17 per cent.—a bigger reduction than any other country has achieved. However, Sweden still has a level of tobacco use similar to that of other countries because 19 per cent. of males use snus. There is very little use of snus by women in Sweden. On examining the statistics, we find that the level of nicotine-related cancers among males in Sweden is half the European average, while the level for women is almost exactly the same as the European average.

Everyone who studies the effects of moist snuff comes up with the same conclusion. Two distinguished American researchers from the university of Alabama, Brad Lodu and Phillip Cole, have taken a pessimistic view of the health consequences of snus—no product is entirely safe—yet have calculated that the life expectancy of someone who uses snus from the age of 35 would be reduced by only 15 days, whereas the life expectancy of someone who smokes from 35 onwards would be reduced by eight years. The smoker might live to 73, but a non-smoker or a snus user would have a life expectancy of 81.

We cannot ignore the extraordinary evidence from Sweden. For good reasons, the European Union believed that snus should be banned because of the risk of mouth cancers. It seemed a logical and persuasive argument. However, the matter has now been investigated at great length. A Swedish researcher found one case of mouth cancer among 200,000 snus users. Other researchers make similar claims for similar tobaccos in America. It is absolutely certain that the incidence of mouth cancers among smokers and drinkers—alcohol can cause mouth cancer—will be far higher than among snus users. It is significant that those who use moist snuff run virtually no risk of other health ill effects such as lung and larynx cancer, emphysema and all the other problems that result from smoking. Every report on the matter comes up with the same conclusion.

As I said, the EU banned snus because of the risk of mouth cancer. Even if we wanted to, we could not use it. When Sweden joined the EU in 1995, it was given a special derogation to allow the continued use of snus. Every year, more Swedes use snus because of its health benefits.

The problem that smokers and ex-smokers face is the virulently addictive nature of tobacco. Many people can give it up, but their bodies and brains are dependent on the fix that it provides. The main reason for returning to cigarette smoking after quitting is to reward oneself for having given it up in the first place. Unfortunately, many people who give it up for short periods return to it. If they could experience the same feeling of satisfaction and gratification from other sources by causing the endorphins to work in the brain in the way that they do when they get a shot of nicotine, and could avoid the health problems, that would be fine. That is what all the independent research indicates is happening in Sweden. However, Britain is in the extraordinary position of allowing the almost unfettered sale of tobacco.

The Select Committee on Health referred to the controls on the sale of tobacco as pitiful. Almost anything can be put into tobacco, including addictive substances. Tobacco kills almost half the number of regular users. If there is a case for banning anything, it should be tobacco. We also allow the sale of other chewing tobaccos. Several relatively new tobaccos of questionable provenance have joined gutkha and paan from the far east in being legal and on sale. Snus, however, is banned. There can be no sense in banning a substance that has a proven record of reducing health problems and deaths.

The Government have followed the simple policy of "quit or die": one must carry on smoking or give up altogether. There is a "third way"—to coin a phrase—that has been effective. There is a case currently before the European courts that snus should be removed from the list of banned tobaccos, which is a decision that the British Government and other Governments will have to take. I discussed this at some length with Swedes who have an ambivalent view of what is happening in their country. They are not naturally attracted to the idea of harm reduction but take an absolutist line in many of their policies on drugs. However, we cannot afford to do that when there is a possibility of achieving the sort of health improvements that the Swedes are achieving. Most of the organisations in the field in this country and throughout the world support renewed consideration of the ban and new ways of reducing the problems caused by tobacco.

On 10 December, the Royal College of Physicians produced a report in which it joined the call made by the Health Committee in 2000 for a regulatory authority to protect public health from the problems associated with tobacco. We are failing to give smokers sufficient protection from cigarettes, and there is much to be done. However, we are banning what is probably the safest form of oral tobacco, and allowing other forms of tobacco into the country that potentially are far more dangerous.

We need a body to decide which of the tobaccos on offer are the most carcinogenic and toxic and to give advice. It may be necessary to ban some chewing tobaccos, but the difference between snus and the others is that snus is absorbed in a way that does not involve chewing and so does not cause the lesions inside the mouth that other forms of tobacco might cause. It is taken in a safe way in which there is no direct contact between the skin and the tobacco.

The Royal College of Physicians says that tobacco is a uniquely dangerous consumer product that kills more than 120,000 people a year in the United Kingdom when used as intended by the manufacturer, yet it is not as highly regulated as are prescription drugs and food. It recommends a regulatory authority, as it did in its report "Nicotine Addiction in Britain", and complains that the Government largely ignored that recommendation. It also says that new reduced-risk cigarettes and smokeless tobacco are being designed. How will the Government handle issues such as relative risk, analyse the claims of such products and decide what information would be helpful to smokers? We need to encourage the development and production of new nicotine products. They face much stricter regulations than cigarettes. How can that make sense? How can it be rational to turn our back on the terrible dangers of cigarettes in many cases and allow them to be freely sold? They are available even to young people. Yet we still have a ban on a product that could well be a lifesaver for half the present smokers in the country.

I am grateful to Action on Smoking and Health, the organisation that has done so much over the years on this issue. It takes a line that is similar to the one that I want to present today. It has courageously taken on the smoking lobby over many years and achieved many victories against them. I have no commercial axe to grind on this or anything else. A company is manufacturing this product and although we would not necessarily want Britain to become involved in Swedish Match's products, we should learn the lesson from this. When we look ahead we must realise the truth of all our anti-smoking campaigns. A hard core of millions of smokers cannot and will not give up. They will be addicted to tobacco to their early graves. We can offer them an alternative of using a form of tobacco that will spare them that early grave and will give them the same type of life expectancy as non-smokers.

The evidence is overwhelming. I hope that the Government will take it into account. What will they do when Swedish Match seeks a judicial review of the ban that can no longer be defended? When it comes to court, the European Union, or other countries in the EU, must defend why snus should be so uniquely difficult, poisonous, and carcinogenic that it must be banned while other products are not. I believe that no case can be made on those lines.

Will the Government act now to do what many organisations, including the Royal College of Physicians, have suggested and set up a regulatory body that will decide on the toxicity and carcinogenic properties of all forms of tobacco? Close members of my family died tragic premature deaths as a result of smoking: my father was 43 and my brother was 57. Others will have had similar experiences. We owe it to all those who are smoking now to give them all the alternatives that are available, so that they can escape from the tyranny of their addiction and into using products that will guarantee them a normal full lifespan.

1.48 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. David Lammy): I welcome the opportunity to speak today on the health aspects of smokeless tobacco. I recognise the efforts of my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) in highlighting this serious subject. On his last point, my father died from throat cancer caused by the effects of tobacco. I have felt this personally. My hon. Friend refers specifically to the case that is currently before the UK courts. He will understand the conventions of this House and why it would not be appropriate for me to comment on the specifics of that case or to put the Government's position here.

My hon. Friend spoke passionately about the Swedish snus, but I should like to talk more generally about oral tobacco. It would be remiss of me if I did not put the Government's case and declare our commitment to tackling tobacco addiction. Tobacco has been with us for about 400 years and it remains with us for the simple reason that nicotine is addictive. There are many ways of taking nicotine, but smoking is by far the most efficient and the most dangerous. As the 1998 White Paper starkly put it, "Smoking kills". It is as simple as that.

In any one year smoking is responsible for about 120,000 deaths in this country—one in five of all deaths. It is the principal cause of inequalities in death rates between the rich and the poor. The treatment of its consequences is staggering: it costs the national health service £1.5 billion a year. The addictive properties of nicotine and the range of cancers and respiratory diseases associated with smoking are universally acknowledged. If cigarettes were to be introduced today, I have no doubt that their production and sale would be banned without delay. Unfortunately, with a 400-year history of social acceptance we cannot seriously consider doing that. However, we will continue to make every effort to warn people of the dangers of the habit and to help those who are addicted to break free.

Much that my hon. Friend is suggesting would mean that the Government would take a step-down approach to nicotine, but we should take a step-off position. We want people to break the addiction or not to take up the habit in the first place, and that is where we should concentrate our efforts.

The addictive properties of nicotine ensure that tobacco users find it difficult to break free from its influence, but the crux of the debate is that the delivery route—the tobacco itself—presents the health dangers. There might appear to be benefits in persuading tobacco users to switch from smoking, the most dangerous manifestation of the habit, to the less dangerous, oral tobacco, but no form of tobacco is completely safe. We firmly believe that the only sensible course is to persuade people to give up tobacco and to provide them with the help and support necessary to do so. It must be right for the Department of Health to be in the business of health promotion.

I am not sure that it is correct to suggest that there are no known health consequences of oral tobacco. We are spending a considerable sum on a comprehensive programme designed to inform the public of the damage caused by smoking and to provide a range of services helping those smokers who want to give up. The services include free telephone helplines, counselling and support and the provision of nicotine replacement therapy and Zyban on NHS prescription. We began those services in the poorest communities and they are

[Mr. David Lammy]

now available nationwide. Our approach is not just about getting people to quit smoking but ensuring that people, especially the young, never start.

The £59 million that we have invested in the past four years in anti-smoking advertising is making a difference. Seven in 10 smokers say that they want to quit and it is our job to help them to do so. After years of obstruction in the courts and in Europe, we now have legislation banning tobacco advertising and promotion. From the middle of next month, press and billboard advertising of tobacco will be a thing of the past in this country—a fact which we should all be proud of and grateful for. By October next year, all cigarette packets will carry new and much starker health warnings on the front and back. The misleading doublespeak of "mild" and "light" will also disappear.

My hon. Friend gives the Government some credit in this regard. We have more than good intentions. The financial investment that we have made suggests that, as do the early results.

Paul Flynn: I should like to measure the Government's ambition with regard to their policies. They say in their response to the Health Committee's report that their ambition is to get smoking levels among males in the poorest areas down to 26 per cent. by 2010, but in Sweden currently the level of smoking among males is down to 17 per cent. as a result of the use of snus. How on earth can we say that we are doing the right thing or the only thing when, even by our own ambitions, we will not get anywhere near the improvement that has been achieved in Sweden over the past 20 years?

Mr. Lammy: I am grateful to my hon. Friend: he makes the case for me. Sweden is unique in Europe in having the very specific habit of using oral tobacco. That has been the case since the second world war.

Paul Flynn: For centuries.

Mr. Lammy: My hon. Friend corrects me: the Swedish habit of using oral tobacco has existed for centuries, whereas we in this country have smoked tobacco. The banning of advertising and our investment in smoking cessation—Zyban is available on the NHS to help people to stop smoking—are relatively new. In fact, it is a two-and-a-half-year programme, but we are on the journey. My hon. Friend will forgive me for wanting to allow the efforts being made to bed down and for questioning ever so slightly—I do not want to put this too strongly—the emphasis on what is happening in Sweden, when that has gone on for some considerable time. As I have suggested, cultural habits in Sweden are different from those in this country. Here, only coal miners, who could not smoke in the pits, and some seafarers were in the habit of using oral tobacco. That is relevant.

Let me return to our achievements. Smoking rates have fallen, and the fall has been greatest among those in manual occupations. The newly established NHS cessation services have helped almost 220,000 smokers to kick the habit for good. Let us consider the figures for England in the past year. The figure for teenage girls is now 11 per cent. vis-à-vis 15 per cent. in 1998, and the figure for boys is 8 per cent. vis-à-vis 18 per cent. in 1998, so things are moving in the right direction.

Many smokers recognise the dangers of a smoking habit, but either have no wish to give up nicotine or find it too difficult to do without it. They have therefore sought alternative means of delivery of the drug. That search has resulted in various forms of smokeless tobacco—tobacco products that are designed to be chewed or sucked. In this country, the phrase "oral tobacco" used to mean simply the old-fashioned chewing of tobacco, normally in the form of a plug.

Another category consists of products that are available in the south Asian communities, to which my hon. Friend drew attention. Tobacco is mixed with a number of other substances to produce paan. Those products vary in content and presentation, and some, which masquerade as sweets, appear to be designed to appeal to younger members of the community. I assure my hon. Friend that that is the subject of an inquiry by trading standards officers, and the Government are keeping a close eye on it. Although legal, all those products carry health risks, such as various oral and dental disorders and, most seriously, cancers affecting the jaw, tongue and oral cavity. We are therefore developing particular strands of our tobacco information campaign to address the various ethnic differences.

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the sitting lapsed, without Question put.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 8 January 2003

[MR. FRANK COOK *in the Chair*]

Marine Pollution

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Charlotte Atkins.]*

9.30 am

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise this subject and I am delighted to see other hon. Members in the Chamber. The timing of the debate was instigated by the Prestige disaster and the problems of oil spills at sea. Today is a poignant anniversary given that, 10 years ago, on 5 January, the Braer ran aground on the Shetland Isles. I am pleased to see that the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) is present, and I hope that he will remind us of what that disaster meant for the local communities.

Unfortunately, there are discharges from vessels all the time as there are from oil and gas rigs. In 2001, 678 polluting discharges were registered by the Advisory Committee on Protection of the Sea. In one way that was encouraging given that there were 743 discharges in the previous year. Of the 678 discharges, 71 per cent. were from offshore oil and gas installations; 11 per cent. from fishing vessels, 5 per cent. from general cargo ships and 4 per cent. from oil and chemical tankers. Such figures put some matters in perspective, but the real problem is that when an oil tanker, in particular, has an accident, runs aground or breaks up, the ecological damage is huge. That sort of disaster comes to everyone's attention.

Ecological disasters and problems have strong safety implications. Each time a ship runs aground, lives are at risk. Marine accidents cost human lives throughout the world. There is an average annual loss of 350 seafarers. Perhaps it is a reflection of today's world that the loss of seafarers' lives does not grab as much attention as pictures of oiled sea birds and devastated fishing communities. While that will be the main thrust of my speech, it is beholden upon us to recognise the safety implications for human life and the fact that some ships should not be at sea. I am talking not only about their effect on our environment, but people's lives are put at risk by what, on land, would be called cowboy operators.

The European Union blacklisted 66 ships that face a port access ban, 26 of which fly the flag of Turkey. Twelve sail under the flag of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, nine fly the flag of Cambodia and three the flag of Algeria. Of those ships, 49 are bulk carriers, eight are chemical tankers and eight oil tankers and there is one passenger vessel. It is a fact of life that the marine environment and the marine industry are international. One reads about such vessels, although relatively few are operating. We would be less than happy if MOTs in our country were issued by a Liberian authority.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I apologise. Owing to the new timetable and the fact that the parliamentary Labour party meets at 10 am, I cannot stay in Westminster Hall. May I record that it is a crying shame that the other place scuppered the hon. Gentleman's Bill on the marine environment? I hope that that measure will be brought back in one form or another during this Session.

Mr. Randall: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. I place on the record my gratitude for the work that has been done by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and for the assurances that it has given. The Department might not be working towards all of the measures that I had hoped would be included. It might, however, even make an improvement because a private Member's Bill, by its nature, is not able to do all the things that primary legislation does. I am looking forward to that, and I shall be happy to give the Government my support.

Recent incidents have illustrated the seriousness of oil spills and the impact that those can have on a marine environment. We have seen the high-profile disaster involving the oil tanker Prestige off the Galician coast. Of course, we know that the impact of that has not only devastated that coastline—it is now finding its way up to the Atlantic coast of France. That underlines that the issue must be tackled internationally, although I hope that we in the United Kingdom will be able to implement some measures on our own.

Ports of refuge could be prepared and made available throughout the EU to mitigate the problems that we saw when the Prestige first got into difficulties, but I understand the problems in respect of ports of refuge. People might say, "That's a jolly good idea, but we don't want one near us." However, we should consider whether some of the ships in trouble could be taken to a particular place, rather than be left at sea because no one wanted to get near them.

The Prestige case had a high profile, but in the past two months there have been some less high-profile pollution problems. For example, significant numbers of oiled sea birds were washed up on the East Anglian coast in late 2002. Such incidents exemplify a more difficult problem and we need more action at both national and international levels to try to tackle it.

Many hon. Members are hoping to catch your eye, Mr. Cook, so I will not dwell for too long on the impacts on the seabird population—the facts are self-evident. We have all seen television news items of poor, wretched creatures: auks, guillemots, razorbills and some of the sea ducks, including long-tailed ducks and scoters. Birds that dive into the water or that swim on the surface are most vulnerable to oil slicks.

There is a human cost, as we have seen in Galicia, Orkney and Shetland, resulting from oil spills on fisheries. The last restrictions on fishing were lifted only a full seven years after the Braer ran aground on Shetland, so it is apparent that the impact is not only on the simple ecology, but on people's lives. As we know, fishing communities are suffering greatly. Even from the inland security of Uxbridge, I am well aware that fishing communities all around our islands are in crisis. A major oil spill may be the final straw.

Some people have suggested there should be environmental incentives such as those in the Merchant Shipping and Fishing Vessels (Port Waste Reception

[Mr. Randall]

Facilities) Regulations 2002 that came into force on 28 December 2002, which promote the polluter pays principle. I hope that the regulations will have an impact.

A satellite monitoring tracking system for identifying oil spills was trialled between August 2000 and August 2001 and considered a success by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency. I would be pleased to hear of any new movement by the Government to make more of that trial. If oil spills could be found and tracked more quickly, it might be possible to alleviate problems earlier.

There has been much talk about single-hulled oil tankers and the need for tankers to be double-hulled. It would be great if we could get single-hulled tankers out of European Union waters, but they would only end up going somewhere else and becoming someone else's problem. The international community should seriously examine such vessels, which, from a layman's point of view, perhaps should not be at sea at all.

We must try to ensure that vessels that could cause problems are kept well away from areas of environmental sensitivity. In response to a question about when the second round of consultation on marine environment high-risk areas would take place, the Under-Secretary of State for Transport replied in a written answer that he expected

"the consultation document will be issued during February 2003"—[*Official Report*, 16 December 2002; Vol. 396, c. 580W.]

I am grateful for that positive development, but disappointed that it has taken so long. Lord Donaldson recommended the establishment of a network of high-risk areas in his 1994 inquiry that followed the running aground of the Braer in 1993. Vessels carrying dangerous cargoes would be routed away from the United Kingdom's most sensitive coastal sites and the most hazardous shipping areas. That brings us to another problem that we have seen recently, when a ship has gone down and other vessels, despite being given clear warning from what I have seen in the press, still manage to hit the wreckage. We should look towards getting such vessels away from our most sensitive coastal sites.

There are also questions surrounding the ratification of various international conventions, but we must ensure that these conventions work. It is one thing for them to be written down; it is another to make sure that they are implemented. Although the Government sometimes think that they can do everything and rather like to say that they can, the problem cannot be solved overnight. It must be considered internationally and from an EU position. The issue is important. The marine environment has been a Cinderella for so long that action must be taken because a major disaster on the UK coast is just a stone's throw away.

9.45 am

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): I am pleased to take part in the debate at short notice, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) on securing it at such a relevant time. We have seen the Prestige disaster unfold before our eyes and, more recently, the Tricolor was stranded in the channel, and is likely to stay there for a few weeks yet.

I have taken an interest in marine safety, and am the promoter of the Marine Safety Bill, a private Member's Bill, which has already been mentioned. I should like to trail that Bill, and hope that the hon. Member for Uxbridge and other hon. Members present will support it. Its Second Reading will be on 28 February, and I hope that thereafter it will be discussed in detail in Committee.

The recent sinking of the Prestige highlighted the importance of the United Kingdom being ready to respond to maritime incidents at very short notice. When a ship gets into difficulties, there is a narrow window of time in which effective action can be taken. Outside that narrow window, action is much more difficult, and terrible disasters can occur, such as those that have happened off the Spanish and French coasts.

My Bill, which I hope to take through all the parliamentary stages, will promote effective emergency action in two main ways. First, it will confer powers on the Secretary of State to give directions to owners and operators of facilities used by ships such as berths, wharfs and jetties to make those facilities available for reducing or preventing pollution and safety hazards to ships. Secondly, it will allow fire-fighting authorities to charge for activities at sea that are outside their usual area of authority.

The Department for Transport told me yesterday that, fortunately, there are now fewer incidents around British coastal waters. We should congratulate those responsible for safety at sea on that fact, which comes despite a significant increase in the volume of shipping entering British ports and harbours. Oil is the main, but not the sole, pollution problem; many ships carry other dangerous cargoes, including dangerous chemicals, and those that are not so dangerous but lead to pollution at sea.

I shall give one example of a ship in difficulty that my Bill would, I hope, have tackled. Not that long ago, a tanker coming into a private wharf had a small engine fire on board. In the opinion of British authorities, the oil cargo of that ship could have been unloaded on the jetty. We should remember that some jetties are quite a way from the coast; they stretch out to sea so that the ship can be attached by snorkel and pipeline to the coastal facility.

The company involved, which I shall not name today—I shall probably name it during our debates on the Marine Safety Bill—insisted that the ship be towed out to sea. It did so for economic reasons, namely that the ship would have tied up the jetty for perhaps several days, if not weeks, if the fire became more serious. As I have said, the fire was in the engine room, so the engine was not completely co-operative. The ship was towed out to sea in worsening weather conditions. It could be argued that that was irresponsible. If it had been towed out in very difficult weather conditions with fire fighting going on, which often involves pumping water on to a ship, the water would not have escaped. That water would have added weight to an already fully laden ship, and there could have been a serious disaster. I am told that fire fighting can often sink a ship due to the amount of water that goes on board.

The Government do not have the authority to commandeer shore operations such as wharves and jetties—or even coastline, if it is needed—to deal with a disaster in British coastal waters. That is unsatisfactory. If my Bill is enacted, it will enable the Government, through the Maritime and Coastguard Agency and the Secretary of State's representative—who is usually known as SOSREP—to commandeer such private onshore facilities when the coastguards alert them to a ship that is in trouble. Not only the British Government but all Governments should have the authority to do that. Sometimes ships are in difficult positions around our coastline, and they are not always in a harbour or close to a jetty. If we come to debate my Bill in Committee, we shall discuss many more instances of ships in trouble. As we are in London, it might be relevant to point out that all the wharves and jetties in the port of London are privately owned. This city is still a major port, and it is clear that it needs the provisions that are set out in the Bill.

The second part of my Bill addresses fire fighting. County and city brigades only have the authority to fight fires within their jurisdiction. Of course, they cross boundaries onshore, but I am told that their jurisdiction ends at the low water level. Beyond that, their authority is not the same as it is onshore. Difficulties arise from that fact and from other technical reasons for fire-fighting operators. They are less likely to fight fires because of them, and because it is hard for them to recover their costs from shipowners through their insurance companies. My Bill will make it much easier to recover costs, so that fire-fighting authorities with a lot of experience in fighting fires both onshore and offshore will continue to train their staff to a high level and be ready to deal with any ships on fire that are in British coastal waters. With the sort of experience they have, they could even be used to fight fires in the English channel, in co-operation with authorities across the channel.

My interest in ship safety arose as a result of the sinking of the MV Derbyshire in the Pacific ocean many years ago. We have now had a full inquiry into the sinking of that ship: some people believe that the first inquiry was a whitewash, but the Government reopened it and the truth about the sinking of the MV Derbyshire is now out.

The all-party group of which I am an executive member has now converted itself into an all-party group that is interested in safety at sea, and that includes pollution. I encourage Members who are not members of the group to join us. We are campaigning for improved ship safety, and I must praise the Government for doing quite a lot to improve that. In recent weeks, there have been announcements through meetings of the International Maritime Organisation and other authorities; things are beginning to move. International co-operation is needed, and those of us who are involved in politics know how difficult it is to collaborate with other countries, some of which do not share the high standards of the British Government.

I will not refer in detail to the things that would improve ship safety. One of them has been mentioned. Ships carrying dangerous cargoes—especially oil tankers and tankers carrying liquid chemicals—should be double-skinned. That is essential. All warships, of course, have double skins. If the first skin is penetrated, the second may not be and it may be possible to preserve the cargo intact.

A "Panorama" programme a few weeks ago dealt with what seems to have sunk the Derbyshire and many other ships: heavy water cascading down on to the ship in storms and smashing the deck facilities, especially the hatch covers. Moves are now afoot to introduce international regulations to strengthen hatch covers; not only the forward hatch covers but all of them, along the length of the ship. The ships in question are extremely long and when the captain is on the bridge in a storm he cannot see what is happening all the way along the ship. The inquiry that considered the Derbyshire disaster recommended that CCTV cameras be fitted. There would still be difficulties in a storm, but fitting cameras down the length of the ship would at least make some observation possible.

Weather forecasting has improved tremendously with the use of satellites. Indeed, swarms of satellites, rather like swarms of bees, can now measure wave heights all around the world and transmit that information to national centres of weather forecasting. Navigational aids have improved, especially on the most modern ships.

Why do we fit black boxes in aircraft but not in ships? When aircraft crash we recover the black boxes and examine the information that they have recorded immediately prior to the disaster. The black box is used in a full inquiry into an air disaster. Unfortunately, that does not yet happen with shipping worldwide. The all-party group is campaigning for the fitting of black boxes, certainly to new ships, and I believe that the Government are interested in the idea. It might be difficult to retrofit black boxes to existing shipping.

I am told by friends in Liverpool who are sailors and have sailed on some of the worst shipping in the world in their time, that after about 15 years some bulk carriers—it is those vessels that we are particularly concerned about—are literally rust buckets. They should not be at sea. They should be scrapped. However, sailors tell me that these rust buckets are still floating around the world. When the decks corrode, it is common practice with some flagged-out authority shipping to put tarpaulin over the deck hull and paint it the same colour as the deck. That is entirely unacceptable. Ships like that—there are more than a few sailing today—should not be given a licence to sail.

Full investigation should take place after every shipping disaster, whether minor or major, and we should learn from disasters. The general public have seen a long list of oil tankers from the Torrey Canyon to the Prestige going down, polluting the coasts of many countries. We do not seem to learn from these disasters. Full shipping inquiries should point all countries towards improving ships' safety.

It is also important for Governments to be given the powers—I am not sure whether the British Government have such powers, but I suspect that they do—to refuse to accept dangerous ships into their waters. If all countries were given, through international agreements, powers not to accept into their ports and harbours or anywhere near their coastlines dangerous shipping of the kind to which I have referred, shipowners would have to scrap it, or at the very least improve its safety.

[Dr. Brian Iddon]

I have presented a small trailer to my Bill, and I urge all hon. Members to support it, because it is too important to be a missed opportunity.

9.58 am

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) on securing what he described as a timely debate; it is especially timely as viewed from my constituency. I congratulate him also on what he said. He rightly made the link between marine pollution and the standards practised, all too commonly, by the merchant shipping industry. That point was taken up also by the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon), and I shall examine some aspects of that link. I shall be most interested to hear what the Minister has to say in reply to a debate that has been essentially about transport; I am sure that we all await his speech with some interest.

As the hon. Member for Uxbridge said, it is almost 10 years—the anniversary was on Monday—since the Braer ran aground off the south coast of Shetland. The devastation caused was unimaginable, given that it is difficult to gain access to the area where the ship ran aground and that a hurricane had been running for 10 days. As it happened, the hurricane solved many of the problems immediately, because the Gulfaks crude that the Braer was carrying was fairly light oil and easily dispersed in the poor weather.

The great rule that is supposed always to be applied to such cases is that the polluter should pay. Unfortunately, that has a hollow ring for a number of my constituents. A goodly number of people in the south of Shetland had roofs of asbestos tiles, which were damaged and effectively made unserviceable. I have bored this chamber at length on the subject, and I do not intend to dwell on it today, but I wish to place on record again the conduct of the International Oil Pollution Compensation funds in relation to the litigation subsequently entered into by the asbestos roof complainants.

That litigation failed because the IOPC played what I, as a lawyer, would term litigation hard ball; it refused to allow the Braer roof claimants access to the reports that had been compiled on the fund's behalf in the immediate aftermath of the Braer's grounding. Much of the information in those reports had been provided by the roof claimants themselves, but when they needed that information to substantiate their claim, the IOPC refused them access to it, which, in strict legal terms, it was entitled to do. As recently as Monday, Mr. Joe Nicholls of the IOPC was quoted in the Aberdeen *Press and Journal* as saying that there has been no cover-up. If he is saying to the people of Shetland, "I am from the IOPC: trust me," he will be given a fairly frosty response. Frankly, they do not; they feel that they have been badly done by. If there is no cover-up, I must ask again why the IOPC continues to refuse to put the reports into the public domain.

I should pay tribute to the fact that the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson), visited Shetland last year and met the asbestos roof complainants. Unfortunately, I am not satisfied that he or his officials fully understand the legal position, inasmuch as they keep citing Lord Gill's judgment; he referred to the author of the reports, who was a witness in the case but who could not be a witness to the contents of the reports. That information remains outwith the public domain.

I intend to visit Galicia later this month, to see some of the damage that has been done and to share with the local communities some of the difficulties that my constituents experienced in coping with the aftermath of an oil spill, in particular in dealing with the IOPC. We have a saying in Scotland that one needs a long-handled spoon to sup with the devil. I think that one needs a long-handled spoon to sup with the IOPC. I shall warn the Galicians to make clear to the IOPC the basis on which any information is provided to them.

Other hon. Members have referred to the sinking of the Prestige. If I had to sum up in one word what I feel about it, that word would have to be "depressing". It is truly scandalous that 10 years after the Braer, virtually the same thing could happen again. The hon. Member for Bolton, South-East spoke about 15-year-old rust buckets. The Prestige was 26 years old. It was a single hulled tanker, owned in Greece through Liberia, registered in the Bahamas, classed in the United States of America, chartered by a Swiss-based Russian company that has offices in London and crewed by Greek and Filipino sailors. The Prestige was a floating indictment of the current state of the merchant shipping industry. The people who are feeling the adverse effects are not Greek, Liberian or Bahamian or from Switzerland, the United States, Russia or the United Kingdom. They are the people of Galicia, and my heart goes out to them when I see what they are suffering.

How do incidents such as the Braer, the Erica, the Prestige and the Torrey Canyon keep happening? They happen because they can. We tolerate on the high seas things that we would never dream of tolerating on dry land. The bottom line is that self-regulation of the maritime industry does not work. An agreed, enforceable system of international standards is needed. Owners and operators cannot be allowed to hide behind reclassifications and reflagging, as they currently do. I commend, in particular, the most recent edition of the *NUMAST Telegraph*, which includes a 22 or 23-point recipe for radical reform of the shipping industry.

I shall draw attention to a few of those points. The first is that there should be mandatory third-party liability insurance for merchant shipping. Some hon. Members might think it remarkable that that is not already the case. One has to have third-party liability insurance in order to take on to the street a car that might do a few hundred thousand pounds worth of damage at most, but one can take a tanker full of crude oil out on to the high seas without any such insurance.

The hon. Member for Bolton, South-East suggested measures that would improve shipping safety. I shall be more than happy to support his private Member's Bill, and I shall encourage all my Liberal Democrat colleagues to do so, although that might not be as helpful as he might wish.

One further issue is the standard and training of crews in the merchant fleet. Some agreements already exist, including International Labour Organisation convention 147. Last year, I submitted a written

parliamentary question to the Department for Transport. On 10 June, I received a fairly brief reply, which I will share with hon. Members. I asked the Secretary of State for Transport

"what assessment he has made of the UK's compliance with its obligations under the International Labour Organisation Convention 147."

When it arrived, the answer was not without information—such answers never are—but no one could accuse the Department of actually answering the question that I asked. I was told:

"The UK ratified ILO Convention Number 147 in 1980."

Well, anyone with access to the convention would know that. I was then told:

"The UK Government ratifies international conventions only when it is satisfied that measures are in place to ensure compliance."

Well, that is good news as well. Finally, I was told:

"The Government has also ratified the Protocol of 1996 to that Convention, which extends the list of other conventions with which signatory states must comply."—[*Official Report*, 10 June 2002; Vol. 386, c. 775W.]

There was absolutely no assessment of the UK's compliance with its obligations, which is what I had asked for. Sadly, that is often the way in which the Department for Transport answers such questions. I do not, in all sincerity, expect the Minister to answer such a specific point, which is more properly the domain of the Department for Transport. However, I would be grateful if he could ensure that my remarks are conveyed to the appropriate quarters within the Government.

We must also have proper regard to the role of flag states, such as Greece and Liberia. To draw again on the NUMAST recipe, the International Maritime Organisation and the International Labour Organisation should be given greater resources and authority to enforce and implement the standards on which their collective memberships agree. At the moment, lip service is paid to agreements, but there is no proper enforcement. That must change.

Dr. Iddon: The hon. Gentleman has referred to the *NUMAST Telegraph* a couple of times. This year's first edition contained a table of 66 ships that have been blacklisted by the European Union and that face port-access bans. It is significant that Turkey has flagged out 26 of them, and there is a moral in that. If Turkey is to be allowed into the EU, the UK Government and other EU Governments will be able to put an armlock on it as regards the present unsatisfactory situation.

Mr. Carmichael: That is indeed a possibility, and one hopes that the EU would do that. The hon. Gentleman raises the spectre of EU enlargement, and I got into some trouble in that respect over the Christmas recess, so I shall resist the temptation to go down that alley again.

The hon. Gentleman's point about Turkey is well made, but the problem extends even beyond the EU. My concern is that even if we fix the problem in the EU, it will emerge elsewhere. EU measures are welcome, and I was particularly pleased by those taken after the sinking of the Prestige. However, they will not be enough on their own, any more than the actions of a single nation state will be.

Flag states that fail to discharge their responsibilities under the United Nations convention on the law of the sea, and that fail to ensure effective jurisdiction and control over ships that fly their flag, should surely be identified and penalised. Ultimately—this would be a meaningful sanction—it should be open to the international community to say that it will no longer recognise the certification of ships that are flagged under nation states that do not pay proper regard to their international obligations. Another great difficulty is the attitude taken by flag states that consistently fail to investigate, or to publish the results of investigations into, accidents involving ships that use their registers. The current system of regulation lacks transparency.

The approach taken should not be very different from that taken to everything else in life; quality should be rewarded and poor standards punished. The hon. Member for Uxbridge referred to the difficulties caused by pollution to the fishing industry in Shetland. As he said, it was seven years before the restrictions on inshore fisheries in Shetland were lifted following the damage caused by the Braer. The damage that was caused continues today, because before the grounding of the Braer, Shetland salmon was highly regarded as a clean and environmentally friendly product. Sadly, however, the sinking of the Braer put an end to its reputation and the former position has never been recovered. Coastal communities generally are reliant on the promotion of a clean and healthy environment, to which shipping and marine pollution is a real threat. For that reason, I hope that the Minister will take note of what has been said today and, working with the Dept for Transport, ensure that the necessary changes are put in place.

10.17 am

Norman Baker (Lewes): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) on securing the debate. His commitment to the marine environment is now well established, and that is especially laudable considering that his constituency is land-locked. He made several sensible points in his contribution, to which I hope that the Minister will respond positively. I also welcome the comments made by the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon). Certainly, I find myself in sympathy with the legislation that he proposes. I was unaware of the incident to which he referred, in which it seems that economics determined whether a potential oil incident would be treated seriously. If a business can decide that its bottom line is more important than the environment, and if the environment can be penalised to save money, that is completely wrong and anathema to most of the Government. I hope that the Minister will respond to that point.

The hon. Gentleman also raised the issue of fire fighting in the channel and elsewhere. As my constituency borders the English channel, I am familiar with that issue. The problem is that fire fighting in the channel is a particularly expensive business and requires specially trained fire fighters. Fire at sea is extremely difficult to deal with because heat rises, so fire fighters tend to have to go in at the seat of the fire. Therefore, fire authorities must invest properly in that service to deal with the problem effectively. I suspect that our capability to deal with fires in the channel and elsewhere around our coast is not as good as it might be because fire authorities are often short of cash. The Government

[Norman Baker]

should be addressing that issue in their settlements with fire authorities, perhaps by ring-fencing that capability in any settlement.

The hon. Member for Uxbridge referred in his opening comments to the Prestige tanker disaster. That is one of the sad reasons why we are here and, I imagine, one of the reasons why he felt that it was necessary to initiate the debate. It is disappointing—indeed, scandalous, to use the adjective that my hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) used—that the position has not changed. There has been a depressing series of spillages into the marine environment in UK waters and elsewhere over many years. The situation appears to be improving only slowly. We need to accelerate that.

One thinks of the Exxon Valdez, which released almost 11million gallons in Alaska, the grounding of the Sea Empress off Wales, with 18 million gallons in 1996, the Greek tanker the Aegean Sea, with 21.5 million gallons off north-west Spain, the Braer, with 26 million gallons, and the oil tanker Erika, which sank off Brittany with 3 million gallons. Such events are monotonously regular in their occurrence. The international community should get its act together to prevent them.

Oil tankers are not the only problem. During the Gulf war, Iraq deliberately released an estimated 460 million gallons of crude oil into the Persian Gulf, showing scant regard for the environment or anybody else in the area. I hope that, when considering the position in Iraq, the Ministry of Defence will give some consideration to the environmental consequences of action by either side, though doubtless that is not top of its list.

The impact of the Prestige is well known. The incident has devastated the Iberian coast—those in Spain and Portugal are suffering, not the owners of the ship, its crew, the people who flagged it, or people sitting in offices in Geneva or anywhere else. For example, a fishing area of more than 180 square miles around the wreck has been declared off limits, and up to 90,000 livelihoods have been affected. People who went about their normal business and led normal lives have had their livelihoods disrupted in a most callous and significant way because of the failure of the international community to regulate shipping properly. We owe it to people throughout the country and around the world to prevent such preventable accidents in future.

The number of incidents in British waters is decreasing. It is worth mentioning that since 1978—I think—there have been 12,746 incidents of oil spillages in British waters, which is a huge number. The hon. Member for Uxbridge was right to say that last year the figure was 678, and it is decreasing. The Government should be given some credit for reducing the number of incidents. However, I also tell the Minister that since 1995, from those many thousands of incidents, there have been only 10 successful prosecutions for discharges, with an average fine of £20,000. It seems that polluting the marine environment is a pretty risk-free business. It is time that we got a grip on that, and ensured that those responsible are properly prosecuted for their actions. The environment should not be a freebie that one can discharge into freely.

What are the solutions? The hon. Member for Bolton, South-East and my hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland suggested a number of solutions, all of which I am in considerable sympathy with. It is absolutely right that we deal with single-hulled tankers. There was an interesting piece in *The Guardian*, in which David Osler, industrial editor of the shipping newspaper *Lloyd's List*, pointed out that

"the Prestige was one of a large number of oil tankers built in Japan during the boom years of the 1970s".

He said:

"These tankers were churned out, mass produced using steel turned out to the lowest possible standard. Out of a global fleet of 1,800 oil tankers, around 300 are pre-1980, Japanese and single-hulled."

There is a time problem that dates back to the 1970s. If those ships were of a low standard then, they are of a low standard now. However, they are still carrying potentially dangerous cargoes in international waters, and are still unregulated, as far as anyone can tell. They need to be pulled out of service—scrapped, to use the word of the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East.

It is true that all oil tankers built since 1986 must have a double hull, and that is welcome; but there is a residue of single-hulled vessels built before then, and they are not going away very quickly. That issue needs to be grappled with. If we cannot get the International Maritime Organisation to take proper action, we will need to take action at UK-level, or better still at EU-level. We will need to restrict access to our ports and use persuasive methods to encourage countries operating under flags of convenience and other shipping agents to improve their performance and get rid of single-hulled ships. I hope that the EU will show more mettle than it has done so far, but that is not to underestimate its work. However, we need to accelerate the speed of improvement.

We must also consider compartmentalising ships, so that if a ship is hit, its leakage can be limited. That is standard practice in some but not in all cases, and particularly not with older ships. We also need to consider the maximum size of oil tankers allowed in EU waters. That is a matter of dispute with the Government. We cannot go on building ever larger ships. When I asked the Under-Secretary of State for Transport whether he would press for a maximum size for oil tankers, he said:

"There is no evidence that reducing the size of oil tankers would lead to an overall improvement in safety. The implication of using smaller tankers is that more voyages would be needed to carry the same volume of oil and related cargoes."—[*Official Report*, 3 December 2002; Vol. 395, c. 670W.]

Mr. Carmichael: My hon. Friend makes a good point. One reason why single-hulled tankers of the vintage to which he refers continue to be used is that a great deal of oil is coming out of Russia. The waters—I have forgotten the name of the stretch, but it is the narrow part between Denmark and the rest of Scandinavia—are such that smaller classes of tankers must be used, or there would be too much traffic to get through safely.

Norman Baker: I am grateful for that information, which demonstrates that my gut feeling is right: it is a sensible proposal to set a maximum limit on the size of oil tankers, not only because that is required in certain

passages of water but because, obviously, when a huge oil tanker sinks, the damage is greater than it would have been if it were caused by a smaller tanker. It is all very well to say that there would be more ships around, but less damage would be caused by one ship sinking if that ship were smaller. The Government should consider that. It is right to say that self-regulation does not work, as my hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland said, and there should be mandatory third party insurance. We should consider refusing to allow dangerous shipping into EU and UK waters.

We have talked a lot about oil. It is worth mentioning that other dangerous cargoes are carried regularly around the world, often, but not always, in substandard ships. A huge number of chemicals have been lost in UK waters over the years. The last time that I raised the matter in a parliamentary question—I do not have the reference, and do not remember exactly when it was—I was told that there was no proper register of what had been lost in UK waters. I hope that the Minister will either respond to that point, or write to me about it. We now log all instances of chemicals and other potentially dangerous materials that are lost at sea in UK waters. Not so long ago a cargo of some 28 barrels of lindane, a dangerous pesticide, was lost in the English channel. That may leak out and damage the marine environment. We need to know what is going on with such incidents, and where such losses occur. I should be grateful if the Minister would address that point.

Let us not forget that a huge amount of radioactive material is being carried around in UK waters as a consequence of activities at Sellafield and elsewhere. The Government should have a policy of minimising the transportation of radioactive material for environmental and security reasons, given the international climate. Instead, the Government's answer is that what is done with that material is a matter for British Nuclear Fuels Ltd., which has contracts with Japan and sends ships half way round the world. The Government say that that is not a problem, and that it is a commercial matter for BNFL. It is not; it is a matter for the Government to regulate in order to protect the environment and to ensure that there are as few terrorist targets as possible. I know that it is an old-fashioned suggestion to make to a Labour Government, but I hope that they will consider intervening to control matters, not simply leave matters to the market.

10.29 am

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): I echo the words of other hon. Members and congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) on securing such a timely debate. It is indicative of the deep and abiding interest in the maritime environment that he has shown since he was elected in 1997, and no one can gainsay the considerable work that he has done for the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds throughout the past five years.

I shall start with a plea to the Minister—a plea that my hon. Friend would echo. The south Dorset coast is a world heritage site, but such a designation does not confer protection. The area is absolutely glorious; it deserves and requires protection. One way in which to protect it is to deny international shipping access to such a delicate maritime area, and the way to do that is to designate it a particularly sensitive sea area. I must declare a particular interest in the area, in that I sail round it fairly frequently, but if the right hon. Gentleman does that the Government will have the support of the Conservative party.

Ships can constitute a hazard to the marine environment in three ways: through deliberation action, through accidental pollution and through physical damage. Although more than 80 per cent. of marine oil spills occur within a port or harbour area, more damaging than that are the actions of those who clean out the tanks and release waste oil and chemical products at sea, most of whom get away with it.

Of the 14 successful prosecutions for discharges during 2001, 10 were related to oil pollution. However, 1,616 incident reports were received and processed. Of the total discharges in 2001, 95 per cent. were from mineral oils and 72 per cent. were in the open sea. The other cause of marine pollution is accidental, owing either to ship malfunction—thankfully, a rare occurrence—or human error. The fact that the wreck of the car carrier, the Tricolor, in the English channel has been the cause of two collisions and a near miss since it sank on 14 December calls into question the competence of some ship masters.

There are a variety of navigational aids to help work out the answers to the three key questions that we need to know at sea: where we are, what direction we are going in and what is in front of us. In addition, radar, satellite, the global positioning system and visual fixes, dead reckoning and electronic route following can be used. A new hazard in the English channel brings into play an additional set of warnings to mariners. For example, the area around the Tricolor had wreck and raycon buoys, and a guard ship was in position. Both the British and French authorities were broadcasting hourly verbal maritime hazard warnings, the text of which was carried on Navtext as well as being issued as a "Notice to Mariners".

With all those warning signs, it was absolutely incredible that the Turkish master of the Vicky, the second ship to hit the Tricolor in two weeks, was able to tell *The Times*:

> "I had no idea it was there. I saw some light buoys but I didn't understand what it meant or why they were there because my normal charts don't show any light buoys".

Will he be prosecuted? Will he lose his ticket? Will he go to jail? We certainly need punitive sanctions to deter those who are incompetent or who flout international safety standards. Does the Minister support the European Commission's proposal for severe sanctions for parties who have caused maritime pollution by grossly negligent behaviour?

We have heard from others that the Prestige was a 26-year-old, single-hulled tanker from which it is estimated that oil will leak for the next three years. The Erika was a single-hulled tanker that sank off the coast of Brittany in late 1999 and it lost 30,000 tonnes of oil; the Braer was a single-hulled tanker that caused an 85,000 tonne oil spill off Shetland in 1993; the Aegean Sea, which grounded in almost the same Spanish waters as the Prestige a decade ago, released 74,000 tonnes of crude. Ships of a similar age and with similar problems are still trading in the world today. Last year, nearly two-thirds of the ships that were lost were more than 20 years old. Despite international agreement under the International Maritime Organisation to phase out all

[Mr. Jonathan Sayeed]

single-hulled tankers by 2015 at the latest, those still make up the majority—about 60 per cent.—of the total tanker fleet. It is clear that international agreement is the only way to control a force that recognises no sovereign jurisdiction and to regulate a business that is obviously international.

We have heard tell that the Prestige was owned in Greece, registered in the Bahamas, classed in the United States and chartered by a Swiss-based Russian company with offices in London. It was crewed by Greeks and Filipinos and it was sailing from Latvia to Singapore. At the beginning of last December the Commission issued a blacklist of 66 ships that should be banned from European waters and ports and it called for a ban on the transport of heavy fuel in single-hulled vessels. The Commission also instructed states to bring forward the implementation of rules that were drawn up after the Erika disaster in 1999 and were intended to tighten the controls on vessels carrying dangerous cargoes. The Government have confirmed that at a recent Transport Council meeting they agreed

"to invite a proposal from the Commission to accelerate the timetable for phasing out single hull tankers even further, and to consider how the carriage of heavy oil in single hull tankers might be restricted, with a view to reducing the risk of a spill from a single hull tanker even more."—[*Official Report*, 11 December 2002; Vol. 396, c. 356W.]

May I ask the Minister what is happening? Will the deadline for the phasing out of single-hulled tankers be accelerated? How far have the Government made good their pledge made in the other place

"to ensure that all existing maritime pollution compensation and liability conventions come into force as soon as possible"?—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 27 November 2002; Vol. 641, c. 749.]

Another important contribution to maritime safety and, therefore, to reducing marine pollution, would be a reduction in the secrecy surrounding flags of convenience. It is often impossible definitively to establish who controls a ship. That so-called "corporate veil" means that it took several weeks before the owner of the Erika was known. There are similar problems in identifying the Greek ship-owning dynasty that controlled the Prestige and it is reported that al-Qaeda is using legal means to hide its nefarious shipping interests. Where ownership cannot be established, the law cannot be enforced effectively. What discussions has the Minister conducted with the IMO to increase transparency? What steps have the Government taken to implement the recommendations of the National Audit Office's report of June 2002 "Dealing with pollution from ships"? Will the Minister expand the provision of year-round emergency tugging vessels that are currently located at only four points around the UK coast. How far have the discussions progressed with the Irish Government on the joint provision of a fifth tug to cover the Irish sea?

Finally, I welcome the August 2000 contract between Air Atlantique, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency and the Department of Trade and Industry, which offers a considerable opportunity. This particular contract allows aircraft typically to survey 32,000 square miles in a five-hour period of surveillance, as opposed to 14,000 square miles previously. Can we anticipate further sharing of counter-pollution equipment and more commercial contracts? Will the satellite oil spills sensing trials by the MCA be further developed?

The Government have committed themselves to an ecosystem-based approach and integrated stewardship of our marine environment. As a token of their devotion yet another consultation paper has been launched. It is grandly called "The Seas of Change". According to my records, this is the 83rd consultation undertaken by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs since June 2001. It has consultationitis. Consultation is useful but policy is what is necessary. What is needed is stewardship of our own and foreign vessels entering our waters and ports. Although accidents are often the product of human fallibility and error, measures can be taken to limit the likelihood of their occurrence and to mitigate the environmental consequences, and incompetence and neglect should always be dealt with swiftly and severely. Global thinking, allied to effective national and local implementation, is the recipe for safer seas and the protection of our marine environment. I urge the Government to echo that point in policy.

10.41 am

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): I congratulate the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) on securing this important debate and the manner in which he introduced the topic. I should also like to congratulate the other Members who took part in what has been a wide-ranging and constructive debate.

With regard to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon), I look forward to seeing his private Member's Bill making progress through the House. It is eminently sensible. I hope that it will receive support from the Opposition as well as the Government, and that it will reach the statute book very quickly. I congratulate him on the work his group has produced on the findings of the Derbyshire inquiry, which are most important. I understand that the work on bulk carrier safety has now, as a consequence, been taken forward by the IMO.

The points made by the hon. Members for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael), for Lewes (Norman Baker) and for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed) were constructive contributions to a very important, although not easy, issue.

The hon. Member for Uxbridge has a personal commitment to marine conservation. I share his disappointment and that of other Members, referred to, in particular, by my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), that his Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill did not find support in another place.

I was puzzled as to what the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland wanted from this debate. He made the point, quite tellingly, that there are many issues that are matters for the Minister with responsibility for shipping. If the debate had been flagged in a different way, he would be responding to the debate and would have been able to go into more detail on some specific issues. I am very interested in some of the issues on maritime safety that the hon. Gentleman raised at the beginning of his intervention, representing, as I do, Cardiff, a port with maritime traditions. I share his interest in those issues, but they are matters for the Department for Transport.

It is unfortunate that the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), who deals with marine issues, is unavailable today, as is the Minister for the Environment, the right hon. Member for Oldham, West and Royton (Mr. Meacher), who deals with pollution issues. I shall do my best to respond to and follow up any detailed and technical issues in writing, as some Members have asked.

The title of the report goes rather wider than the debate itself. Pollution that finds its way into our seas comes from a number of different sources. Globally, about 80 per cent. is the result of land-based activities, such as industry and farming, and 12 or 13 per cent. comes from maritime transport, including deliberate and accidental oil spills; the remainder is the result of illegal discharges or dumping from land.

In recent years, much has been achieved in tackling marine pollution. During the past 15 years, we have cut the amount of mercury going into the North sea by 70 per cent. We have also stopped dumping radioactive waste, sewage sludge and munitions at sea, and we have improved standards for sewage treatment.

In opening the debate, the hon. Member for Uxbridge focused on oil pollution, and he is right to say that our oceans are still under threat from that. As the hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire made clear, international solutions are required if we are to tackle these issues effectively. The sinking of the Prestige last November reminded us of the environmental, social and economic consequences of marine pollution. More needs to be done to better manage and protect our seas and the unique forms of life that they support.

As has been said, the oil from the Prestige is having a considerable effect; it is coming ashore on the western coast of France between La Rochelle and Hendaye. The French authorities were prepared, but they were hampered by bad weather when they tried to deal with the immediate problem. This matter is raising controversy in Spain, and it is worth placing on the record that we offered help of a scientific and environmental nature—including the loan of tugs—either directly or through the European Union.

The positive use of places of refuge when vessels are in difficulty is a major international issue. It is the subject of live debate in the EU, and the UK is fully engaged in that. The UK's experience is that judicious provision of shelter in a place of refuge or sheltered waters can significantly help in averting marine pollution incidents. We believe that it is unwise pre-emptively to rule in or out a particular location as a place of refuge. The need for a place of refuge and its location will be driven by events and specific data: the prevailing weather, the forecasted weather, the whereabouts of the incident, the consequences of not rendering assistance, and the type of threat that is posed by the ship seeking refuge and its cargo will all be key factors in the decision-making process—which will need to be geared up to be speedy.

As part of their contingency planning for pollutions incidents, the Government are asking harbour authorities to give consideration to granting refuge, having regard to the particular conditions pertaining at their ports, such as access to safe moorings, berths and jetties, availability of tugs, counter-pollution equipment and offloading and repair facilities, and environmental considerations including local tides, currents and fishing activities. I think that everybody would accept that there is not an instant solution to these issues, but I can assure the hon. Member for Uxbridge—who raised them in a positive and constructive way—that we are seeking to tackle them urgently.

The hon. Gentleman also raised the issue of substandard shipping flying flags of convenience. The main problem with substandard shipping and pollution from ships is not the result of inadequate international standards but of the failure of some owners in flag states to fulfil their responsibilities under agreed conventions. In 1997, the UK played a leading role in launching the quality shipping campaign at the IMO and in the EU. That engages all those involved in shipping ventures—owners, flag states, brokers, charterers and insurers—with a view to rewarding the responsible in the industry and increasingly marginalizing substandard ships, their owners and flags, and that initiative certainly needs to be continued.

It is worth noting that the United Kingdom is a party to the Paris memorandum of understanding on port state control. The UK's port state control regime is one of the most vigorous in the Paris MOU area, and we continue to exceed the target given in the port state control directive for inspecting foreign flagged vessels calling at UK ports. It is clear that all those hon. Members present strongly support continuing with enthusiasm down that road. The hon. Gentleman spoke also about satellite monitoring. The situation is still as he indicated; it is proceeding on a trial basis, but it is obviously something in which we are interested.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East raised the subject of black boxes. The Government support the installation of voyage data recorders in new vessels. That is stipulated in the revised chapter 5 of the international convention for the safety of life at sea. We are interested in work that is proceeding in the IMO with regard to retrofitting black boxes in existing vessels, but I am sure that all hon. Members accept that it is a more contentious and difficult issue to tackle. Nevertheless, my hon. Friend was right to raise it.

A number of hon. Members referred to the Braer incident in 1993, not least the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland. In many ways, that incident marked a defining moment in our efforts to address pollution and its consequences. The Braer still ranks as the world's 12th largest oil spill. A pollution incident of such magnitude will inevitably have caused major hardships for many, and I recognise the impact that the hon. Gentleman outlined. It is a tribute to the resilience of the Shetlanders that they coped so well with the traumatic consequences, which were devastating for such a small community.

Many lessons had to be learned, and some lessons could not be learned nor could the solutions be implemented in a short time, but as a result of the Braer and the Sea Empress disasters, as well as other major spills, a number of steps have been taken. The UK has played a leading role in developing the many measures that have substantially improved the situation internationally, regionally and nationally, and I shall return to some of those in a moment.

[Alun Michael]

The establishing of marine environment high risk areas was touched on. That is a particularly important development, to which the Government are strongly committed, although I accept that it has taken some time to get where we are now and I agree that we need to move as quickly as possible. That was one of the recommendations of the Donaldson report, and officials have worked very hard on the idea in recent years. However, I am sure that hon. Members would accept that it is important not only to implement the proposal but to get it right. We hope to announce the identified areas shortly; there will be some 30 areas, covering 10 per cent. of our coastline.

The hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire asked, in relation to the Dorset coast, whether the UK would seek to designate all or some of its waters as PSSAs once that concept has been put in place. We take the view that all of our coastline merits protection from marine pollution, and once we have established the marine environment high risk areas we will monitor their effectiveness and assess whether further protective measures are required, such as the PSSA designation to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

The hon. Gentleman referred also to the Comptroller and Auditor General's report entitled "Dealing with Pollution from Ships". It was a soundly based, balanced and well-rounded report that recognised the substantial achievements of the Department for Transport and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency in minimising the risk of pollution of the marine environment from ships and, where pollution occurs, in minimising the impact of that pollution on UK waters, coastlines and economic interests. The report has much to say that is positive, while highlighting areas in which it was perceived that more work has to be done. The Department for Transport and the MCA are working to take forward those recommendations. The hon. Gentleman almost seemed to ridicule the amount of consultation that DEFRA has undertaken. That consultation reflects its extremely wide-ranging and complex areas of responsibility, and the partnership approach that it takes to working with interest groups, often groups that have to be reconciled, rather than single interest groups with a clear aim. That is combined with the commitment of Ministers to action and to solving the extensive list of problems covered by our portfolio.

The Government's first marine stewardship report "Safeguarding our Seas" shows the way forward. Published last May, it sets out our strategy for the conservation and sustainable development of our marine environment, and outlines our ecosystem approach to achieving our vision of clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse oceans and seas. Tackling marine pollution is a key element of that strategy.

Mr. Sayeed: The Minister mentioned that the debate is cross-departmental. I understand that he does not have specific knowledge of all the areas under discussion. On that basis, and because some important points have been made, will he confirm that he will bring to the attention of other interested Ministers the points that have not been adequately covered, so that they can write to hon. Members?

Alun Michael: I mentioned that at the beginning, because the hon. Member for Uxbridge had the choice of targeting the Department for Transport or DEFRA. Some of the issues are very important, and are lead issues for DEFRA, but many of the matters that have been raised are primarily for the Department for Transport. I said at the start that, for that reason, I would either reply on behalf of the two Departments or seek a response from my hon. Friend the Minister with responsibility for shipping on matters on which I was unable to respond in detail. I am happy to reinforce that point.

Tackling marine pollution is a key element of our strategy. We are working closely with EU member states, the OSPAR convention for the protection of the marine environment of the north-east Atlantic and other international forums to turn our vision into reality.

A range of OSPAR decisions and recommendations, together with EU directives, not least the integrated pollution preventative control directive and the water framework directive, have sharply reduced discharges of hazardous chemicals into the north-east Atlantic. I am sure that hon. Members from all parties would accept that a lot of those boring-sounding and technical titles reflect an enormous amount of work that is done internationally, making a positive contribution to the future of the environment. That concerns all of us.

Action is also being taken through the EU and OSPAR to tackle eutrophication, which can be a problem in some coastal waters. We reduced direct inputs of nitrogen into marine waters by 30 per cent. during the 1990s and further reductions will be achieved through action plans under the nitrates directive and the urban waste water directive. I refer to those issues because they are complementary to the issues of maritime pollution and oil pollution, which have been mentioned. We need to look at the whole environment as it affects the maritime situation, including the contributions that are made from land within the UK.

Norman Baker (Lewes): Will the Minister comment on the fact that the MCA has managed to prosecute only 10 ships, with an average fine of £20,000 since 1995? For all the Government's good work, there are no prosecutions and no teeth.

Alun Michael: That falls within the areas on which I do not have direct knowledge and on which I have said that I will respond to colleagues after discussing them with the Minister with responsibility for shipping. I return to the point that the debate was focused on DEFRA responsibilities. However, most of the debate has been on the responsibilities of the Department for Transport. We work closely across Departments, but it would be unwise for me to go outside my specific knowledge in debate. A debate should be focused differently if technical responses from the Department for Transport are required. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will approach the matter again from a second angle.

The debate has certainly shown the need for cross-Department co-operation. There is a high level of such co-operation; I am very pleased with the way in which officials in my Department, and those at the Department for Transport, co-operate.

Mr. Frank Cook (in the Chair): Order. I ask hon. Members not participating in the debate on air quality in market towns to leave quietly and calmly.

Air Quality (Market Towns)

11 am

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury): I am grateful for the opportunity for this debate on a matter of great concern to many people in my constituency. Transport Ministers have now pretty well admitted that the Deputy Prime Minister's 10-year transport plan will fail to meet its targets by 2010. That is a great pity, because, of the 120 air quality management areas in England, two happen to lie in small towns in my rural constituency. Had the plan been on course, I might not have felt it necessary to ask for the debate, and we could all have been outside making snowmen in the ever-increasing snow falling around the House.

Last year we remembered the London smog of 1952. Overall since then things have, mercifully, improved. However, two things have happened at the same time, relating to the consideration of air quality in smaller centres. Our insight into the likely health effects of levels of atmospheric pollution that are, by historic standards, low, has improved dramatically. Also, the contribution to air pollution by industry has of course been eclipsed by that made by road traffic.

Unfortunately, the improvement evident in cities has not necessarily been matched elsewhere. Indeed, when air quality assessments were carried out by local authorities from the mid-1990s onwards, people in the field were, it is probably true to say, caught rather on the back foot by the extent of the problem in unexpected locations. In Wiltshire there are six air quality management areas—one in Bradford-on-Avon, one in Westbury and four in Salisbury. None are in Swindon, which is by far the biggest conurbation in Wiltshire.

We expect pollution in our big industrial cities and alongside motorways, and by and large we find it there. However, we do not necessarily associate it with pretty market towns and pocket cathedral cities such as Salisbury; but it appears that we are finding it in those places too. Consequently, a national air quality strategy that anticipated having to deal exclusively with cities must now attend to the special needs of smaller centres.

Market towns are pathetically ill-equipped to deal with 21st century traffic. Traffic is forced to wind through ancient trackways, competing all the time with the needs of pedestrians. Workable solutions are devilishly difficult and planners have little room for manoeuvre. Not only do they struggle to marry the competing needs of residents, businesses, motorists and pedestrians, but they must deal with historic buildings that are blackened by traffic effluent. Air pollution does not respect anyone, including politicians. An acidic sandstone leprosy has eaten away at the rather handsome façade of my constituency office. That building is not unique in west Wiltshire and the small towns that I represent have a wealth of historic buildings that are gradually being spoiled by traffic effluent.

Alarming though such effects are for the townscape, my chief concern is for the well-being of people who live along major through routes in Bradford-on-Avon and Westbury. One of the defining characteristics of market towns is that residents' front doors often give directly on to major thoroughfares. In gentler times, when all that passed by one's front door was a coach and horses, that perhaps was not a problem. However, when the road

[Dr. Andrew Murrison]

has evolved into the A350 through Westbury, a road that Ministers are seriously considering as a south coast to Bristol and Bath super-highway, it is a different matter entirely. We know that pollutants fall away the further one gets from traffic, but when the exhaust-to-sofa distance is measured in inches, there is a problem. That applies in larger centres also; however, in many cities the traffic is not juxtaposed with vehicles in quite the same way as it is in many historic market towns. People would not plan to live so close to traffic these days as those who live in small towns that were built hundreds of years ago.

Most authorities that need to put in place air-quality improvement plans will rightly try to avoid the difficult option of building themselves out of difficulty. However, for the Westbury bypass, as a local scheme that is independent of the south coast to Bristol and Bath study, a road is the only realistic solution. There is no other way that decent air quality can be delivered to my constituents who live in the middle of the town. I commend the bypass to the Minister, although I realise that his powers are limited in that respect. I hope that, in the next few months, his Government will think again about the stop that they put on the Westbury bypass at the tail-end of 2001.

Although air pollution in smaller towns is predominantly the result of traffic, industry also surprisingly features. Indeed, the Westbury cement works presents an additional challenge for the town. Blue Circle has taken to burning tyres with the Environment Agency's support. The Environment Agency has more than simply the welfare of my constituents in mind as it works towards the EU-driven landfill directive.

To meet the terms of the directive, the Government appear to be going for the easy option of energy recovery, which is hardly carbon-neutral, over retreading and recycling, which are. That may be good news for the cement industry, but many of my constituents who live in the lee of the Blue Circle chimney are yet to be convinced that what comes out of the stack does them any good. It is sad that our Government do little to support tyre-recycling, apart from sponsoring a bit of research. They might like to consider the United States, where the recycling of tyres is more actively promoted. In the States there is a statutory minimum recycled content for road surfacings that must be derived from old tyres. I hope that the Minister will comment on that and also reconsider my request for a meeting to discuss air pollution in Westbury.

Anyone who doubts the challenges facing market towns should visit hilly, mediaeval Bradford-on-Avon, which is a quintessentially beautiful small town. If it were snowing there—my wife tells me that it is not snowing in Wiltshire at the moment—the town would be particularly attractive. I recommend that the Minister pay a visit at any time, but particularly to look at the problem that I describe today. Were he to take his life into his hands, he could walk up Mason's lane in Bradford-on-Avon. There, fumes from traffic that climbs a steep incline are retained by high structures on either side that produce a canyon effect. That road, which is in the middle of one of the most delightful towns in England, has one of the poorest air qualities in the country.

To get an idea of local opinion in Bradford on remedial measures, I personally delivered more than 400 letters to residents and businesses in the middle of the town during the festive period. The response has been impressive.

One of my chief concerns is that a planned development at a redundant industrial site called Kingston mill should be disallowed in its current form. The site is plumb in the middle of Bradford, and the developer is no doubt relishing ministerial diktat on housing density that is promoting the shoehorning into the site of 127 de-luxe dwellings, no affordable housing and a quantity of commercial premises. The effect that that will have on traffic and air quality in Bradford in the 3 to 4-year construction phase and in the long term is blindingly obvious.

Any proposals that Wiltshire county council might come up with to re-route, to slow down and, in a myriad clever ways, to alter traffic behaviour would almost certainly be eclipsed by such an application. My constituents have lost no time in pointing that out. They are rightly calling for a holistic approach to air quality management in the town. I hope that Ministers will allow latitude in planning guidance to ensure that the special nature of settlements such as Bradford-on-Avon is recognised.

Many of my Bradford correspondents are calling for a bypass to lift their misery. Realistically, that is a distant prospect, but it would be nice to have reliable data on which to base relief measures. Unfortunately, according to their own advisers, the Government are using wrongly computed data to project future pollution from car usage. Last month, the advisory committee on business and the environment said that the Government had substantially underestimated the reduction in road transport emissions that would be achieved by the end of the decade. It is important to sort that out quickly, because it would be unfortunate if structure plans were drafted and road schemes hatched on the basis of shoddy data. I hope that the Minister can offer the appropriate assurances in that regard.

Last year, DEFRA published revised draft guidance with its proposals for rolling air quality reviews and annual reports. The guidance makes it clear that Ministers want to get a tighter central grip on local air quality management. That is fine, and the proposal is no doubt driven by the Government's need to meet EU directives. However, local air quality management suddenly looks like no more than local air quality monitoring, with most of the management being done centrally.

The evidence base for the health effects of historically low levels of pollution is not firm. Guidance based on levels will encourage a deterministic approach, when a stochastic one might be more appropriate. Clearly, further research is needed into the effects of pollutants and particularly into the toxicology of particulates, given the emerging evidence on lung cancer and circulatory disease. I hope that the Minister will see such research as a potentially fruitful area for Government funding.

Ministers must take the lead in promoting cleaner, more sustainable fuels through suitable abatements in vehicle excise duty and by adjusting duty on alternative fuels to reflect the EU minimum rate. I welcome what the cleaner vehicles task force and Powershift have done so far, but alternatively powered vehicles are still marginal. The Government must further increase the fuel duty differential in favour of alternatives such as liquefied petroleum gas, compressed natural gas, biodiesel, and electricity and hydrogen cells. We must also support research and development.

I welcome the enforcement of MOT and roadside emission checks, and I am intrigued by the possibility that the low-emission zones enforced in European towns might also be applied in towns here. However, such strategies are financially regressive, and much of my constituency lies in a low-wage economy. The less well-off tend to own older, less efficient vehicles, and I would be interested to know what assessment the Minister has made of the possible impact of the initiatives on such people.

I am sure that the Minister is aware that a car is no luxury for people in the countryside, where public transport is often not an option. I hope that Ministers will be true to their word in rural-proofing any policies that they come up with for improving air quality, so that my rural constituents are not disproportionately disadvantaged.

In their worthy market towns initiative, the Government have at least been good enough to nod in the direction of such towns, and that is welcome. No one expects the scheme to turn the fortunes of small towns around—much less that it will greatly improve the road traffic situation. However, I hope that it indicates a willingness on the part of Ministers to recognise that market towns have distinct problems, as well as difficulties, such as poor air quality, that are traditionally associated with large conurbations.

11.13 am

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) for raising a wide range of important issues and for the constructive and well-informed way in which he debated them.

It is worth saying at the beginning that there have been real improvements in air quality over the past decade and, indeed, the past 50 years. In that respect, we should recall that we marked the 50th anniversary of the great smog of London only a few weeks ago. That improvement in air quality applies in market towns just as much as it does in larger cities. That is a tribute to the improvements that have been made in vehicles and fuels, as well as to the reduction in industrial and domestic emissions.

However, the hon. Gentleman is right to say that the issue is important and that the problems have not gone away. There are still areas with unacceptably high levels of pollution, and we must address that problem, not least because of the health impact of exposure to air pollution. Indeed, the hon. Gentleman referred to the need for further research into those health effects, and I agree with his point. I am therefore pleased that the Department of Health recently announced £1 million worth of new research projects.

The committee on the medical effects of air pollutants has been asked to advise the Government as soon as possible on new evidence that is emerging from research. With his medical background, the hon. Gentleman will be familiar with many of the impacts of air pollution, for example its links with asthma, cancer and reduced life expectancy. That underlines the importance of the issue that he raised this morning.

I certainly agree that, in smaller towns, increasing volumes of traffic cause particular problems, some of which the hon. Gentleman described eloquently, although I suspect that some pollution problems were caused by the coaches and horses that used to pass through Wiltshire towns in earlier days. We are all familiar with the problems of narrow streets, which were never designed to cope with the volume of traffic that goes through those towns today. I agree that those problems need to be tackled, but it is also important to get the balance right.

Towards the end of his remarks, the hon. Gentleman made one important point. We need to improve air quality but we also need to improve transport links—a key issue not only for market towns but for the rural hinterland. It is important to improve transport for people in rural areas, as well as for the rural economy, in which communications play a crucial role. That is especially true as the economy becomes more diversified and we try to maintain the standard of life in rural communities. That is an important part of my work and that of DEFRA, which is focusing, for the first time ever, on rural issues in that way.

The problem is that there is no one-size-fits-all policy to deal with all the issues. That is why the Government have introduced the system of local air quality management, the purpose of which is to allow local authorities to identify pollution hotspots and to put in place local measures to deal with them. We also have a system of local transport plans, under which local authorities are able to bid for new capital funding for local transport measures. Many authorities have successfully bid for schemes to alleviate local pollution problems. It is something of a quiet revolution that that is becoming such an accepted part of a progressive approach towards improving the environment.

In Wiltshire, funding for integrated transport measures is being increased from just over £350,000 in 1998–99 to nearly £4 million in 2002–03. I am not surprised that the hon. Gentleman mentioned the possibility of a bypass. Indeed, I believe that he referred to that possibility in connection with two locations. I am sure that he is aware of the importance of the Bristol/Bath to south coast study, which is examining how best to manage traffic flows in the area. The consultants are creating a strategic traffic model, which will allow options to be tested. We might reasonably expect the study to address the issues associated with the possibility of a bypass for Westbury, which would improve air quality there. It would not be right to speculate on the outcome of the study before it is published because the issues are complex and need to be addressed in the round. I can tell the hon. Gentleman, however, that the consultants have been asked to complete the study by the summer in time to allow Wiltshire county council to apply for funding as a supplementary local transport bid, if the study's findings support that approach.

[Alun Michael]

The hon. Gentleman said, rightly, that levels of pollution at the roadside can be high, and some properties are built far closer to the road than would now be acceptable as a construction standard. That poses a problem in several market towns. Local authorities have a variety of powers at their disposal to tackle that, and the problem must be addressed locally, sometimes by taking the strategic approach that a bypass implies and sometimes with other more local approaches.

In trying to deal with local air pollution problems in the way that I have described, several local authorities have identified considerable air pollution problems in smaller market towns. Levels of pollution at the roadside in those market towns can sometimes be high enough to cause real concern, and clearly must be dealt with. In trying to improve air quality, the hon. Gentleman is right to point out that the air is no respecter of artificial boundaries. For that reason, national and local measurements have a role to play. Local measures are the most direct effective way of dealing with local air pollution problems. Local authorities are best placed to decide what will work in their areas, whether it be new traffic management systems, parking restrictions, or partnerships with bus and freight operators.

Where levels of air pollution are high, we have also given local authorities new powers and new funding to carry out roadside emission testing, which can be an effective way of encouraging motorists to behave responsibly—by getting their vehicles tuned, for example. Several powers are now available to local authorities because of the increased importance that we place on the issue. What works in one town, however, might not in another, and local authorities are best placed to decide what will and will not work well in their areas.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the recycling of tyres and it is important that we deal with the problem of used tyres in the United Kingdom. I cannot comment about the local issue that he raised in detail, but a cement works would be regulated by the Environment Agency, which considers all emissions when it sets the pollution permit conditions. If he has not already done so, the hon. Gentleman should examine the particular circumstances and the Environment Agency's approach in his area. I would be happy to help if that would be of any use to him.

We take the issue of air quality very seriously. There are air pollution problems in some market towns just as there are localised problems in our bigger towns and cities. Local measures have a key role to play in dealing with those problems. The Government will continue to support local authorities financially and through the provision of policy and technical guidance.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the link between air pollution and land use planning, which I agree is of the utmost importance. Planning authorities must be alive to the impact of new developments on air quality, but each case should be examined on its merits. As with so many things, the specific issue must be seen in the context of the wider economic, social and environmental effects. The point of sustainable development is to ensure that each of those three elements is properly balanced when reaching individual decisions. The guiding principals must be those of sustainable development.

I do not wish to comment on particular planning applications—it is not appropriate for Ministers to do so—but it is worth touching on a few broad principles. First, air quality can be what planners term a material consideration in any application. Whether it actually is, and the weight to be attached to it relative to other material considerations, are matters for the local planning authority in each case. For example, a planning authority may decide that it is worth accepting a slight deterioration in overall air quality if the economic or social gains of a particular development outweigh it. In other cases, the authority may decide that the impact on air quality is likely to be so significant that the development should not go ahead. What is important is that the issue is dealt with appropriately in the planning process.

Secondly, we cannot totally rule out developments in areas where the local authority has identified an air pollution problem, but in such areas, air quality is more likely to be a material consideration in the planning process. Local planning authorities may also consider whether to request developers to put in place mitigation measures, through planning conditions or other agreements with the developer.

Finally, we have encouraged local planning authorities to bear in mind air quality in their development plans for an area. When they set out the long-term blueprint for future developments, they must ensure that they do not create new pollution hot spots or worsen old ones. Such a balanced approach should be pursued. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is reassured about the way in which the Government are taking such issues seriously that he raised in the debate.

11.24 am

Sitting suspended.

Consumer Rights in the EU

2 pm

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): I am delighted to have secured this Adjournment debate—it seems to be somewhat amplified—on consumer rights in the European Union. I sought a debate because European institutions and member states are currently discussing several major consumer rights issues. Their decisions will have significant implications for consumers throughout the EU, including in the United Kingdom, and it is vital that the right decisions are taken.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): On a point of order, Mr. Cook. Something strange is happening with the microphones. There is quite a lot of feedback, and I would suggest that it is too loud for anyone.

Mr. Frank Cook (in the Chair): It may make things easier if the control room turned off the two additional live microphones—the Opposition spokesman's and mine.

Mr. Lazarowicz: Thank you, Mr. Cook. I am not sure whether that has improved matters. Do you wish me to continue?

Mr. Cook: Please continue.

Mr. Lazarowicz: It is vital that the right decisions are taken as a result of the ongoing discussions in the EU and member states. I shall highlight the most important aspects of those discussions, and suggest some of the measures that need to be implemented in the EU. I hope that our Government will support such measures in the European institutions, and that the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Miss Johnson), can give some indication of the line that the Government are taking and of how matters stand in the European debate.

In drafting my comments, I have drawn on the ideas of several consumer organisations, and I thank those that have provided me and other hon. Members with useful briefing material. In particular, I thank Citizens Advice and the Consumers Association.

This debate is important because the EU is developing significant consumer protection proposals. It is worth remembering that it has been the major shaper of much of our recent consumer protection legislation. Until the Enterprise Act 2002 was enacted a few weeks ago, most of our homegrown consumer rights legislation derived from the 1970s. Otherwise, most of the initiatives that have resulted in new rights for UK consumers have come from the EU. Those include protection against unfair terms in consumer contracts, and rights for those who purchase package holidays, timeshares and items at home, over the telephone and on the internet. It might even be said that those new rights are some of the most obvious and direct benefits that individuals in this country enjoy as a result of our EU membership. Most recently, the stop now regulations, which had previously been brought into play, were incorporated into the Enterprise Act. They originated in EU legislation, and I pay tribute to the Government and to the Minister for setting such great store by those stop now regulations, which will be an important weapon for the consumer in the fight against unfair trading practices.

One of the important debates taking place in the European Union is whether the various measures to protect consumers' interests should be complemented by placing businesses under a general duty to trade fairly with consumers. I am sure that hon. Members are aware that the European Union is consulting on such proposals. The introduction of such a general duty is supported by a wide range of consumer organisations, and I urge the Government to support such a general duty through European regulations.

Citizens Advice, in arguing for such a duty, has told me that its bureaux regularly report inquiries about shoddy and overpriced goods, delivery of substandard services, the use of misleading information, oppressive behaviour and high-pressure selling methods. Many of those complaints clearly involve unfair trading practices, but they cannot readily be addressed under present consumer protection legislation.

I was particularly struck by one example publicised by Citizens Advice in its recent report on doorstep selling. It gave the example of a single parent who was receiving working families tax credit and who was persuaded to sign a £6,000 contract to purchase solar panels. The salesperson had been in her home for five hours, the woman had not eaten and her child was desperate to go to bed, and she signed a contract for solar panels. She had responded to a sales leaflet that had come through her door, and because of that she was held to have solicited the visit from the salesperson. As a result, she had no cancellation rights under the regulations governing doorstep selling. When she tried to cancel the contract the company threatened her with breach of contract.

Such problems occur because under the implementation in the United Kingdom of European regulations on doorstep selling a consumer who signs a contract agreed to during a solicited visit to their home has no right to cancel that contract. A general duty against unfair trading would provide that such a practice could be challenged and that contracts entered into as a result of such unfair practice could be set aside. It has also been suggested that a fair trading duty could be a very powerful weapon in dealing with the many scandals of fuel mis-selling that have been the subject of many debates in the House.

The argument for such a general duty to trade fairly is that it would fill a gap in consumer law between specific rights and business practices that are unfair and are to the detriment of consumers but which may not easily be defined as unlawful practices. This gap exists, as legislation can fail to capture new trends and developments in a market. Unscrupulous traders have always tried to find ways around legislation, and a general duty to trade fairly would enable enforcement agencies to act much more quickly to deal with unfair trading practices. It is important to protect the interests of honest traders while preventing dishonest traders from engaging in unfair trading practices.

[Mr. Lazarowicz]

The idea of such a duty is not new. Twelve years ago, the Office of Fair Trading published proposals for a flexible tool for tackling unfair, deceptive or misleading practices under proposals for an overhauled Fair Trading Act. Four years ago, the Government, in their White Paper on modernising consumer protection, declared that the current legislation did not deal effectively with traders who demonstrated their lack of regard for legislation that was aimed at protecting consumers. The Government recognised the need to tackle unfair trading practices that harmed consumers yet were legal.

I hope that the Government will support the proposals that are going through the European Union to introduce such a general duty to trade fairly. Were that to be done, it would be a major boost for consumer interest throughout the European Union, including consumers in this country.

Consumer credit has been the subject of considerable debate in the House. It is an area in which the European Union will play an increasingly significant role, both because of its duties to promote the consumer interest and because of the increasing trans-border nature of much of the financial services industry. None of the hon. Members present will need persuading that there has been major, unprecedented growth in consumer credit in this country in the past few years, and that has been paralleled in the rest of the European Union.

The Government have decided to review the law on consumer credit. The Minister is to be congratulated on announcing recently what is to be the biggest shake-up in our consumer credit laws, under the banner of 'Tackling loan sharks and more!'. That Government initiative is welcome. It is also to be welcomed that the European institutions are looking at their consumer credit rules.

Jim Sheridan (West Renfrewshire): People of my age and from my era may remember that loan sharking was a big issue, especially in parts of the west of Scotland in the more traditional shipbuilding industry. Although it has been stamped out in many areas, it is still prevalent where there is low employment. I ask the Government to take whatever steps possible to encourage employers to make loan sharking in the workplace a dismissible and disciplinary offence.

Mr. Lazarowicz: My hon. Friend raises an important point. One problem is that the illegal loan shark will not be covered by consumer credit laws. However, employers still have an important role to play. As well as the measures that my hon. Friend suggests, support for workplace-based credit unions may be a positive way in which employers could deal with the problem that he outlines.

The European Commission has now published its draft consumer credit directive, and it is to be welcomed that the European Union is reviewing the Commission's proposals. However, several consumer groups in this country have expressed anxieties that the current European Union proposals for a new directive may—unintentionally—undermine much of the good work that the Government are doing to protect the interest of the consumer against the unscrupulous provider of credit.

It must be said that there is much to be welcomed, at least theoretically, in the European Union's draft directive. Consumer organisations have expressed concerns that, from a UK consumer's perspective, the directive may offer much less of the positive regulation that is enjoyed by UK consumers at present, and will be enjoyed by UK consumers if the Government's proposals on consumer credit are put into effect.

I wish to draw attention to some of the concerns expressed by consumer organisations, and I hope that the Minister will respond to some of those points at the end of the debate.

My first concern relates to licensing and regulation. As I understand it, the European Union proposals would replace the current positive licensing system for traders with a system of registration for lenders and credit intermediaries, but they do not appear to require debt collectors and debt counsellors to be registered, although they are currently required to be licensed in the UK. Those who operate credit reference agencies and hold personal data on individuals would not need to be licensed under the EU proposals, as they currently are in the UK. Clearly, if such measures were omitted from the European rules, loopholes could open up in our system of protection for borrowers.

A second concern relates to home improvement loans. As I understand it, the draft directive would exclude lending for the transformation of private heritable property or home improvement loans. Consumers who take out loans for that purpose should be protected from unfair trading practices and unfair debt recovery practices. CABs report that that area of the market is often associated with unfair trading practices, extortionate credit and high-pressure sales tactics, so it needs to be covered by the consumer credit directive, when it finally emerges.

There are concerns about extortionate credit, which the EU proposals do not seem to challenge. UK legislation contains at least some limited provisions to challenge extortionate credit rates, and I know that the Government have given some consideration to strengthening legislation in that respect. The fear is that the draft European directive could make it impossible to enforce such restrictions on extortionate credit in the UK.

There are concerns about early settlement charges. It is suggested that, under the EU proposals, there would be no prospect of member states being able to abolish extortionate charges for the early settlement of debt. CABs have often reported outrageous practices by lenders who charge extremely high rates of interest for early termination of loan contracts.

Another important concern, expressed not only by consumer organisations but by some lenders, is the proposed change to the liability of credit card issuers in the event that goods or services purchased with a credit card are substandard. The draft directive seems to offer less protection to consumers in those circumstances than the UK's Consumer Credit Act 1974. Under that Act, both the credit card issuer and the supplier of goods and services are liable, subject to certain qualifications, if those goods or services are substandard. Under the terms of the directive, however, the liability of the supplier and card issuer would apply only if the supplier of goods and services had also acted as the supplier of

credit. As I am sure hon. Members appreciate, consumers who purchase goods and services with a credit card from a supplier often do not also use the supplier as an intermediary to provide the credit. The ability to claim against the credit card provider, as well as against the supplier, for substandard goods and services has been an important fall-back right enjoyed by consumers in this country. If the directive were to remove or restrict consumers' rights to make a claim against a credit card provider, for example when the supplier had not met a claim or had gone out of business, that would be a major loss for the consumer interest. It is not only consumers organisations that have expressed concern about the matter; I received an e-mail last night from the Nationwide building society, a credit card issuer, which expressed concern about the effect of the directive on consumers' rights.

The draft directive raises many questions about the Government's intention to tighten the UK consumer credit regulations. It is important that the European Union rules should not eventually worsen the position of consumers in this country, instead of providing them with additional rights. I hope that the Government will work to ensure that the important EU proposals on consumer credit will result in the improvements for UK consumers that I have suggested.

Mr. Kerry Pollard (St. Albans): My hon. Friend spoke of regulation that can be applied to people in the system. The largest difficulty in my county is the black economy, where cash changes hands. Travellers come across every summer and take millions of pounds from the local economy for shoddy jobs. There is no comeback because they disappear into the ether. Has my hon. Friend given any thought to the idea of educating consumers, rather than regulating the people providing services, who can never be caught?

Mr. Lazarowicz: My hon. Friend raises an important point, because a difficulty with tightening regulations is that some people choose not to comply with any regulations, and ignore them all. The measures that the Government are introducing strongly emphasise not only the giving of rights to consumers but the provision of mechanisms to educate them about those rights. Some providers will always flout the law, so it is important that people know when that happens and when to report it to an enforcement agency.

The Government have done much to provide consumers with new rights. The opportunities for consumers that recent measures have brought about may not yet have been as widely recognised as they might be. It is essential, therefore, that the European Union framework should add to, support and strengthen the measures taken by the Government, and should not allow them to be undermined, even inadvertently. I hope that the Minister will be able to commit herself to continuing the fight within Europe to maintain a high level of consumer protection, so that consumers in this country will benefit, as well as those in other countries of the European Union.

Mr. Frank Cook (in the Chair): Order. It will be of interest to hon. Members to know that the volume level on the sound system in this Chamber has been increased in response to complaints made by colleagues before Christmas that it was too low. However, account has been taken of our experiences this afternoon, and measures are in train to moderate the levels to somewhere between what we have now and what we had then. No expense is spared to ensure the comfort and ease of hon. Members.

2.23 pm

Ross Cranston (Dudley, North): I hope that my contribution will be well modulated, Mr. Cook.

I have a puzzle. It began in the 1970s when I first took an interest in this matter. At that stage, this country was a leader in consumer policy and law. The Trade Descriptions Act 1968 was a model, as was the Fair Trading Act 1973, which was introduced by the Conservatives, although a great deal of the work had been done by my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) when the Labour party was in power. People in other parts of the world looked to the Unfair Contract Terms Act 1977. At that time, the National Consumer Council was established and high street consumer advice centres sprung up around the country.

Then we had the great freeze of the 1980s. I remember being part of a small National Consumer Council delegation to the now shadow Leader of the House, who was then at the Department of Trade and Industry. We proposed a manufacturers' guarantee bill, but although that was strongly supported by members of the Conservative party, such as Baroness Oppenheim-Barnes, it got very short shrift. As my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) said, it was a time when the European Community consumer protection measures came into their own. I had some difficulty with the competence of the European Community. The justification that the measures were somehow fundamental to the completion of the internal market and that they were necessary to empower consumers to shop across borders did not wash with me. However, the substance of the measures was excellent. We received directives on, for example, package holidays and time-shares and, most importantly, we had the unfair terms in consumer contract directive, leading to regulations in 1994 which have been replaced by the 1999 regulations.

That is where my puzzle comes in. Since the great freeze, the consumer measures that have been taken have been largely driven by Europe. My concern is that sometimes we are the odd one out in opposing valuable developments at a European level. In 1999, the Government published a White Paper "Modern Markets: Confident Consumers" which provides a valuable framework for policy. I commend the Government for such measures as section 11 of the Enterprise Act 2002, which introduced the system of super-complainants. There are also provisions in part 8 of the Act in relation to stop now orders, although they were largely prompted by the European Community directive on the matter and by the need, which was identified in 1976, to reform part III of the Fair Trading Act 1986.

However, we should not have needed the 1999 sale of consumer goods and associated guarantees directive to make us change our law to make manufacturers'

[Ross Cranston]

guarantees enforceable and to ensure that consumers were legally entitled to repairs to faulty products. We should have taken the initiative many years ago. A number of problems have been identified by my hon. Friend, such as over-indebtedness. In preparing for the debate, I asked Dudley's citizens advice bureau and trading standards department to provide me with examples of that. They cited companies that lend money door to door and encourage people to take out high-interest loans, which they cannot afford to repay, and rogue traders. In my area the phantom tarmackers have been replaced by the block pavers. I am sure that all hon. Members have received complaints about the sale of gas and electricity by various companies.

The most scandalous recent example of high pressure sales in Dudley is that of the 83-year-old widow who received an unsolicited phone call asking about her physical condition, at the end of which she was told that she had won a massage. An arrangement was made for her to receive a visit the next day. She was then pressurised to buy a £4,400 orthopaedic bed, eventually reduced to £2,700. She paid a deposit of £300. After the bed arrived she discovered that she could have bought it for £800 to £900 elsewhere, and that it was not especially helpful to her. The problem of rogue selling is being dealt with as a result of the super complaint brought by NACAB, which is now known as Citizens Advice. In response, the Office of Fair Trading agreed that there was a serious problem. The taskforce set up by the Department of Trade and Industry to tackle over-indebtedness has acknowledged that there is a problem with irresponsible lending. It sets out several practices, and draws the conclusion that

"each affects a relatively small proportion of high-risk households. But such practices do tend, quite disproportionately, to attract customers who are at a high risk of over-commitment."

In her speech to the money advice liaison group in November, my hon. Friend the Minister acknowledged that there were problems and identified the steps that the Government have taken on financial education and support for financial advice services and the steps of the regulatory agencies in relation to the sale of gas and electricity. However, we should not need a proposed directive from the European Community to tell us that we need a legal instrument to deal with responsible lending, which is what draft article 9 sets out to do.

My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith raised some important points about this new consumer credit directive, which I shall not repeat. The directive would create certain difficulties, such as the section 75 difficulty identified by my hon. Friend, whereby the liability of creditors for the acts of retailers might be reduced, which would certainly be a retrograde step for policy in this country.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Renfrewshire (Jim Sheridan) raised an interesting point about marrying employment and consumer credit law. My point is that we have problems in this country that are clearly identifiable. We should be taking action and do not need the European Community to tell us how to do things.

My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith raised the issue of a general duty to trade fairly. He rightly pointed out that an OFT paper was published on the subject in February 1987. In the summer, I read a paper to the Society of European Contract Law in which I traced the issue back even further. The United States and commonwealth countries such as Australia have provisions that could easily form a basis of a general duty to trade fairly. I therefore found it disappointing that, during the passage of the Enterprise Bill, my hon. Friend the Minister made clear the Government's opposition to that duty. That opposition was confirmed by the Government's response in October 2002 to the European Commission's consultation on the follow-up communication to the Green Paper on EU consumer protection.

In the debates on the Enterprise Bill, the Minister referred to the lack of clarity of a duty to trade fairly. It appears that the experience of other countries does not support that proposition. The duty to trade fairly, or its equivalent, operates successfully in other countries. It operates in the United States under the uniform commercial code and in Australia under the Trade Practices Act to pick up problems with which specific legislative provisions do not deal. We need the general duty as a backstop to specific regulations.

The Minister also voiced the objection that the general duty would be too great a burden on business. It does not operate as a burden on business, but merely crystallises once a business acts unfairly. It has no bearing on a business until that business steps out of line.

In the paper that I presented over the summer to the Society of European Contract Law, I argued that the duty should be coupled with a provision for redress. Again, that operates successfully in other countries, so I am puzzled as to why we are not in favour of the duty and why we are not leading by example. I know that other hon. Members have contributions to make, so I shall end where I began—with a puzzle. Why is it that we were once a leader in consumer policy and law, but we are now a laggard?

2.35 pm

Jim Sheridan (West Renfrewshire): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) on securing this debate on an extremely important issue. I shall concentrate on timeshare selling and its impact on many vulnerable people. Going on holiday abroad, they are subjected to attempts to sell them timeshare facilities, which cause them much pain and discomfort. Many of those people are easily identifiable by their white legs when they arrive at these sunny resorts.

Timeshare has presented a problem for consumer protection policy for a number of years. The Department of Trade and Industry has estimated that there are at least 440,000 timeshare owners in the United Kingdom, more than three quarters of whom have timeshares abroad. There are an estimated 1.14 million owners throughout the European Union, a third of whom are based in the UK. The DTI also estimates that, in the UK alone, the timeshare market is worth more than £108 million per annum.

Attracted by the certainty of holiday accommodation for years to come, consumers often find that, at best, the deal is poor, as service charges rise uncontrollably and

contracts contain restrictive covenants on resale. Worse, contracts often seem to be entered into after high-pressure and misleading sales practices. Often, contracts do not have cooling-off or cancellation rights, and obtaining redress or refunds is extremely difficult, if not impossible.

Many products on the market are designed to fall outside the specific EU consumer protection relating to timeshare, either because they are timeshare-like, such as holiday clubs that do not specify a particular property under the contract, or because the contracts are of less than 36 months' duration. Providers seem to use both those devices to avoid coming within the scope of the EU timeshare directive, which provides the right to cancel contracts.

For many years, consumer bodies have highlighted a range of significant shortcomings in the consumer protection law in this regard, so it comes as no surprise that the Office of Fair Trading reports with alarming regularity that consumer complaints about timeshare continue to increase. In 2000, the complaints totalled 4,860; now, the figure has risen to 6,218. Outside the UK, the European consumer centres report that this is the single largest subject of inquiries from consumers, who often seek help because they want to get out of a very shady deal.

It seemed that the UK Government were on top of the problem and keen to solve it. Just three years ago, the then Consumer Affairs Minister announced a crackdown on unscrupulous holiday timeshare sales techniques. Consultation was promised on a number of key changes, such as widening the scope of timeshare legislation to include holiday and vacation club schemes, floating vessels and timeshares of less than three years' duration, timeshare resales, and protection relating to money paid post sale for items such as maintenance.

At present it seems that all that is likely to materialise in the UK in the face of ongoing consumer detriment is a small change to UK consumers' rights to information about their present cooling-off and cancellation rights. Pulling back from the proposals made three years ago, the DTI only proposes to change the legislation so that instead of customers receiving a separate cancellation notice and form, the notice will be integral to the contract and have a detachable cancellation coupon. While those consumers with cancellation rights may be more likely to be aware of them, it will do nothing to allow those who purchase timeshares that do not fall within the strict limits of the present legislation to cancel after they have experienced the high-pressure sales tactics.

Across the EU, instead of moving to improve this legislation, it seems likely that nothing will happen until it becomes clear whether timeshare problems can be adequately addressed through a proposed framework directive, which will prohibit unfair trading practices but, unfortunately, could take a number of years to appear. In the interim, a self-regulatory code of practice promulgated by the Organisation for Timeshare in Europe has been issued. In fact, it is a collection of so-called codes of ethics relating to different products. Unfortunately, consumer organisations doubt whether the OTE code will ever deliver any tangible benefits.

Indeed, the ECC has provided a joint response, pointing out that the code fails consumers. It says that the code is not consumer friendly. One simple, clear code is needed. The code will only be as affective as its market coverage and enforcement mechanisms. The ECC's experience is that the most problematic firms are not currently and certainly have no intention of becoming members of the OTE. Procedures and commitments on complaint handling and compensation are absent and arrangements for supervision, monitoring and enforcement of the code are either absent or insufficiently transparent to attract confidence. For example, the codes are overseen by an ethics council, but there is no information about how that council will be constituted or whether it will have any independent representation or how cases can be brought to it.

In conclusion, the ECC is extremely unhappy about promoting the proposed code, even if the content is improved considerably, as that could be seen as minimising the extent of problems that consumers face in the market and suggests that the codes are an adequate response. It supports the view that this is a case where a code cannot substitute for effective legislation. An EU directive on timeshares is long overdue.

2.42 pm

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) on the professional way in which he introduced his subject. It establishes a good precedent. We often deal with European legislation at its later stages, but he has taken up a subject where the issues are still being discussed. The Green Paper thinking is still open. There is no Government commitment. There is no directive, certainly on the duty to trade fairly. It is good that we have discussions in this House at this early stage. I do not know whether that was his intention, but it has certainly been the effect and it is welcome.

I share the hon. Gentleman's enthusiasm for putting consumer issues on the agenda. Like the hon. and learned Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston), I feel that the issue has stagnated in recent years. It is fair to give some credit to the Minister. The stop now provisions were a big step forward. I know that she has taken a lot of personal interest in promoting the function of the trading standards officer, which is a low-status backwater in local government that has now been given some valuable impetus and support.

The issue on which I want to focus is specifically the European element. There are good and bad reasons for wanting to introduce consumer provisions at a European level. The good reason is to make the single market work, but the bad reason is that there are people in Brussels who are underemployed and want to create a European framework even though one is not strictly called for. I met some of the people in the division in Brussels about a year ago when the policy strategy was still being drafted, and I had great doubts about whether it was necessary. This is an area of European legislation about which we should be critical and ask whether the principles of subsidiarity are being applied.

On the positive side, there is a case for having a degree of European consumer legislation to make the single market work. There are two basic reasons for that. The

[Dr. Vincent Cable]

first is in the interests of the consumers, so that people have the confidence to buy across national frontiers. Some useful survey work, quoted in the European Commission document, suggests that only 30 per cent. of European citizens have confidence that they will be protected if they buy across frontiers, whereas in the national domain the figure is 60 per cent. There is clearly a consumer reticence issue with which European provisions could help. Secondly, for the single market to work producers need to be confident that they can sell standard products and do not have to produce 15 different variants. That is why it is important to have a set of European safety standards for cars, so that we do not have 15 different versions of the same car, which would undermine the purpose of the single market. Therefore, some degree of European consumer protection is necessary.

The question is then whether the rules should be applied on what insiders would call the mutual recognition principle. In other words, should we accept that the standards of the country of origin should apply or do we need standardisation and harmonisation? In general, the mutual recognition approach is right. It gives producers the confidence that they can sell throughout the whole of Europe and is valuable in preserving some degree of local identity. Consumer protection rules in Germany means that two-for-the-price-of-one discount sales are illegal, whereas we would regard that as a normal and acceptable market practice. People like to hunt around for bargains, and there is no reason why we should have the same approach as the Germans. Some degree of mutual recognition of different standards is desirable, and we should work and fight for it.

However, there are matters on which it is necessary to go beyond that to maintain consumer confidence. Some have already been listed, and timeshare and package holidays are important examples, for the simple reason that many people take their holidays abroad. They are consuming products in a foreign country and will have no consumer protection unless the rules are standardised throughout Europe. In the holiday trade, it would make sense to have not only mutual recognition but some harmonisation of rules. Furthermore, in order to kick start e-commerce, which currently represents only 2 per cent. of business, there needs to be some degree of confidence that if people buy via the internet from another European country, they will have some consumer protection. Otherwise, such trade will not take off.

A market in financial services has been an EU aspiration for which the British have pushed particularly hard. If people choose to buy shares in the German stock market through a German broker or a pension through a French bank based in Paris, they should be able to enjoy the protection, albeit limited, that we enjoy through the financial ombudsman. There should be some standardisation, but there is a delicate balance to be struck between harmonisation, which is necessary in some trades such as travel, and a process that reflects different national standards in other industries. We cannot be dogmatic about this subject.

I want to link those points to the specific issue of the duty to trade fairly. The Minister will remember that when the Enterprise Act 2002 was debated in Parliament, hon. Members of all parties argued that it was a cause that the Government should take up. The hon. and learned Member for Dudley, North has already explained the reasoning behind it—the existence of many dodgy practices just on the border of legality. I wrote to the Minister recently about a lady with Alzheimer's who received one of the posted-in-Belgium letters offering her, if she sent £10, entry into a prize draw to win a Porsche. She had no idea what she was signing: she sent the cheque because she believed that she had to pay a bill. Within weeks, she was receiving 20 follow-up letters a week from people demanding money in the prize draw business. That is an example of the sort of practices being operated on the fringe of the law. It is not being policed, yet there are dozens of such operations.

It was argued in Committee at the time that, rather than try to pick off each of the individual practices through separate pieces of legislation, it would be better to legislate for an overall duty to trade fairly, but the Government rejected that.

Will the Minister explain the Government's position? Having rejected the opportunity to produce British legislation to meet our particular needs, we now run the risk of being subject to Europe-wide legislation, which is not drafted to deal with our specific problems, but incorporates the requisite principle. Will the Government accept that? How will the European move to create a duty to trade fairly sit with the strong pressures exerted in Committee to incorporate the duty into British law? I would be grateful to hear the Minister's response.

Another question about the proposed European directive is how the Government will apply what is known in the trade as the Lamfalussy doctrine? The Europeans are working towards a system in which a general duty is created at European level and subsequently left to codes of practice at a national level. The problem with national codes of practice, as the Minister will know from mortgage regulation, is that they are often applied ineffectively, requiring detailed prescriptive legislation. How will the balance be struck between a European framework and British regulation? Will the degree of delegation of subsidiarity in this sector be sufficient?

Thirdly, how far have the Government gone towards assessing the costs of regulation? We endlessly debate red tape and regulation here. It is now widely accepted that regulation has to be justified with reference to some sort of cost-benefit analysis. Feedback from retail interests with respect to the duty to trade fairly suggests that the legislation is potentially onerous, coming on top of other provisions such as the temporary workers directive. Questions are being asked about whether the EU is carrying out proper evaluation of the costs and benefits. Are the Government carrying out evaluation and how will the tests be applied?

Finally, what of enforcement? As I acknowledged at the outset, the Minister has generally played a positive role in ensuring that the trading standards profession in local government is properly supported. When the legislation is passed, whether at European or British level, it will depend ultimately on the handful of

individuals in every local authority who have the responsibility for enforcing the law. What appreciation has been done of the additional burdens of enforcement? Can the trading standards system cope with it and do the Government have any further plans to strengthen the service?

2.53 pm

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz), who takes a particular interest in these matters, on securing the debate on consumer rights in the EU. I was unusually interested to hear the comments of the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) and I agreed with almost all of them, although not his views on the duty to trade fairly. I was not a member of the Committee that considered the Enterprise Bill, but I was interested in what he had to say. I shall try not to repeat what has been said already.

EU consumer policy and rights have now moved to a central position in EU policy as a whole, largely as a result of the single market. As hon. Members will know, the single market has 370 million consumers, and the United Kingdom has £132 billion-worth of trade with the EU. The Single European Act, which came into force on 1 July 1987, introduced the notion of the consumer into the treaty, and consumer policy became part of the more general policy of completing the single market. In recent years, measures have been taken in a number of areas, some of which we heard about earlier, including toy safety, general product safety, cross-border payment, unfair contract terms, distance selling and timeshares.

Article 153 of the 1997 Amsterdam treaty stated that the

"consumer protection requirements shall be taken into account in defining and implementing other Community policies and activities."

That meant that consumer protection became a key EU objective that had to be taken into account whenever new EU laws were developed. I have mentioned the impact of that in general terms. More specifically, in relation to product safety, European rules guarantee minimum quality standards for food and other goods: a guarantee that must be welcomed by everyone. Furthermore, European rules guarantee greater and fairer competition, and the European Commission acts as a watchdog against collusive agreements between companies and abuse of monopoly position.

Car prices were briefly mentioned earlier in the debate. Hon. Members will remember that, in July last year, the Commission gave permission for car dealers to solicit or open for business anywhere in the EU. That has had a major impact on the pricing of cars in the UK, and presumably elsewhere.

On 7 May last year, the European Commission adopted a new consumer policy strategy. The objectives of that strategy were a high common level of consumer protection, effective enforcement of consumer protection rules, and the involvement of consumer organisations in EU policy.

I shall briefly mention some of the directives that have already been implemented. I was not aware, until I was briefed on this issue, that under the directive on price indications on foodstuffs and non-food products, it is an EU requirement that every food product should carry a best date marking. EU directives also cover misleading advertising and distance selling, unfair terms and consumer contracts, and specific measures protecting purchasers of package tours and timeshares. We heard about that last issue from the hon. Member for—

Jim Sheridan: West Renfrewshire.

Mr. Robathan: The hon. Member for West Renfrewshire (Jim Sheridan).

Jim Sheridan: It is in Scotland.

Mr. Robathan: I am well aware that it is in Scotland. I am not at all sure that I did not live there for a short period, but I was only two or three-years-old at the time, so I cannot remember.

The Timeshare Regulations 1997 implemented the EU's timeshare directive. Those regulations have been useful, although, as we have heard, there have been some problems.

The Conservative party welcomes most of those directives, because we welcome anything that is concerned with good trading practice and with ensuring that consumers are appropriately protected. However, we have concerns about the EU's methods and about consumer protection as a whole. The hon. Member for Twickenham made some good points about civil servants in Brussels looking for things to do because they did not have sufficient work.

My first concern is unequal enforcement in member states. I am not sure how, with subsidiarity, enforcement can be improved. However, the aim must be equal enforcement, not just because that is why there are international agreements, but for cross-border trading. We know that, in the single market, the financial services and insurance market has not been as free as it should have been.

Interestingly, if we look at the single market scorecard, the UK has been a good implementer of directives. The first scoreboard was published in November 1997, shortly after the Government came to power, when the UK was ranked second in transposition. By the general election of 2001, we had dropped to 12th in the European Union, but by May last year we had gone up to fifth place. The UK has a reasonable record of implementing directives under Conservative and Labour Governments. There is nothing to be ashamed of: indeed, we should be proud of it, but we should beware of gold-plating legislation.

Secondly, as the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith said in respect of credit card users, UK regulation is often better than EU regulation. As the hon. and learned Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston) said, the UK has had a good record in that respect in the past 30 years.

My final concern is that we should be wary of over-regulation because there is a balance between proper consumer protection and an unnecessary, onerous regulatory burden on business. Will the Minister explain the Government's position on the guarantees directive, which is probably still in her pending tray?

Mr. Lazarowicz: I think that all hon. Members oppose gold-plating or unnecessary regulations

[Mr. Lazarowicz]

emanating from Europe or elsewhere. Given the positive list of measures from which consumers in this country have benefited because of European initiatives, to which the hon. Gentleman referred at the start of his contribution, can he identify any gold-plating of regulations in consumer affairs by the European Union?

Mr. Robathan: That is a good question. I shall go back to my office and look for several such examples, but I cannot give any at the moment.

Small businesses are groaning under regulatory burdens, as the Minister knows from listening to representations from business organisations. It behoves us not to pile regulation on business, however good the intention may be, and to ensure that there is a proper balance between preventing sharks and cowboys taking advantage of vulnerable people and recognising the importance of business initiatives and improving economic prosperity.

I am not a lawyer, unlike the hon. and learned Member for Dudley, North, but we should all remember the old adage of caveat emptor, and exercise caution. My elderly father, who sadly died a couple of years ago, was persuaded by a cowboy to tarmac his drive, at huge cost. The tarmac broke up the week after it was laid. I tried to get the police to take an interest in the matter, but without success. My father may have been old, but his mind was not feeble and he had entered into a contract.

We welcome EU and international action to stand by consumer protection regulations that benefit business and the consumer. We would be wary of any EU directives that are unnecessary, or that reduce good consumer protection practice current in the UK. We recognise that sharks, cowboys and crooks will always try to make a quick buck, perhaps using modern technology and the internet. We should be vigilant when facing changing circumstances.

3.3 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Miss Melanie Johnson): I join hon. Members in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) on securing the debate on this important subject. As the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) remarked, it gives us an opportunity to have an early debate on matters being considered by the European Union.

My hon. Friend is right to focus on European consumer issues, and I welcome the opportunity to say why my Department and I are working hard to raise the profile of consumers in Europe. One of the United Kingdom's key objectives is to put confident and protected consumers at the heart of our competition regime. Several hon. Members mentioned the role of the Enterprise Act 2002 in that respect. We have done much to create a world-class competition regime, and our aim is to complement it by creating a world-class consumer protection regime. I reassure my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston) that that is our domestic objective. Of course, the two work together. Confident consumers drive innovation and promote a dynamic and productive economy.

Getting the balance right means empowering consumers as we push ahead with broader economic objectives. Whenever possible, protection needs to be EU-wide or international, because consumers increasingly purchase from overseas or from within EU boundaries, for example on the internet. That enhances competition and gives consumers access to a wider choice of suppliers, and the market will be even larger following enlargement. However, if consumers are to have the confidence to make effective use of those opportunities—the hon. Member for Twickenham commented on this—they need to know that they have appropriate rights in the event that things go wrong. That links in to practices such as alternative dispute resolution, which I shall touch on briefly in a moment.

I want to say something about our overall objectives for the new EU. The EU has made a huge contribution to consumer protection. Consumer policy has developed alongside the progressive establishment of the internal market. Indeed, it is clear from work currently being undertaken by the Commission that it is the internal market in services that is lagging behind, and there are many difficult issues with that. Consumer rights to information, education and representation are enshrined in article 153 of the treaty, and EU consumer protection directives have fleshed out some of the detail of those rights.

The development of EU consumer policy in the UK has bolstered our existing consumer protection systems, but in many countries EU-inspired legislation provides more or less the only protection that consumers have. Our stop now orders have been a big step forward in advancing consumer protection throughout Europe, and for UK consumers in particular. Since last June, the UK trading standards agencies have used stop now orders in more than 50 cases, but that underestimates the actual role of stop now orders, many of which have been used as negotiating tools to ensure that unfair or illegal practices are ended.

The EU is about to change fundamentally. New countries are joining and they will bring new markets with differing structures into the Union. We must continue to ensure high standards of consumer protection throughout the EU as the single market begins this dramatic change, which will result in it having more consumers than the US and Japan put together.

We have a clear set of objectives for consumer protection in the new Europe. We want existing regulations to be simplified and clarified. We want the consumer voice to be heard in EC policy-making, and to ensure that any changes to EC policy are based on a firm foundation of evidence. We also want those policies to be backed up by effective enforcement mechanisms. Considerable activity is taking place in Europe at the moment, and we are pleased to see that much of it is in line with UK objectives.

I want briefly to respond to the point made by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Dudley, North. He asked why we were waiting for things to be done in Europe. Obviously, for reasons that I have sketched out, many things need to be done on a Europe-wide basis, so if measures are to be effective, it is only practical to look to the EU as a vehicle for introducing some key aspects of consumer protection. That is especially relevant to timeshare.

The European Commission's consumer policy strategy for the next four years is to be welcomed. The strategy aims to integrate consumer policy into EU policy areas, such as transport, competition and the internal market. We have been advocating such joined-up working for a long time, and it reflects thinking in the UK.

The general duty to trade fairly was the first issue that my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith raised and about which others have commented. The Commission's strategy is to achieve a higher common level of consumer protection. A key element of it is the Green Paper on consumer protection, in which the Commission suggested a new approach to EU consumer protection in the form of a wide-ranging, so-called framework directive with a general duty to trade fairly—or a general duty not to trade unfairly.

We welcome the Green Paper's objective of making existing legislation and the internal market work better for consumers and business. However, we must ensure that such a directive is justified by well-quantified evidence, that we limit the potential for adding regulation and increasing internal market barriers and, crucially, that any new rules will be properly enforceable.

The hon. Member for Twickenham and others mentioned the work that was done and the examples that were produced during consideration of the Enterprise Bill. We have carefully reviewed the dossier of case studies that the National Consumer Council and others have produced, and our impression still is that many of the cases cited are covered by existing legislation. I believe that I gave the Committee that information at the time.

We must also consider whether the problem is one of enforcement rather than a need for new legislation. There may well have been a problem in the case of the father of the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan), even if he had not signed the contract or something inappropriate or improper had been done that was, in fact, covered by legislation. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Dudley, North cited the case of an 83-year-old. The issue for elderly people is one of enforcement as much as failures in legislation.

The UK is one of two member states that do not have a general duty to trade fairly. However, it is easier for each member state to arrive at a definition of "fairly" than it is to agree across the EU on such a definition. That problem must be addressed.

There are also different legal and redress systems among the member states, and we must focus as much effort as we possibly can on preventing problems arising in the first place. I share the concerns of all hon. Members about the treatment of vulnerable consumers and the redress that is available to them. Such people would rather avoid the problem than have to deal with some redress mechanism when they experience unfairness or difficulty.

We have maintained our reserve on the principle of the general duty to trade fairly on the grounds that we want to produce a provision that is workable, enforceable and practical, and that provides a clear definition for businesses and genuine protection to consumers who trade or buy across borders. The definition of "fairly" must be applied on a common basis in all member states.

Ross Cranston: I accept my hon. Friend's point that enforcement is crucial to consumer protection. Without enforcement, the laws on the statute books are absolutely worthless, although they might produce an educative effect.

The consumer contracts directive covers unfair terms. It includes a wide duty to act fairly and in good faith, and not to the detriment of consumers. That has been adopted in all member states, as it had to be. There was not the same difficulty in implementing that, although on the Minister's argument it was a vague provision, so why should there be difficulty with the duty to trade fairly?

Miss Johnson: To answer my hon. Friend's point, it is necessary to consider the issue historically. We are now in a slightly different time, with much more cross-border trading than there was a few years ago when the unfair contract terms directive came into force. There is now, too, much more buying of goods and services over the internet, which raises further issues. The duty in that directive was a very specific one, focused on contract terms. We are discussing a very general duty, and we are concerned, in this as in other fields, because it is often still quite difficult—the timeshare directive is a case in point—for provisions that are genuinely meaningful to consumers to be enforced across different member states.

For all those reasons, we want to see real, practical issues addressed in the discussions. That is the UK's position. The hon. Member for Twickenham was a little unkind in saying that the Government are opposed to the general duty. The Government's line has always been—this was my expressed view when we considered the Enterprise Bill—that we must consider what we are trying to tackle, and how it can best be tackled effectively. We are handling the negotiations on the general duty to trade fairly on that basis. Of course, we have to ensure that businesses are aware of the definitions so that they can be sure that they comply with the law, especially as many business transactions take place across various different member states, as several hon. Members have mentioned.

Turning to the consumer credit directive, I welcome the concerns that consumer organisations have raised. Our officials are in regular contact with the organisations and with representatives of the lending industry to ensure that our negotiations address the points raised. I have considerable sympathy with the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith and by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Dudley, North on such matters as the promotion of responsible lending and borrowing. We want to see all loans secured on property excluded from the scope of the directive, a point that my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith made.

We also want credit unions to be exempted from the scope of the directive, and we are fighting hard to ensure that we maintain the joint and several liability protections that currently govern credit card use in the

[Miss Johnson]

UK. This is an example of where European legislation could be in danger of watering down current protections in the UK. We want to see a levelling up, not a levelling down, which is the basis of all the work behind our discussions.

We are certainly not prepared to see this important and valuable piece of consumer protection removed. Our aim is to get the best possible outcome, and I was delighted recently to chair a seminar for several MEPs and other interested parties in Brussels, which was attended by representatives of the credit industry and people with a particular knowledge of and concern in the matter. Some effective presentations were made about concerns such as those that hon. Members have rightly raised in this debate.

On redress, as Members have said, effective enforcement by public authorities is vital. We also encourage codes of practice and self-regulation. As part of that approach, we believe that alternative dispute resolution schemes, such as ombudsmen and arbitration, can be efficient and low-cost ways of settling contractual disputes between consumers and business. The United Kingdom is a firm supporter and leading contributor to the European Extra-Judicial Network, which covers all member states, plus Iceland and Norway. It will help consumers to access ADR schemes if they have disputes with traders in other member states. It is not yet fully operational, but the UK national clearing house, which is run by Citizens Advice, is already handling cases and has dealt with about 200 to date. Throughout Europe, some 1,100 consumer cases have been dealt with by EEJ-Net.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Renfrewshire (Jim Sheridan) raised issues on the timeshare directive. The directive is a good example of a popular cross-border product, and changing UK law alone would not help consumer detriment. The importance of effective cross-border legislation remains high. The Commission proposes to review the directive, and we are working closely with it to ensure that consumer protection is balanced with industry competitiveness. Meanwhile, existing legislation needs to be more effectively enforced because, as my hon. Friend said, it seems that consumers still find enforcement of their rights difficult in this area.

The stop now orders give new powers to EU enforcement authorities to tackle cross-border disputes. The Office of Fair Trading has already begun to work closely with its European counterparts to crack down on rogue timeshare traders who target UK holidaymakers. That is particularly true in Spain, and is an example of effective working with another member state's enforcement authorities to secure the protection that our consumers have every right to expect and should receive under the law.

There are limits to the extent that legislation can tackle the problems because it can quickly become outdated, which goes back to the point made by the hon. Member for Twickenham about the Lamfalussy principles, and about self-regulation and secondary legislation rather than primary legislation. The difficulty with primary legislation is that it can rapidly become outdated in today's modern world where matters move quickly and legislation does not always move as quickly. Rogue traders, as my hon. Friend the Member for West Renfrewshire said, are inventive in finding ways to circumvent the law.

The timeshare industry could do a lot more with better self-regulation. That would be to its advantage and it is important to provide more information for consumers, but I am pleased that the industry has taken note and begun to introduce further codes of practice. We are examining that further. The best means of tackling rogue traders and bad practice is to have well-informed consumers, so an information campaign conducted in partnership with the Office of Fair Trading is being undertaken to get our message across to consumers and to give them as much security as can be achieved.

It is important to recognise that there are limits to the protection that legislation can provide people, because, sadly, rogues quickly invent ways of getting round those provisions. That may be a point that hon. Members want to reinforce, and I would not disagree with them about the attraction of a general duty not to trade unfairly.

I am pleased to note that regulations under the sale of consumer goods and associated guarantees directive were presented to Parliament on 11 December 2002 and will come into force on 31 March 2003. The regulations make manufacturers' guarantees legally binding, although we were not aware that that was a problem in the UK. None the less, that sets the record straight.

Effective enforcement is an absolute priority for the UK, and I am pleased that it is being increasingly taken up by the Commission. We warmly welcome its focus on the mechanisms of protection, which mirrors our priorities. Those mechanisms will be relied upon more heavily to deliver protection as the EU enlarges and shopping across borders becomes ever more prevalent and popular.

The Green Paper on consumer protection set out the Commission's thinking on a possible framework for improving co-operation between EU consumer enforcement authorities. We expect that to be worked up into a separate draft regulation early this year. We look forward to that development, because there is much more to be done in improving communication and co-operation between European enforcement agencies. The UK has a strong tradition of consumer protection through public bodies, so we are in a good position actively to support the proposal, which we shall continue to do.

On the general duty to trade fairly, the Government are pressing the European Commission for an extended impact assessment on additional burdens and so-called red tape. We will also prepare our own impact assessment, which will include more on enforcement. My officials are in close touch with trading standards, which is now represented by the Local Authorities Coordinators of Regulatory Services. It has not expressed concern about additional burdens. We should demand that the EU and in particular the Commission carry out comprehensive impact assessments when they introduce legislation. Impact assessments, evidence-based policy making and effective enforcement are all key issues.

Our officials work closely with the European Commission in discussions on a proposal for a general duty. In particular, an expert group has been set up to

consider national law and how the EU regime will interact with domestic law. The European Commission has also begun a study of national systems with prominent academics, including an academic from the UK.

Before I conclude, I shall address the point about scam prize draw mail shots. Last summer, I launched a campaign warning against scam prize draws. It obtained quite a lot of media coverage, including a number of television interviews. We have now distributed tens of thousands of warning leaflets and posters via citizens advice bureaux and others. It is possible to take action by taking complaints to the Advertising Standards Authority. The ASA has also worked with the Royal Mail to curtail the activities of various companies, as has the Office of Fair Trading. It has been possible to close down quite a lot of scams, but the inventiveness of rogues will always drive things forward to the detriment of the consumer. Consumer understanding and education are as important as consumer protection.

We are working hard in Europe to push those objectives forward and to influence the agenda. As we have seen, there is much activity around consumer rights and protection, and we are keen to see that go forward. Where we are cautious, we will ensure that our reservations are well articulated and taken into account by other member states in the Commission, and that protections that the UK has enjoyed are maintained. The UK is a leader in Europe in evidence-based policy making, workable policy and the enforcement of policy. British consumers are well served by recent legislation and by the Europe-wide activities that we undertake on their behalf.

Mr. Frank Cook (in the Chair): Having concluded today's exchanges on consumer rights in the EU, we must turn our attentions to the next topic. Will those Members who are not staying to participate in the next debate leave the Chamber quietly and expeditiously?

Dewhirsts (Ashington)

3.28 pm

Mr. Denis Murphy (Wansbeck): Thank you, Mr. Cook. I thank the House for granting me this important and timely debate.

In November last year, Dewhirsts, which is a major clothing manufacturer, announced the closure of a factory in Ashington, Northumberland, with the loss of 425 highly skilled jobs. In the next few weeks, manufacturing will cease and the machinery will be stripped out and sent to a new factory in north Africa. Since the announcement of the closure, several agencies have come together to try to save at least some of the jobs. The GMB union initially suggested that it might be possible for the company to secure public procurement contracts. Sadly, when I had a meeting with the company's board, they were pessimistic about whether public procurement could offer any realistic hope of keeping the factory open. The first workers will leave this week, and production will cease in a few weeks' time, causing much hardship to many families and dealing a further blow to a fragile local economy.

I realise that my hon. Friend the Minister may not be able to deal with all the issues that I intend to raise today, but I am sure that he will understand why I am seeking urgent Government assistance for my constituency.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Would the hon. Gentleman confirm that the closure that he describes will also have a drastic effect in neighbouring areas, such as Lynemouth in my constituency, and that any measures that Ministers are prepared to consider to help to alleviate that, in Ashington or nearby, would be beneficial to the whole area, where there is considerable unemployment and poverty?

Mr. Murphy: I certainly agree with the right hon. Gentleman. Indeed, when I met representatives of the work force, a number came from his constituency. It will have a drastic effect on those areas.

According to the latest published figures, Wansbeck has the second lowest number of new business start-ups in the United Kingdom, and there has been little new business investment in the district for several years. That partly reflects a general downturn in inward investment projects, but it is also because an enterprise zone is only five or six miles away. It should have been extended into the Wansbeck area. Although unemployment has declined in recent years, the rate of decline has been much lower than the regional and national averages. Wansbeck's unemployment rate is still two-and-a-half times the national average. The Wansbeck action team for jobs has been a welcome addition to the employment services since its introduction in 2000. During the year to October 2002, the action team helped 321 residents back into employment. Key to the success of that team have been the efforts to place people in employment in growth areas outside the district, such as Cramlington and north Tyneside. Although people moving into new jobs is always welcome, we must provide jobs in communities where people live. That will reduce dependence on the motor car and help to promote investment in town centres or edge-of-town business locations.

[Mr. Murphy]

A recent report by Sheffield Hallam university examined the real level of unemployment, taking into account incapacity benefit recipients and those who had retired early. It estimated that unemployment in Wansbeck was 16.2 per cent. as at April 2002. On that measure, Wansbeck is one of the 30 weakest labour markets in England and Wales.

Apart from the welcome commitment from priority sites to build speculative business accommodation on the Wansbeck business park, private sector commercial and industrial investment has been extremely limited over several years. The district has been unable to bring on stream a new supply of serviced sites and premises to compete effectively for new business investment, simply because property market returns are generally unattractive to the private sector.

Deprivation levels in Wansbeck are acute. The district is ranked as 17th most deprived in the United Kingdom according to the index of multiple deprivation that was produced in 2000.

I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will want to look more closely at some of the problems that I have outlined, and I shall be happy to provide him with the relevant information after the debate.

I want to draw the Minister's attention to some of the issues that could play a major role in the economic recovery plan for Wansbeck. We need a commitment from the Government to maintain the Wansbeck action team for jobs beyond its current March 2004 lifespan. The team has been very successful in meeting its clients into work targets over the past two years, in difficult labour market conditions. We need reassurance that that valued local service, which makes a valuable contribution to the district's neighbourhood renewal and economic strategies, will be maintained beyond 2004. Despite the good work of the team, the district's continuing levels of unemployment show that a much longer-term commitment is required.

Much of the success of the action team has relied on finding jobs for residents outside the district in areas such as Cramlington and north Tyneside where property markets, business investment and new job opportunities have been more readily available. Plans to service and promote new investment in North Seaton business park in Ashington need to be vigorously pursued. Although the Government seem to be moving away from the idea of enterprise zones, we need a successor to that scheme.

If the Government concede that special help is still needed in areas of acute deprivation, North Seaton business park and the rest of Wansbeck's commercial and industrial sites should be considered a priority for any new scheme—or even the current scheme—being extended into Wansbeck. In the pre-Budget report in November 2002, the Government announced their intention to provide additional support for businesses in the UK's 2000 most deprived communities, which would be termed enterprise areas.

Of Wansbeck's 16 wards, 14 are in the list of 2000 most deprived wards in the UK. Given the almost universal coverage in Wansbeck, I would like to see the whole district declared an enterprise area. A specialist enterprise team should be established and resourced, to work closely with the action team for jobs and the local strategic partnerships. Flexible budgets and local discretion have worked well under the action for jobs approach.

As a further strengthening of the enterprise area package, I would like the district council to be able to offer a much wider basis for discretionary rate relief, funded by the Government, to help safeguard local businesses and to stimulate investment in the enterprise areas. Recent announcements indicate that the Government intend to introduce several pilot initiatives to support further people who are out of work. I welcome those initiatives.

New programmes should be designed to offer intensive support in neighbourhoods with high concentrations of unemployment, and they should allow access to the new deal after only three months of unemployment. I welcome moves to streamline the various regeneration programmes. The national neighbourhood renewal strategy recognised that achieving sustained and significant progress in such areas required a 10 to 20-year perspective.

In small areas such as Wansbeck with uniformly high levels of deprivation, and where ward boundaries mean very little in delivering programmes, we need a wider commitment to neighbourhood renewal. It is essential that the Government commit to continuing funding well beyond the March 2006 limit and channel additional resources to ensure employment targets are met.

In recognition of low business formation rates and the lack of an enterprise culture, and—I am pleased to say—in line with Government policy to introduce enterprise to the high school curriculum, I request support for the planned bid to establish enterprise college status by St. Benet Biscop high school in Bedlington. Additionally, I request that the Ashington education achievement zone be considered to introduce pilot initiatives to promote enterprise in Ashington schools.

The towns of Ashington and Bedlington have undergone massive change, with huge private sector housing developments being built during the last 20 years. The district needs to continue to develop. Plans have been prepared during the past two years to achieve significant investment in Ashington town centre, in Bedlington and in Newbiggin-by-the-Sea.

Complementary plans to develop strategic new housing and recreational facilities in a village-style design have been prepared by the private sector. I request Government grant support for the district council to co-ordinate a multi-agency development team to assist key infrastructure costs for all the schemes.

The coal industry still plays an important role in the local economy. More than 400 miners still work at Ellington colliery. Were it not for the introduction nationally of the operating aid scheme, Ellington would now be closed. UK Coal now considers it to be one of its best collieries. We need to secure a long-term future for that mine. A more generous investment aid scheme would assist Ellington in accessing coal reserves that could keep the colliery open for a further 20 years. The coal industry faces a crisis nationally, with many collieries facing early closure. I realise that my hon.

Friend the Minister will not be able to address those problems here today. I simply stress how important Ellington is to the local economy.

The Government have invested much time and effort and many resources in addressing some of my constituency's problems. All that I ask today is that the current schemes should be strengthened and extended, and that extra resources, where necessary, should be invested in the area. It is fairly obvious that until the new business parks and industrial sites come on stream, people will have to travel further afield to work. The Employment Service has a team of dedicated people working in the Dewhirst factory assisting people with retraining, the preparation of new CVs and identifying available jobs.

As people will have to travel further to work, it is essential to strengthen our public transport links. There has never been a better opportunity to reopen the Ashington, Blyth and Tyne railway line to passenger services. It was one of the priorities of the south-east Northumberland-north Tyneside regeneration initiative, SENNTRI. That has identified three important transport corridors, alongside which economic development could take place: the A19, the A189—both important dual carriageways—and the reopened Ashington, Blyth and Tyne line. All three need to be supported.

The recent closure of Blyth power station was another blow to the area. It is currently being demolished, and could provide the most important development in our region for decades. It has access via a deep-water port, a dual carriageway and a railway link. If it were developed correctly, the site could eventually provide thousands of jobs in a beautiful, landscaped environment.

The quality of life for the great majority in Wansbeck is very high. We have a wide range of quality housing and live in an area of outstanding natural beauty, only 20 minutes from what will be the next European city of culture. The extra Government assistance that I am seeking is to ensure that all the local population can share that quality of life. We need to demonstrate to those working at Dewhirst that the Government want to help them to go straight into new jobs.

To that end, my final request today is for the Government to assist in the economic recovery of the area by relocating some Government offices. I understand that inquiries have been made about office accommodation in Northumberland and I urge my hon. Friend to use his good offices to press for an early positive decision. Success in that would send out all the right messages, and I am sure that, along with the measures that I have suggested, it would encourage much more private sector investment.

When I visited the Dewhirst factory in Ashington a few weeks ago, I met many highly skilled and dedicated people, all of whom want to continue working and supporting their families. I ask on their behalf that the Government do everything in their power to ensure that those people are placed in jobs as soon as possible.

3.43 pm

The Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness (Mr. Stephen Timms): Let me begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck (Mr. Murphy) on securing the debate, and paying tribute to him for the hard work that he has done over a long period on the future of the Dewhirst factory in Ashington, and particularly his work with the GMB. He came to see me with the union regional secretary in November. I know that he has put a great deal of work into looking for a viable future for the Ashington factory. It is through no want of trying on his part or on the part of the GMB that it now looks certain that redundancies will be made next month.

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) intervened earlier, and I note the presence of my hon. Friends the Members for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell), for Easington (Mr. Cummings) and for Tynemouth (Mr. Campbell). That reflects the wide impact of the proposed closure at Ashington on the regional economy, and I want to put on record my sympathy for all the employees and their families who face the prospect of redundancy in the next few weeks.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck graphically described the problems faced in his area. He said how much he welcomed the comments of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor in the pre-Budget report last autumn, when he spoke about addressing precisely the issues that we are discussing in parts of the country that still have high unemployment, despite the reduction in unemployment nationally. On several occasions, my right hon. Friend has set out his commitment to creating a culture of enterprise in every part of the country so that people will be confident about setting up businesses, even in areas where it was assumed that one would never get a job. There will certainly be more business start-ups, as my hon. Friend suggested. I agree that the measures set out by the Chancellor hold much promise for constituencies such as his, with the characteristics that he described.

My hon. Friend also drew attention to the importance of ensuring that good transport links are in place, and I agree. It is often the case that jobs are available not far from the areas with the most severe problems. If we can match those jobs with proper transport connections—good work is now being done on that—that will offer us an attractive way forward, too.

My hon. Friend mentioned the regeneration initiative and the responsibility for specialist schools. I agree with him about the importance of enterprise status for local schools, but, as he indicated, those are matters for other Ministers. However, I shall ensure that his remarks are drawn to the attention of my right hon. and hon. Friends who have responsibility for those issues, so that they can take account of the telling points that he has made.

I am responding to the debate because of my responsibility at the Department of Trade and Industry for the textile industry, and I want to make several points about the Government's response to the closure that we are discussing. The Government are not in a position to intervene in the commercial decisions of individual companies, but there is much that we can and will do to help those who face redundancy as a result of the closure in Ashington. As my hon. Friend knows, Jobcentre Plus has designated the Dewhirst's factory in Ashington as significant to the labour market, which means that employees who are made redundant will be eligible for early access to a range of Government programmes and services. They will have access to the programme centres, where those who need immediate

[Mr. Stephen Timms]

help can get advice on CV preparation, job applications and interview techniques. Those who are eligible will also have early access to the new deal for young people, which gives those in that age group the opportunity to access the full new deal programme of support. It offers a range of employment, education and training opportunities.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): My hon. Friend talks about getting people back into work, and that is all well and good. We had the same situation in Blyth Valley a few years ago, when we lost a lot of jobs, but in my area, we are losing the jobs and not getting them back because all the money goes to the enterprise zones. South-east Northumberland and the rest of Northumberland are not part of an enterprise zone and we do not get the money that enterprise zones get. All the jobs are there, but workers in our area do not have jobs. My hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck and I are saying that we need jobs in our areas.

Mr. Timms: I agree with my hon. Friend about the need both for jobs in the immediate area and for people in the area to have access to jobs in other areas, if they are available. There have been no new enterprise zone designations since 1996. The Chancellor has set out thinking about how we can promote business start-ups and new enterprise in areas such as those that my hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck and I represent. That approach is much more promising than those applied by the previous Government. We need to create many more new jobs in the immediate area. In opening the debate, my hon. Friend set out a number of proposals, with which I have a lot of sympathy, and which reflect the work that the Government are doing to achieve exactly such results.

We will ensure that those made redundant at Ashington will have early access to the programmes I have described, including workplace learning for adults, which will provide short, job-focused training and longer occupational training. A local Jobcentre Plus liaison officer has been appointed to support those made redundant, and to act as point of contact. Dewhirst has, I am pleased to say, agreed to provide office accommodation at the factory, and it is intended that Jobcentre Plus staff will be on site from tomorrow in order to start their work. They will make presentations to groups of employees about benefit entitlement, training and work opportunities, and will give information on other organisations that may be able to help.

There will be information from the Inland Revenue on new tax credits, so that people will understand their position if they move on to other employment. For those who request it, there will be a counselling service that will include skills analysis to help people ascertain future job goals. There will be access to specialist support, such as disability employment advice, lone parent advisors, and the Wansbeck action team staff, in cases in which it can help. There will also be direct internet access at the site to the Jobcentre Plus vacancy database, which will provide detailed job vacancy information and a job-matching service, through Jobseeker Direct. A wide range of support will be provided on the site from tomorrow to those facing redundancy in the next few weeks.

The textiles industry continues to be important for the UK. It contributes 0.8 per cent. of GDP, accounts for £15 billion in sales, employs some 250,000 people, and exports goods to the tune of more than £7 billion. That is why the Department of Trade and Industry is committed to helping the sector to improve its productivity, and to remain competitive in the tough global marketplace in textiles that now prevails, which is the background to the closure that we are debating. The Department will continue to support close work with the textile and clothing strategy group, which includes representatives of employers, trade unions, the retailers and the universities, to work together on the issues that the industry faces. This is a tough period of change. There have been substantial and severe job losses, such as those at Ashington, as manufacturers adjust to meet the challenges that they face.

In the context of Ashington, my hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck has raised the issue of public procurement for UK-based manufacturers. We cannot pursue a buy British policy. Public purchases must observe European Union rules and the Treasury's value-for-money guidelines, and it is in the public's interest that they should do so. However, it is important to recognise that value for money is not the same as the cheapest unit price, and that there is scope for UK textile and clothing companies to compete more effectively in tendering for public sector contracts within the European and Treasury framework. If something costs 50 per cent. more than the alternative, but lasts 100 per cent. longer, there is a clear value-for-money choice to be made.

We must ensure that public sector procurers are able to make such choices, and are working with the industry through the textile and clothing strategy group to find ways in which to help UK suppliers to be more successful when they tender for public sector contracts. We have had meetings with senior figures in the industry to discuss the impact of current public procurement policy. Those have highlighted the opportunities for UK suppliers that are prepared to raise their game to meet the purchasing needs of public purchasers. We also supported the conference on public procurement organised by the GMB in November 2001, which was addressed by my noble Friend Lord Sainsbury and representatives of the Ministry of Defence and the Prison Service, both of which procure garments on a big scale. The conference highlighted the opportunities available to textile and clothing companies tendering for public contracts to identify the issues that have caused some UK suppliers to struggle to win contracts, and the actions needed to reverse the trend.

We have produced a good practice guide on value for money to remind public purchasers of the key element in the Treasury guidelines, because we recognise that the industry needs to make changes. Equally, procurers and those responsible for procurement in the public sector need to be able to make qualitative assessments about value for money when they are looking to award contracts for textiles or clothing. That has been widely distributed. Similarly, the Small Business Service and the Office of Government Commerce have produced detailed guidance for firms wanting advice on how to tender for public contracts.

We want to see dynamic, competitive markets operating throughout the economy. That encourages firms to bear down on costs and improve their efficiency and enhances their competitiveness in the home and overseas markets. However, in markets in which the Government are a major procurer of goods and services, our actions can have a big influence on the market and might impact on competition and on the long-term value for money that that can secure for procurement, ensuring value for money and encouraging strong competition go hand in hand. We welcome the Competition Commission's recent recommendations to improve competition in procurement and have asked the Office of Government Commerce to consider what further steps can be taken to increase competition and to encourage better long-term capacity planning in markets in which the Government have significant purchasing power. For example, advance information for all the potential suppliers about opportunities that are about to come up could be improved. We have also asked the Office of Government Commerce to build on its recent work to enable small and medium enterprises to compete for Government contracts to deliver value for money. The office of development and commerce will take those issues forward in consultation with a group that involves the Treasury, the DTI and the Small Business Service and will report to the Government in the summer. I shall ensure that the interests of the UK textile and clothing industry are represented.

The textile and clothing strategy group's recent report, "Making it Happen", which I launched in July, outlines the progress that has been made since the launch of the national strategy. It also charts the great challenges that the industry faces, underpinning the closure that we have debated. It describes an industry that is still going through profound structural change to enable it to compete in the global economy, and Ashington provides stark evidence of the scale of the change. That is deeply concerning for those who are affected. There is some reassurance to be gained from the industry view that it is not in terminal decline—it is undergoing a process of change as it faces global challenges. The industry has reaffirmed its belief, through the "Making it Happen" report, that the strategy blueprint remains the right direction for it to follow, so that it has a sustainable and competitive future. We will continue to work with the group to ensure that that happens. A great deal has still to be done, but with the industry and the Government working together we are confident that we can achieve it.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck for giving the House the opportunity to consider the particular problems facing his area that arise from the closure. I hope that the measures that I have set out, and the ideas that he proposed to which other Ministers can respond, will enable my hon. Friend's constituents to face the future with much greater confidence than would otherwise be the case.

Mr. Frank Cook (in the Chair): Order. We now come to a debate on national health service provision in Sutton. I ask right hon. and hon. Members who do not wish to participate in that debate to leave the Chamber quietly and expeditiously.

NHS Provision (Sutton)

4 pm

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): I welcome the opportunity for such a timely debate. Much is happening in the national health service economy locally, and I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) will seek to catch your eye, Mr. Cook—provided that I do not speak for too long.

First, I would like to raise the subject of the review of Epsom and St. Helier trust hospital services in Sutton and Epsom. I support much of what is proposed; the modernisation of hospitals and a new approach to delivering health care within the community is welcome, provided that it is properly funded and does not lead to the loss of essential services. The trust would like to make changes; it does not want hospitals that are too full, that often treat patients who would be better cared for outside the hospital or closer to home; nor does it want long waiting times, operations being cancelled and so on—things that I and my hon. Friend, too, would like changed.

A key element in the proposal is for there to be significant investment in primary care—that is care provided in the community by GPs, health visitors, district nurses and so on. That, too, I wholeheartedly support. It would lead to many more services that are traditionally hospital-based being delivered locally through other services such as care centres, community hospitals, or whatever one chooses to call them.

I assume that that proposal is in line with Government policy. The Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Salford (Ms Blears) nods her head. If that is so, I would be interested to know how capital will be raised for the project and what guarantees the Government will give the project as it develops over the next seven to 10 years. I hope that authorisation will be quickly forthcoming at each decision-making point. I would also like the Minister to explain a little of the process that will be used to rank that proposal against the myriad of other proposals that will be seeking access to private funds—or Government funds, should any be available.

Finally, I wonder whether the proposals will be put at risk or jeopardised by the current financial position of the trust, as it has an overspend of £1.6 million. Will that affect the proposals?

The most visible impact of the proposals, should they come to fruition, will be the reorganisation of hospitals, the provision of cottage hospitals or community hospitals and—this is highly likely—the provision of a single acute centre. My family and I live in my constituency. Both my children were born at St. Helier hospital. We have made regular use of its children's accident and emergency department; and we were very happy with the level care provided on every occasion. My personal preference would clearly be for the acute hospital to be built on the site of St. Helier's. Although the building has served its purpose, it is not ideal in this day and age. However, it is important that arguments about where the acute hospital will be rebuilt do not detract from the priority that must be given to providing the best-quality patient care. Clearly, that will include

[Tom Brake]

several factors, not just accessibility but also the experience of medical and other staff, the availability of consultants, doctors, nurses and so on.

So far, there has been reasonable consultation involving different organisations and I am satisfied that the process is moving forward in an organised and acceptable fashion. That contrasts with some concerns that I will raise shortly about at least one other local health care organisation that needs to be more open in the way it operates. Whether we are considering these plans or primary care trusts, it is important that the local authority is in a position to perform the scrutiny role. I understand that to recruit one health policy officer would cost in the region of £35,000, something that my local authority and others who will want to do the job of scrutiny properly will find it difficult to fund. Will the Minister use this opportunity to confirm that any funds that will be available as a result of disbanding community health councils will be passed to local authorities so that they can perform that role effectively?

I highlighted the longer-term plans for the Epsom and St. Helier trust, but there is a shorter-term matter that causes concern: the possibility of cuts within the trust. The budget of the Sutton and Merton primary care trust, the local PCT, will rise by 30 per cent. between now and 2006. Although the headline figure is good, compared to other PCTs the picture is less rosy, especially as the Epsom and St. Helier trust is recovering from a poor report from the Commission for Health Improvement and poor star ratings, which have improved in the most recent league table but need to carry on moving in the right direction. I want the Minister to explain what safeguards, if any, are in place to ensure that if the pendulum swings very far in the other direction in terms of the shift to primary care, the acute services do not suffer as a result.

There is one local difficulty in relation to the Epsom and St. Helier trust—the fact that one of the Surrey primary care trusts is not pulling its weight in terms of the financial contribution that it is expected to make; there is a shortfall of a couple of million pounds. Can the Minister say who should play an arbitration role in such disputes, if one PCT says that it will not provide funding but the others will? Someone needs to be able to step in and sort out the mess.

I come now to the openness of the decision-making process in respect of the Sutton and Merton primary care trust. The community health council has been talking with the PCT for several years about the need to be more open, particularly after the Nelson and West Merton PCT was set up. However, there has been a backward step in terms of accountability and openness, as the executive board of the PCT meets in private without any lay people or representatives of the CHC being present. Locality committees, which operate at a lower level, are responsible for drawing up a local development plan, but I understand that the CHC is not involved and apparently NHS solicitors have been asked to consider the matter. Will the Minister comment on the apparent lack of openness and accountability and say whether she supports action to ensure that the PCT is opened up to greater scrutiny?

Dental health care locally and the number of five-year-olds with decayed, missing and filled teeth are an issue. The figures are going in the wrong direction: the number of children suffering from dental decay has increased at a time when the targets for access to dentistry have apparently been met. I hope that the Minister will comment on how that can be the case.

The transfer of the renal transplant unit is also an issue. There are proposals to move some services from St. Helier to St. George's, but I understand that it has recently been shown that the cost of the upgrade that is needed at St. George's to accommodate the transferred service has increased significantly. I wonder whether that means that the plans have been put on hold or whether it is more likely that the service at St. Helier will be retained and the services at St. George's possibly moved there.

Bed-blocking is another issue. My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam may have time to raise the local authority's concerns about the impact that the charges will have on the relationship between the PCT, the Epsom and St. Helier trust, and other health organisations. It is good, but could be affected by the charges.

I hope that the Minister can provide clarification on those points, either now, or shortly in writing.

4.11 pm

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) on securing the debate and selecting this topic. It is a timely debate on the important issue of health care provision in our constituencies and, indeed, in those of a number of other hon. Members present.

I declare a personal interest in that my family has used and benefited from the accident and emergency department for children and the maternity facilities at St. Helier. I therefore have direct experience of them and pay a warm tribute to the hard work that the staff do on behalf of the public, not only in the acute trust, but across the whole health economy in Sutton.

I welcome the increased funding that has been made available for the next three years. It provides a basis for stability of planning. There will always be questions as to whether the funding is adequate, and inevitably I make the point that it is one of the lower increases, but there is extra investment, which is one of the measures that I voted for in the Budget last year.

That said, we must place in a financial context the proposed clinical strategy that the acute trust has been working out with others, not least because at month six the Epsom and St. Helier trust reported that its financial position was an overspend forecast at £1.639 million. I have spoken to the trust more recently to get a fix on the current estimates for the overspend by the end of the financial year, and the figure is about £2 million. That is a serious, ongoing problem for the trust.

As my hon. Friend said, an additional problem is caused by the East Elmbridge and Mid-Surrey primary care trust not picking up all its responsibilities and obligations in terms of the money that it should be paying to the acute trust. That gives an additional financial problem of £2.15 million to the director of finance at that trust in balancing the books and making everything add up.

Those very real pressures make delivery of the trust's clinical services strategy more difficult, particularly the transition that is inevitably involved in the document, in that there is a move from what is in a way a centralised system, under which most care is provided within the acute trust's main buildings, to a more decentralised approach and the use of care centres. That will involve questions such as whether there is dual running of services while we move to the new system and build confidence in it. Where will the money for that come from, given that the trust has to recover its financial position and deal with the £2 million overspend plus the funding difficulties relating to the PCT? It will prove difficult for me, as a Member who last year voted for the tax increases to fund the investment to the NHS, to have to explain to my constituents why later this year my acute trust may have to make cuts in its services to bring its budget back into line. That will be a rather difficult story to tell, but I hope that the Minister will be able to help by providing some answers that I can give to my constituents.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington raised the question of accountability and the transparency of governance of the Sutton and Merton PCT, and I strongly endorse his comments. However, I want to raise briefly the development of systems for new patient and public involvement in the NHS, in particular the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health, which has been told by the Department of Health that it will have only one office in each strategic health authority. How on earth will that one office support all the patients forums in an area? Will the Minister tell us how that will work? Furthermore, why are community health council staff not being transferred to the new structure under TUPE, and why has no budget been announced for the work of that important local body? Why does it appear that local CHC members are being left out in the cold in the development of the new structures? Surely their experience, expertise and knowledge should not be lost to the new structures. It should be garnered and used to ensure that they work.

Sutton needs its own commission office to ensure access for patients and the public. I hope that the Minister will be able to respond to my points and those made by my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington.

4.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): I am delighted to respond to the debate and I congratulate the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) on his openness in welcoming the process that has been undertaken in drawing up the clinical services strategy. I can reassure him that the process has been designed to build on the views of patients, the public and the people who use the services in his community.

I have explored the matter with some of the officials responsible and am heartened that the process has been worked from the bottom up—by asking people what the service should look like in the future and then trying to design the service around their views. That contrasts with the previous process, which took place a couple of years ago and started from the bricks and mortar. It examined the hospitals and institutions that were already in place and the physical location and then tried to design a service from the top down. This process has been different, and there has been a genuine attempt to involve all local stakeholders, including primary care trusts, patients and local authorities, in designing the service. It is at the beginning and is about setting a vision. As both hon. Members have said, it is designed to be developed during the next seven to 10 years, so there is a long way to go in the practical implementation.

The process has been something of a revolution, as the service contemplates many more local care centres rather than the dominance of a large acute sector in the health economy. Much of the health service will move to a situation in which local centres cater for between 50,000 and 100,000 local people and provide a much wider range of services than have previously been available in primary care. We anticipate that GPs and other primary care workers will be doing much of the work that has traditionally taken place inside acute in-patient hospitals, and different ways of working, new skills, more investment and equipment, and much more flexibility in the staff who are employed in the local care centres and their skills will be required to bring about the change. The area in question will be a trailblazer, frontrunner and pioneer of a new way of approaching the design of health care services and their implementation. I would like to place on record my congratulations both to the clinical staff and to the health organisation staff on the imagination and creativity that they brought to bear in the process.

It is important that we try to change the way in which services are delivered for two reasons: first, to relieve the undoubted pressure on acute care and secondly, and equally important, to provide patients with the kind of services that they want in the 21st century. That means trying to give them the right care, in the right place, at the right time. That has not always happened. In future, patients will be more demanding. They will want services provided more quickly. They will want higher standards and they will want to choose which services are provided in their areas. That is exactly what the changes are designed to achieve.

The services in this area are the responsibility of Sutton and Merton PCT. The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) was gracious enough to welcome the massive increase in investment that is going into the PCT. It is something like 30 per cent. over the next three years—a significant increase amounting to approximately £87.5 million. Although there are still pressures on the service, it will give real space for innovative thinking and new ways of delivering services for the PCT to put into place.

The PCT predicts that it will achieve financial balance in the next year, which is a significant improvement over where it was just a few months ago. As the increases in expenditure begin to feed through, it will be in a much more advantageous position. It is also meeting many of its targets. In some cases it is ahead of its targets. It is doing extremely well. The local hospital, which has gone from zero stars to two stars in the last 12 months, again under a new leadership team, is real evidence that progress can be made. In this Chamber today we are debating optimism, rather than some of the pessimism that may be being debated elsewhere in the House. We can see evidence of progress.

[Ms Hazel Blears]

Both hon. Gentlemen raised other important issues. I will do my best to attend to them. I should like to deal first with the two issues raised by the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington. He expressed concern about renal services. At present they are not under threat. The new approach that is envisaged is that out-patient and rehabilitation care will continue to be provided locally, as close to patients as possible, because that is where it is most appropriate. People do not want to have to travel miles for their out-patient care. They want rehabilitation if possible at home or in local centres.

Certainly the renal transplantation service will continue to be at St. George's. That is because it is a regional service. This service is not just for the hon. Gentleman's constituents, but for the whole of the south-east. It is therefore important that those transplantation services are looked at in the context of regional services as a whole, rather than this strategy, which looks at services for the people of Sutton and Cheam. That is why the renal transplantation service is not part of the clinical services strategy review.

The hon. Gentleman's second specific concern was the openness of the PCT in his area. That is an important matter. The Government are committed to trying to engage and involve as many local people as we can in decisions about the shaping and development of services and their priorities. Openness is a key factor. I understand that the PCT holds its board meetings in public and the community health council has been fully involved in all the discussions that have led to the drawing up of the clinical services strategy. They are supportive of the strategy and they have had a real opportunity to be involved.

The hon. Gentleman is asking for the professional executive committee meetings and the local management board committee meetings to be in public too. Clearly there is a debate about whether those are decision-making meetings that should transacted with the public, or whether they are management meetings and therefore less appropriate for that kind of public debate. We need to examine that matter to ensure that we get the right balance.

Clearly in any organisation, certain meetings where decisions are discussed will be internal management meetings. However, decisions should never be reached behind closed doors without dialogue with the public so that they can know what the criteria were, how the decisions were reached and what other options were on the table. I will certainly look at the issue that the hon. Gentleman has raised, but it is never as simple as saying that every meeting should be in public or every meeting should be closed. It is a matter of what business is being transacted and the appropriateness of those meetings.

On a similar matter, the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam raised the important matter of public involvement. He said that the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health would have one office for the whole strategic health authority, and he asked for a specific office for his local area. However, the idea behind the commission is that it is not simply about bricks and mortar—offices or shop fronts where people go to make their views known.

The ethos behind the commission and the system for public and patient involvement is that it will go out to where people are. Again, that is a huge change for the national health service. In the past, we expected people to come and make their representations, which meant that we did not hear the voices of those who would not come to an organisation. Therefore, the commission staff have a specific brief as outreach workers to go out and interact with the local community, to work with the Citizens Advice Bureaux and all the local organisations to get their views. They will not be office based or static, but will be out working in the community. They will also be involved in all the different regeneration initiatives under which similar community development work is being carried out, and will feed views back into the NHS.

It cannot be good enough for the NHS public involvement work to be in a separate, parallel stream to all the other good public involvement work, in which the local authority will be greatly involved. Joining up all those views will be a key part of the commission's work. I ask hon. Gentlemen to be more creative and imaginative about the ways in which community development can work. It is certainly not the case that bricks and mortar offices and shop fronts are needed for people to come to.

The spending decisions with regard to the budget for the public involvement system have not yet been announced, but I can tell the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam that from 1 January this year, the NHS has a statutory duty to involve the public not only when there is a significant variation in service—in other words, when the decision has been made—but from the very beginning in shaping and developing ideas. A good example of that is happening in the constituencies of the hon. Members for Carshalton and Wallington and for Sutton and Cheam. As they both agreed, the clinical services strategy was drawn up on that basis from the beginning, rather than coming up with a preferred option.

Mr. Burstow: Have patients and the public been consulted to ascertain their preferred way of getting access to the commission as part of the process of devising the outreach strategy to which the Minister referred?

Ms Blears: Presumably, the hon. Gentleman is in contact with all the organisations in his area that carry out community development work, whether they are the local authority, the CAB or the council for voluntary services. All those groups engage with a wide range of members of the public. There is overwhelming evidence that where public involvement is to be successful, organisations must be flexible and go to where people are, engaging with them in a way that makes them feel comfortable and that it is worth-while to give their time and energy to get decisions taken.

Anyone who has been involved in any community development work will realise that having a static organisation that simply expects people to come to it is not the sort of organisation that is the most successful or that gets the greatest number of people involved in their communities.

The strategy is likely to take seven to 10 years. The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington, who initiated the debate, asked whether finance would be available throughout the process to make the proposals a reality. I am delighted that he believes that this Government will be in a position to make that clear in seven to 10 years' time when those proposals may well be realised.

The shift in the balance of power programme is to ensure that the primary care trusts, which will be spending 75 per cent. of the budget, will be taking those financial decisions in consultation with their local communities, and will decide such matters as whether to spend their money on local care centres and what the contents of those centres should be. That process will be on-going to ensure that the priorities of the community are reflected in the budgets. While the Government are in power, we have been able to invest a tremendous amount of extra finance into those budgets to try to ensure that the vision set out in the clinical strategy has a realistic chance of becoming a reality and providing much better services to people in this area.

The programme is extremely ambitious. I am delighted that it has the support of hon. Members as the representatives of their communities, and I hope that we will begin to see some flesh on the bones in the years to come to ensure that the services are health care in the right place at the right time for people in their local communities. I have no doubt that those services will be of extremely high quality and valued by local people.

It being half-past Four o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment elapsed, without Question put.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 9 January 2003

[SIR NICHOLAS WINTERTON *in the Chair*]

Housing Benefit Reform

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—[*Ms Joan Ryan.*]

2.35 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Malcolm Wicks): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this afternoon, Sir Nicholas.

It is clear that housing benefit and its reform should be high on our agenda. I welcome the opportunity of outlining the Government's views on housing benefit and our ideas for future reform. I am sure that we will have a constructive debate, given the hon. Members who are here.

About one in six households—almost 4 million households—are supported by housing benefit at an annual cost of £11.5 billion. Those householders include many older citizens and families with children. For those households, housing benefit often provides the only means of paying for decent accommodation. Without it, those struggling to live on a low income could find themselves living in poverty or even homeless.

Since its introduction in 1988, housing benefit has been relied on as a safety net for tenants in privately rented accommodation. It is vital, especially for people who are moving to get work, moving out of the family home or cannot afford home ownership.

To develop a scheme that fixes levels of benefit in line with market rents and that can cope with variations in rent is highly complex. Once again, we find ourselves wrestling with the same concerns that William Beveridge faced when he was drawing up his famous 1942 report. In many respects, that is at the heart of this question.

The existing scheme provides reasonable support, but its sheer complexity makes it difficult for local authorities to administer it effectively. Some can cope with the administration, but others are struggling to manage and are falling well below acceptable standards. Following the assessment of the benefits service as part of the comprehensive performance assessment, which was published shortly before Christmas, our benefit fraud inspectorate now has a complete picture of how benefits are being administered by all single-tier authorities. The results were encouraging: about 30 per cent. of authorities achieved the top score for benefits. However, about 14 per cent. have been assessed as providing a poor service, which means that they are achieving less than 40 per cent. of the performance standards used in the assessment process.

We also know from our quarterly performance monitoring that a quarter of local authorities are taking more than 60 days to process a new claim for housing benefit. That cannot be right. By contrast, the best take only a week or two. The administrative complexity of housing benefit has a direct effect on claimants and their families, and can inhibit any move from benefit dependency into employment. The system is complex because it requires endless form filling, and is confusing to tenants and landlords. Delays in payments often lead to uncertainty, anxiety and even eviction.

We are especially concerned about the lack of transparency in the scheme. In the privately rented sector, tenants are in many ways "shopping in the dark." They do not know how much housing benefit they will receive when choosing somewhere to live. As a result, they must cope with the uncertainty that their benefit may not cover the rent. That is why reform is needed and we should consider the deeper issues about how tenants should be supported.

The first stage of our housing benefit reform programme is already under way. It has been a strategy for far closer co-operation and partnership between central and local government. The aim has been to understand the reasons why administration of housing benefit varies so much and to start addressing them one by one.

Our strategy has combined clear objective and standard setting. Last year, we published the first set of national performance standards, setting out our expectations for a good housing benefit service. The strategy also combines inspection and monitoring by the benefit fraud inspectorate; practical support, for example, through the Department's help team, which involves our officials and outside experts, including from local government; and the removal of some structural inefficiencies.

The strategy has already delivered demonstrable results. Backlogs are falling in many authorities that we have been working with—for example, Hackney, Manchester, Kirklees and Northampton. I am pleased that that is the case. In authorities that we have been working with, there are also clear signs of more general improvement in claims processing and dealing with changes of circumstance. I am pleased that complaints to the ombudsman about housing benefit have declined in number significantly.

We have boosted the strategy by making the biggest investment in housing benefit administration since the scheme began in 1988. The support that we announced in this year's spending review represents a 32 per cent. cash increase over the next three years. That includes £200 million for a performance standards fund for investment in performance improvement. Funding has also been provided for the extra work for local authorities in respect of the Government's new tax credits and pension credit.

A further stage of reform is needed, however, as there is still plenty of room for improvement. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions announced on 17 October last year a vision for a much simpler and much fairer system. The new reform package includes ending the requirement to make a new claim when a person gets a job; providing a simpler, rapid re-claim process if the job does not work out; developing a modern service that facilitates claiming over the telephone; cutting out duplicate claim forms; and abolishing the need to re-claim housing benefit automatically after a fixed time, the so-called benefit period. That is particularly important. It makes no sense in extremis for someone of 90 who has lived in the same

[Malcolm Wicks]

dwelling for 40 years on more or less the same income to have to re-claim housing benefit more or less every year. We are ending that bureaucratic nonsense.

The key element of the package is the introduction of a standard local housing allowance, initially in the private rented sector. In a nutshell, housing benefit payments will be based on a system of standard allowances. These will be fixed according to area and family size, but not to the rent charged. The standard allowance will be calculated in a similar way to the local reference rent, reflecting rents in the middle of the range for different sizes of property in each locality.

Publishing those rates in advance will allow tenants to know how much they can expect housing benefit to pay for and to use that knowledge to find affordable accommodation that meets their needs. That will reduce the administrative burden for local authorities and make the system far more transparent for tenants and landlords. It will minimise the delays that make tenants worry that starting a job will complicate their housing benefit claim and increase their debts.

We will begin by introducing the standard local housing allowance in 10 pathfinder areas. It is a big step forward and we need to undertake a full evaluation of how it is working before a national roll-out. A number of the authorities have confirmed their participation: Blackpool, Edinburgh, Brighton and Hove, Lewisham and North East Lincolnshire. Early on, one of the chosen 10, Tendring, had to drop out of the process because of the IT changes affecting that authority, but Blackpool took its place. A number of other authorities will, I am sure, join in the process, but in the coming weeks they are going through their own due process at local authority and council level. The remaining authorities are Conwy, Coventry, Leeds, Middlesbrough and Teignbridge. I am confident that the great majority of those authorities will be able to help us in the pathfinder areas.

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): Given that there are particularly acute problems with housing benefit in Greater London, and particularly in inner London, has any thought been given to having two London authorities rather than one, in order to obtain a better judgment of whether the system will work in that particularly difficult market?

Malcolm Wicks: The London borough of Lewisham has already agreed to take part in the pathfinder scheme. Those of us who know Lewisham will agree that it has many characteristics, including inner London characteristics. We considered including a further London borough. At present, because we have the 10 we require, we do not intend to do so, but our mind is not closed to that possibility. The inner London boroughs have particular problems, so my hon. Friend's point is well made.

An important part of our radical proposals for change involves moving to payment of benefit to the tenant in the majority of cases, rather than to the landlord. We know that some landlords are worried by that proposed shift away from direct payment to landlords. However, we are building in safeguards so that direct payments will continue for vulnerable people, such as those with learning difficulties who might be unable to manage their own affairs, or for tenants who have built up arrears.

We will be monitoring that area carefully in the pathfinder schemes, during the two years of the project, and we will engage with landlords to explore ways of handling the matter. We have already begun those discussions with landlords.

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): As the Minister said, the city council in my area has agreed to participate in the pathfinder scheme. I know that the decision to do so eventually received support from all the parties on the city council. Although the attitude to the pathfinder project has been generally supportive, concern has been expressed that the monitoring of the scheme should be sufficiently flexible and should be put in place sufficiently quickly to take account of any difficulties that arise during the operation of the scheme. In areas such as my own where there is high housing demand, it is important that the standing housing level allowance is sufficiently high to reflect the real market conditions and any increases in the general market rent that could occur very quickly. Will the Minister give an assurance that the pathfinder scheme will be operated in a sufficiently flexible way to take account quickly of any problems that are identified in particular communities?

Malcolm Wicks: In thanking my hon. Friend for that intervention, may I say that we had a useful meeting with the city council in Edinburgh on our proposal for a pathfinder scheme in the city? We learned a lot from that meeting.

The purpose of running the 10 pathfinder projects is to learn a great deal about this novel and radical proposal. We will work closely with each of the 10 local authorities in a number of different ways. We have planned a seminar for the pathfinder authorities next month. Obviously, we need to take account of the lessons that we learn.

I know that there are a number of concerns about the possible impact of the proposals on local housing markets, and we must take account of those concerns. I hope that there will also be a continuing dialogue with the MPs from the pathfinder areas. Our view is that this is the way ahead in the privately rented sector and that, nationwide, this is probably where we want to move to before the end of the decade. That is why we have called it a pathfinder, because we know where we want to go, but we need to find out exactly how to get there, rather than simply using a pilot.

I am not saying that we have all the answers. There are a number of proper concerns that we must monitor and evaluate. In the coming weeks we will be discussing the nature of the monitoring and evaluation that should take place. It must include the impact on the local housing market, as my hon. Friend said. It must include the attitudes and behaviour of both landlords and tenants. We also need to evaluate the impact on the local

housing benefit administration. We are contemplating a complex monitoring and evaluation process and a complex action research exercise.

Mr. Lazarowicz: Briefly, my concern is not only about flexibility at the end of the project, but about the ability to change quickly during the course of a pathfinder project.

Malcolm Wicks: I cannot provide a guaranteed assurance about that because a project might need to be tested across the country—nationwide and nations wide: one in Scotland, one in Wales, others in England—and we shall need to study the effects, but we will be sensitive if any adverse consequences arise. That is as far as I can go.

The proposal to assume that in future housing allowance should be paid to the tenant is not a wholly radical change. About 40 per cent. of claimants in the deregulated private rented sector already have their benefit paid to them rather than to their landlords. Many landlords have seen the advantage of having tenants take on full responsibility for rent payments.

From the tenant's point of view, if the rent paid were less than the allowance—part of the choice that might be made—and he could find accommodation for less than the allowance, he could keep the difference. That is a practical expression of the choice and responsibility strategy that we are pursuing. Someone looking for accommodation who placed a high value on housing and wanted to spend a few extra pounds of their own money on it could readily do so. Again, it is part of the empowerment programme that we are trying to implement, initially through the pathfinders.

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): I apologise for missing the beginning of the Minister's comments. Following up the concerns expressed by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz), my constituency of Teignbridge may be one of the pathfinder authorities. When the Minister came to speak about it, he was asked whether the housing market could dry up as a result. Local authorities would then have to put more people into bed-and-breakfast accommodation at their own cost. The Minister said that no financial burdens would result from the exercise, so will the money be made available for such an eventuality?

Malcolm Wicks: I am not at all anticipating that eventuality. The financial guarantee that we have offered local authorities is that the reasonable costs of a pathfinder project will be borne by my Department. It would be unfair if they fell on the local council, but we are not embarking on these projects on the assumption that they will create the sort of difficulties that the hon. Gentleman anticipates.

Any change produces anxieties among landlords, but they should benefit from our setting out and publishing clear housing allowances. Sometimes they complain when, unbeknown to them, a tenant left a property weeks or months before they knew about it, and overpayments are sought from landlords who have received the direct housing benefit payment. Of course, that would cease in future under our housing allowance proposals.

We are not pretending to have all the answers. If we did, we would go nationwide as soon as possible. At present, we are monitoring and evaluating developments in the 10 areas. We shall keep in the closest possible contact with local authorities and with right hon. and hon. Members who are actively involved in the process. I was pleased to accompany the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Richard Younger-Ross) in his own constituency.

The system will empower benefit recipients to make similar choices to those paying their own way about whether to move nearer to a local school or to relatives, whether to share with friends or to trade quality for a bit more space. The great majority of citizens at their respective income levels have to make such choices about housing and we want to enable those currently receiving housing benefit to enjoy the same choices in future.

We believe that tenants will benefit from the responsibility of paying their own rent, but we are also concerned to ensure that no one loses out financially from the new scheme. We do not believe that anyone will lose out; in fact, we estimate that about half those affected in the pathfinder areas will gain from the changes.

As well as benefiting tenants, the simplified scheme and removal of benefit periods will release resources at local authority level for a more targeted approach to fraud, which is the final topic on which I want to comment. Like everyone else, I attach great importance to combating fraud in our social security system. We have an ambitious target—the first time that a target has been set for tackling housing benefit fraud—of reducing by 25 per cent. fraud and error in housing benefit by 2006. We need a more flexible system that meets the needs of our modern customers, but we must also ensure that local authorities carry out regular, targeted checks on tenant circumstances. We will build a strategy to combat fraud and error into the reforms from day one, and our benefit fraud inspectorate will be closely involved throughout.

That is our vision of a better system, towards which we will work during the next few years. It is a vision that will make housing benefit a rewarding area in which to work and that is at the heart of the Government's strategies to target poverty and enable more people to enter employment. Housing benefit spending is a large part of the Government's housing bill, and getting it right has become a high political priority. We are determined to put right the legacy of neglect and cuts-driven change that housing benefit has endured in the past.

We are in a phase in which housing benefit has a positive role and key part to play in handing choice and decision making to the customer. We are half a century from direct state action and the issues of shortage and rationing that affected the post-war Governments. Expectations are higher now. We expect a flexible, responsive benefit system that enables people to get work and choose the home in which they live. That is why our housing benefit reform is so important to our overall social security strategy. We are working hard with others to achieve it.

2.56 pm

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): I, too, welcome the opportunity for today's debate on this important subject and join others in welcoming you to the chair, Sir Nicholas. I apologise in advance to the Committee—

Sir Nicholas Winterton: Order. We are not a Committee; we are part of the House.

Mr. Brazier: I am sorry. I apologise to the Chamber in advance that I may have to leave early for an emergency visit to the dentist, but I hope that that will not stop me getting my teeth thoroughly into the subject.

The cost of housing benefit has extended steadily under all Governments, and the Opposition will support any sensible initiatives, although for the system to be reformed, bold action is needed. It is worth setting the context. When Labour came to power nearly six years ago, the reform of the whole benefit system, of which housing benefit is one of the most important elements, was declared as one of the Government's highest priorities. The Opposition are in favour of pilot tests when they are appropriate, but it is sad to think that nearly six years on we are hearing the second series of announcements of pilot testing of doing something serious about housing benefit.

We also supported the Back-Bench proposal of the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) to withhold housing benefit payment from families who cause problems to their neighbours through antisocial behaviour. The Liberal Democrats shamefully talked that out in July last year, and we would like to know, and were hoping that the Minister was going to tell us in his introduction, whether the Government will introduce that measure themselves.

Today, just fewer than 4 million households receive housing benefit. That includes many families with children and a high proportion of pensioners. The benefit assists one in six households, and the cost to the taxpayer has risen to £11.5 billion, so what happens to the benefit is important not only to a large number of recipients but to taxpayers.

At the last election, we focused on improving the administration of housing benefit through sharing best practice, lowering the regulatory burden and reducing overpayments, error and waste. Alas, it will not have escaped the House's attention that we did not win the election, and it is interesting to see what the Government have done. Today, there are people who are homeless on the streets having been evicted from their houses by councils whose failure to pay housing benefit reliably is a source of the problem. It is a scandal that affects thousands of people throughout the country and needs to be tackled.

However, the truth is that the blame for that does not lie entirely with the councils concerned. The Government have done as much to hinder councils and complicate the system as would almost seem possible. In recent years, the number of statutory instruments and circulars relating to housing benefit has increased.

3 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

3.15 pm

On resuming—

Mr. Brazier: I was saying before we suspended that the number of statutory instruments and circulars made the work of councils in administering housing benefit much more difficult. In the five years before this Government took office, there were in total 61 statutory instruments and 230 circulars. Many of us feel that was too many. In the first five years of this Government, statutory instruments increased by half to 90 and the number of circulars almost doubled to 400.

It is not just the Opposition who are saying this. In a report last year the Audit Commission pointed out that

"over time, the Government has made many changes to the scheme . . . because of these changes local authorities are finding the scheme increasingly complex and difficult to administer and the service provided to claimants has worsened since the mid 1990s".

It went on to say:

"In the past, the Government has not always allowed adequate time for councils to comment on proposed changes, or for councils and IT suppliers to implement them. This has often led to problems after implementation . . . The Government provides funding for local authorities to make HB payments through an over complex regime containing perverse incentives."

Another critical body was the Government's own Better Regulation Task Force which reported last year that

"the local authorities complained that the housing benefit regulations and their many amendments have not been consolidated since the original regulations were made in 1998."

The BRTF also found housing benefit administration was "in a mess" and "needing urgent action". It also mentioned considerable delays before claims were assessed and paid and stated:

"Housing Benefit is almost impossible to understand. The rules are complex and it is not clear how decisions are made."

That same report also made it clear that the Government have made the situation worse by an excessive number of minor changes and an overflow of paperwork. It concluded:

"the whole housing benefit regime is in need of radical reform."

Today around two fifths of claimants do not receive their housing benefit within 14 days. Some families have to wait over six months to receive any money. That is despite the fact that the numbers of new claims are falling. Even after such long waiting times numerous mistakes are made; some councils have errors in about 30 per cent. of their housing benefit claims. Information placed in the Library after a recent parliamentary question shows that clients in Sedgefield have to wait 102 days on average for their housing benefit claims to be cleared. The figure for Oxford, another place chosen quite at random, is 76 days. The average processing time is 52 days in England and very nearly as long—48 days—in Scotland.

Behind those statistics lie thousands and thousands of cases of individual misery. Delay in some cases can mean eviction. In most cases it results in terrible stress, often on extremely vulnerable people. The Government have failed to ensure that there is at the very least a minimum standard of housing benefit administration in

different areas. Processing times, administrative costs and the level of error vary widely and are unacceptably high in many areas.

In October last year the Audit Commission published a report that found that long delays in paying housing benefit and failures of customer care are causing hardship and anxiety as well as the threat of eviction to which I referred earlier. The administration is tarnished by error, waste and fraud, which cost the taxpayer hundreds of millions of pounds a year.

We are all in favour of tackling housing benefit fraud, but it is a little disappointing that the Minister should be announcing a target for doing so only now—nearly six years into the Government's term in office. It is also disappointing that it is presented in such a long-term way.

Even within local authorities, departments have been unable to communicate, because of the Data Protection Act 1998. As a result, families have faced eviction, and fraud has prospered. Does the Minister accept that some people who are homeless today were evicted from their houses simply because the council failed to handle their housing benefit properly?

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): The hon. Gentleman has not mentioned outsourcing. Does he accept that housing benefit administration collapsed in several local authorities—including Conservative-controlled Westminster, which is my local authority—after it was outsourced to Capita? At one point, 25,000 items of post were unopened. Does he believe that ill-thought-out outsourcing can be a major factor in poor administration?

Mr. Brazier: I cannot comment on the particular circumstances in Westminster because I have not been briefed on them. However, outsourcing has a mixed record. In some cases, it has proved extremely successful; in others, it has been unsuccessful. The Government, whom the hon. Lady supports, are very enthusiastic about outsourcing across a range of issues, so I invite her to think carefully about what she is saying.

In its 1997 manifesto, the Labour party claimed that housing benefit fraud cost £2 billion a year, but the estimate now seems to have come down. I may have to find out from *Hansard* what the Minister says in his winding-up speech, but I look forward to him setting out the Government's current estimate of the level of fraud and how it equates with the long-term target that has been announced.

Measures designed to tackle fraud are not helped by the recent lack of successful convictions. Figures from the House of Commons Library obtained by my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts), the shadow Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, show that 50 per cent. of local authorities have failed successfully to prosecute anyone for housing benefit fraud or council tax benefit fraud over the past full year. According to the National Housing Federation, the Government have failed to recognise the extent of the problem and its seriousness for landlords and, in particular, tenants.

I end with a few comments on the measures that have been announced today, although little about them is new. The Minister acknowledged that two fifths of payments already go directly to tenants, rather than landlords. What impact will increasing that proportion have on the incentive for landlords to take in harder cases? Will those in areas where there is competition for rented properties be more enthusiastic about taking in social cases if they think that they will not be paid directly? That is worth considering.

How far will the scope for ending periodic revision extend? The Minister gave the uncontentious example of a 90-year-old lady who had been living on a state pension at the same address for many years, but what other cases will be affected and how? Someone may innocently overclaim because they are unaware of the impact that a change in their circumstances has on their housing benefit. Is there a danger that such people, who might be quite vulnerable, will suddenly face huge claims for back-payments?

Is there a danger that we might return to the situation in the old days when there were two different housing benefit regimes, one for social housing tenants and another for private tenancies? The Minister's announcement about pilots applies to only one category. He has a long track record in this area, extending back long before he was a Member of Parliament. Does he recognise—perhaps I should ask whether he still recognises, because he certainly used to—that the central problem with housing benefit and its sister benefit, council tax benefit, is that huge numbers of people are trapped in dependency because of the incredibly high rates of tax and of benefit withdrawal?

Mr. Love: I listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman's contribution, which reminded me that the central problem with housing benefit was its introduction in 1988 as the most complex of all benefits. That complexity leads to all the problems that he outlined. Does he, therefore, accept some responsibility, on behalf of the previous Conservative Government, for the difficulties that we are discussing today, which this Government are now trying to cure?

Mr. Brazier: I am happy to respond to that point. As a Back Bencher in 1988, I wrote not one but three pamphlets, at least one of which was reviewed in the newspapers, attacking the changes and making it clear that I thought that many of them were mistaken. One of the saddest features of the Labour Government is their approach to social security, because they have built on the worst features of the mistakes made in 1988. They have steadily increased means-testing, while undermining their strong inheritance in other areas, such as the sheer scale and scope of the pension funds that existed when the Labour Government came to power in 1997. Six years on, they have not offered us a comprehensive new approach. Instead, in addition to the huge number of small, detailed changes that they have made, we are today enjoying the announcement of a small number of pilots and a few new ideas. I have made it clear that, in principle, we support the idea of introducing a standardised local rate, but that idea has been a long time coming and we are still only at the stage of a few pilots being announced, and those on a tentative basis.

Will the Minister say in his winding-up speech whether the Liberal Democrats' shameful talking out of his distinguished colleague's proposal to link deductions

[Mr. Brazier]

from housing benefit to grossly antisocial behaviour—a measure that received support right up to Downing street—will be the end of the matter or whether the Government plan to reintroduce the proposal in Government time?

3.28 pm

Mr. David Lepper (Brighton, Pavilion): I am pleased that this debate is taking place under your chairmanship, Sir Nicholas.

I thank the Minister and his officials for spending time in discussions with officers and leading councillors at Brighton and Hove city council about the proposed pathfinder status. I am glad that my city council has agreed to be one of the pathfinders. I also thank the Minister for the time that he spent discussing the proposals with representatives of local agencies in the city of Brighton and Hove that are working on housing issues.

I said to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, privately, when he first announced the proposals, "I think they are good and if they work in Brighton and Hove, they will work anywhere." I felt that then and I feel it now because affordable housing is the big issue in the Brighton and Hove city area, perhaps even more than in some other parts of south-east England. Strategies, such as quotas in planning, the Government's starter homes initiative, the NHS housing allowances for some of its staff, the rent deposit scheme and the proposals in the Local Government Bill, which is at present before the House, to allow council tax discounts on empty properties and second homes to be varied help us locally to deal with the problem.

However, Brighton and Hove relies far more heavily on the private rented sector for housing than most other parts of the country do. It is an area of very high house prices, it is a high-rent area and it is a popular area for second homes. That is not new; it can be traced back to the Prince Regent's deciding to build his winter palace in Brighton at the start of the nineteenth century. Ever since, it has been a popular place for second home owners. It is worth remembering that when he built his palace he was converting a local farmhouse into something rather more palatial. That trend has continued. All these factors put pressure on the unemployed and those who are on low wages when they try to find somewhere to live.

The Minister stressed the importance of housing choice. However, many in my constituency feel that where there is housing choice it is on the part of the landlords, who can choose who will rent their property. It is right that they should, but they know that however high the rent, there will always be somebody in the queue for a property who is willing and able to pay the high price.

I will give my very sympathetic support to the pathfinder status of Brighton and Hove city council area. The Minister will not be surprised that I have concerns that I wish to raise with him. I spoke of landlords having the choice of whom they should rent to. Some council officers, councillors and housing agencies in Brighton and Hove are concerned that the unfortunate bias against housing benefit tenants might be aggravated by the proposal of further direct payment to the tenant. Direct payment is good; it should be the responsibility of the tenant to decide how to pay their rent. However, the proposals, if they are to be successful, must be presented in such a way that they help to overcome such discrimination.

There are also concerns about how the scheme will be delivered. Training and retaining skilled housing benefit staff is a real problem for my city council. There is a simple explanation for that: once staff have been trained they can earn much higher pay working for agencies, often across south-east England. They use the skills that they developed working for my council. There are severe resource implications for my city council and its housing department services. They may have to buy back some of the agency staff on higher rates of pay as well as attempting to recruit their own staff. It would be helpful if the Minister suggested the level of support, with respect to resources for staffing and the training and retention of staff. What I am discussing is part of a vicious circle. Who can blame housing benefit staff who have been attracted away by the higher rates of pay at agencies in a high rent, high housing cost area such as Brighton and Hove?

I should be grateful if the Minister said something about the level of support and planning that is already being carried out in relation to information and communications technology. We have already had mention of occasional unfortunate ICT support programmes that are found wanting at an early stage in the introduction of a new project. I should welcome the Minister's thoughts about how to ensure plainer sailing than has been the case with some other new schemes.

I welcome what the Minister has said about guarding against the possibility of fraud and his statement about the flexibility that will be allowed, particularly in relation to vulnerable tenants. It would be helpful to know to what extent it will be possible to exercise that flexibility at a local level, or whether it will be subject to strict national guidelines. I hope, also, that the Minister will comment on the question, which I know the National Housing Federation has raised, of moving away from the four-weekly arrears payment system for benefit. That is a matter of some concern to people working in the housing field.

My hon. Friend will not be surprised at my mentioning an omission from the proposals, because it concerns the issue on which I have had more conversations with him and his predecessors than any other since I was elected. It is what is now called young people's rent—the single room rent. I welcomed the decision that the Government took in 1997 not to extend the restrictions involved in the single room rent to those aged over 25, as the outgoing Conservative Government had planned to do. Minor, but nevertheless welcome, changes were made to the single room rent last year. I like to think that not least among the reasons for the changes was lobbying by me and other hon. Members because of what was happening in our constituencies. Nevertheless, for 18 to 25-year-olds in my constituency, there are continuing and, I believe, worsening problems in relation to housing. I am not sure that the current proposals will address them.

Prior to the introduction of the single room rent by the Conservative Government in 1996 a major local agency in my city, the Brighton Housing Trust, was able

to house 50 per cent. to 60 per cent. of the young people who approached it for housing advice. It would house them in the private rented sector. By December 2000, following the introduction of the single room rent restriction, that proportion was down to 11 per cent.

I talked this morning to representatives of the Brighton Housing Trust and of Hove YMCA youth advisory service, which is the other major agency working with young people in the Brighton and Hove city area. They told me that it is now virtually impossible for them to place young people on housing benefit with landlords in that area. In 1996 there were 25 landlords quite willing to accept young people as tenants. By June 2000 that number had dwindled to two and, as I was told this morning, it is now none.

The need to consider again the single-room rent for young people was one aspect of the Brighton and Hove City private sector housing forum's manifesto on housing benefit, which I presented to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister—by chance, exactly one year ago today. I am pleased that many of the other things that local agencies, tenants and councillors in my constituency asked for or suggested in that manifesto are included in the proposals that we are debating.

However, the special needs of our young people need to be recognised by further steps in relation to their right to housing benefit. I do not argue that that should be by further shifts in the definition of their entitlement, but by an ending of the system that discriminates against the under-25-year-olds.

3.40 pm

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): It is a pleasure to take part in this debate, of which there should be more in the House. It has been measured and considered, with expert and informed contributions, such as those from the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper), who has first-hand experience of the pilot areas, my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Richard Younger-Ross) and the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz)—he is no longer present—who were able to bring a local perspective. We have enjoyed the expert perspective of senior members of the Select Committee. I hope that we can critically assess the proposals.

I welcome a number of aspects of what has been proposed on housing benefit reform. The waiving of the requirement on pensioners to make regular annual claims must be a good thing—it is long overdue and is welcome. The possibility that someone making a claim will have a clearer idea of eligible rent upfront must, if deliverable, be a step in the right direction. I think that pre-tenancy determinations were supposed to have delivered that, but for some reason have not done so. They are a potential benefit of the pilot schemes.

I want to focus on some of my concerns about the pilot schemes and on some questions that need to be answered during the evaluation. However, it is worth setting that in the context of housing benefit. The consultation paper, which was produced in October 2002, had a fascinating chart on page 9, which I took to bed with me last night. What struck me about the information was that elderly and disabled people dominate housing benefit. With all the talk about housing benefit, work incentives and poverty traps, one imagines that housing benefit is about low-paid workers, yet predominantly it is not, though it obviously matters to such people. We are mainly talking about pensioners and disabled people. According to the chart, roughly £8 billion of the £13 billion of expenditure projected by the end of the public spending planning horizon will be spent on elderly and disabled people. Perhaps most strikingly, the growth in housing benefit expenditure since the mid-1990s has occurred almost exclusively in those two groups. It has continued to fall for employed people and to ease off for lone parents and other groups.

An objective that the Minister did not state for the reform—he hinted that it was not an objective—is to control expenditure on housing benefit. He said that he did not want a cuts-driven agenda. Could he clarify his stance on whether one of the objectives of the pilot and the eventual national roll-out is not to cut expenditure on housing benefit? If the proposals are a way of controlling or perhaps reducing spending by the back door and if, given the current state of the labour market, spending on the unemployed or lone parents probably cannot be reduced by much more, the reduction will have to come from the elderly and the disabled trading down. That is part of the incentive structure being put in place through the standard housing allowance.

I question whether we want to encourage disabled people and some 4 million pensioners to trade down. Would that be realistic? I do not think so. It would be very unsettling for many older people and for many disabled people. If we do not expect them to trade down, it calls into question how effective the strategy might be. After all, the Minister says that we might get round to the whole of the private rented sector by the end of the decade. Another chart on the same thrilling page of the document says that the private rented sector is less than a quarter of the whole stock of housing benefit cases.

I am always wary when I see a Government document with the word "radical" on the cover because I know that it is not radical. The Government seem to be saying that somehow, into what the Minister hopes will be new Labour's fourth term of office, less than a quarter of tenants on housing benefit will be on the new regime. Radical it ain't.

The problem is the other three quarters. If I were to say on the streets of Yate in my constituency that the Government's ethos for those on housing benefit is an agenda of choice, people would fall over. The notion that there is any choice, particularly in the social rented sector, is a joke. People are desperate for anywhere that is better than where they are. They do not have a choice; they simply take what they are given. That is true of the vast majority of the social rented tenants, and I suspect that it is also true of the private sector in large parts of the country. I accept Peter Kemp's comment that it is wrong to say that nobody has any choice, but there must be large swathes of the country in which most people have little choice. To suggest that this is an agenda for reform and choice for tenants is overselling, to put it no more strongly than that. I rather doubt that it is a new agenda for choice and options.

Benefit is mostly for social tenants, not for the people we are talking about today. It is mainly about pensioners and disabled people, whom the Minister does not wish to move around. Therefore, the benefits for them of a flat rate housing allowance when they

[Mr. Steve Webb]

know at the start of the tenancy what the rent will be are probably pretty limited. Most of these people probably do not move much anyway. We must remind ourselves that this is not very radical at all.

Mr. Brazier: I agree with many of the hon. Gentleman's sentiments, but will he tell us why disabled people, whom nobody wishes to see less well off, should not have incentives? Many of them would like to get back into the labour market, if they are not already there. Does he not agree that many disabled people tell us that the structure of the benefits system puts strong perverse disincentives in the way of their getting back into the labour market?

Mr. Webb: We should remind ourselves that disabled people can be part of the workforce. Indeed, some of the people we are talking about are working and in receipt of housing benefit. However, many of the people that we are talking about are long-term sick and disabled for whom therapeutic work might be appropriate. The reason that most disabled people who could work and who want to work do not work has nothing to do with the housing benefit system. Housing benefit would not be near the top of the 10 main reasons why disabled people are not working. It is not irrelevant, but it is not the primary consideration.

The main incentive is not to take a job but to move house, which is what seems to lie behind the Government's agenda. If you give people a flat rate housing allowance they may move to somewhere cheaper and keep the difference.

Fundamental to the proposals is how the standard housing allowance is determined. We are told that it will be determined in a similar manner to the local reference rents and the young person's rent. At present, that process is far from transparent. I hope that the Minister can assure us that the manner in which the reference rents and the standard housing allowances have been worked out will become much clearer. The average punter may claim housing benefit, only to be told some months later that he will receive less rent allowance than he expected. In theory, he can query the decision; in practice, he will accept it as if it had been handed down from on high.

There seems to be no accountability or transparency about where these numbers come from. They will be critical to the operation of the new system, because they will determine the amount of money that people get. We need to know much more openly how the levels are calculated—and that has to be more open to challenge.

As was intimated in an intervention on the Minister earlier, the information needs to be very up to date. If local rental markets are changing rapidly, we cannot have rent officers using 18-month-old data. That will cause real hardship and mess up the system. We need it to be transparent and up to date.

The locality over which the reference rent for standard housing allowance is calculated is critical. Some concern has been expressed to me that the Government want to progress towards using bigger localities. One can see the attraction of that. One can see that being able to post on a web page the information that anywhere in Stockport the rent will be such and such would have the attraction of simplicity. However, there is a real danger in providing a single rent figure for diverse housing markets. What that approach means is that if there are nice areas where people want to live and nasty ones where they do not, the people on housing benefit then end up in the nasty bits. It is straightforward. Unless localities are defined to include only areas where rents to not vary a great deal for comparable property, we could bring about ghettoisation. I do not say that hysterically, but I see it as a real danger. That would be contrary to much of what the Government want to do in mixing tenures and social groups. I hope that the Minister will reassure me that there is not a drive towards bigger localities in which one rent figure will be applied to all, but that localities will be chosen carefully.

The hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion was right to draw the Minister's attention to the continuing issue of the young person's rent. The change that the Government made was marginal. I am not aware whether they have yet published any assessment of its effects, showing whether it has tackled any of the iniquities of the single room rent system. I am told that in some cases it made the allowable rent something like a pound a week higher. Does the Minister have any up-to-date information about the effect the switch has had? How much more can people now receive in housing benefit? Is the change removing some of the problems that young people have faced?

The evidence from charities, such as Barnardo's and Shelter, is that young people who live independently of their parents often do not do so out of choice. The Minister talked about choice, but often the young people in question are living away from their homes and families not because they want to but because they have to. In many parts of the country a shared house is not necessarily available. Is it right to penalise someone, telling them that they will be given only the rent for digs or a shared house, even if there is no suitable house to share and they are not willingly living independently?

One can understand that the taxpayer does not want to pay for 19-year-olds to live on their own in big flats with hefty rents, but have we not gone too far in the other direction? Should not a civilized and caring man such as the Minister feel uncomfortable that the current system for young person's rent continues at all? In particular, should he not feel uncomfortable about the arbitrary distinction between 24-year-olds and 25-year-olds? We all know that lines must be drawn, but what is the rationale for that one? One could understand drawing it at 16 or 18, but there is no justification for drawing a line between the ages of 24 and 25, and treating 24-year-olds as second class citizens compared to 25-year-olds.

The determination of the standard housing allowance is built on shaky foundations. It is built on the local reference rent, which is murky, and on the single room rent, which is decidedly dodgy. We need to examine those foundations.

We need to consider the issue of shopping around. The Government want people to know how much rent they pay. Fair enough. Based on that information they want them to look for cheaper rents—to shop around. Is that always a good thing? Is it always a good thing to put pressure on people to move away from the

community and support networks that they have been part of, including schools and child care that might enable them to move off welfare into work? Is such pressure self-evidently a good thing? We seem to take it as read that it is, but I should like to sow a seed of doubt. Do we want people to become more itinerant and less settled, or to put down roots? In particular, surely we want people who are on housing benefit and who then get jobs not to move out but to stay put, to provide role models and patterns of being that will bring others with them. If big localities are used to set rent levels, we shall have a greater problem with shopping around and more ghettoisation.

If, in the short term, the Government pay a standard amount of housing allowance, and landlords become aware that that is the standard amount, landlords will know that tenants are carrying that amount in their back pockets. What is to prevent landlords who are charging below average rents from jacking them up? That point was made by the hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) in response to the ministerial statement. I understand the Government line that there will be competition in the housing market and that perhaps other people will undercut them, but it is simply not like the market for baked beans among different supermarkets. There is not that quick entry and exit, and contestability. Surely there is a real danger—the pilots will show this—that the measure will put low rents up. Is that really what we want?

Direct payment to landlords has been mentioned and I am very concerned about the proposal in that regard. I spoke to Citizens Advice—the name now used by the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux—which expressed concern about low-paid workers who get some help with their rent through the housing benefit system and pay some of the rent themselves. Those people know how much their rent is; the system does not shield them from that. The example was given of someone in low-paid work who had other debts. Someone might call at their door to say that they want payment on a particular debt. If people in low-paid jobs get cash from the benefit system and someone knocks at their door to put pressure on them, the temptation will be to prioritise that bill over the rent, and we all know the consequences that rent arrears can have.

I am not being patronising. I am not suggesting that direct payments should be mandatory; I am talking about enabling. There should be a choice. Why are we against giving tenants a choice as to whether there is direct payment? The Government seem to have gone from one extreme to the other. They have now gone to the extreme whereby, apart from vulnerable people or those who have got into deep arrears, people have no choice about direct payment. Surely people should have that choice, particularly those who are already paying something towards their rent.

The Minister will say that if people get into arrears, it is all right, because there can be a switch to direct payment, but that will happen only after eight weeks, at which point the landlord has gained increased rights to throw someone out. In addition, by the time the local council has sorted out the direct payment, a few more weeks of non-payment might have gone by. Those are real problems. I believe that the consultation paper referred to the unpopular or criticised system of direct payment, but there was a reason for its introduction, and I wonder how confident the Minister is that those reasons will not come back to haunt us.

I have a couple of other observations to make on the pilots before setting out a slightly different strategy. I am keen that, when assessing the pilots, the Government should ask all the questions, not just the ones about their own scheme. In other words, they should take this unique opportunity to consider in detail all aspects of the housing benefit system and the way in which they work.

We have not talked about non-dependant deductions, for example, which is clearly a complex system. The hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion rightly praised the Government for not introducing the single-room rent for the over-25s, but he did not mention that that was paid for by jacking up non-dependant deductions, which made it harder for young people to live with their parents. There is always a quid pro quo with these things.

Will the pilots consider the whole operation of housing benefit in local areas? If it becomes apparent to the people doing the assessment that other aspects, such as the single-room rent, are causing problems, will those lessons be learned, too? Will the Minister assure us that the Government will consider not only the questions that they want to, but other, awkward issues?

What can the Minister tell us about control authorities? What are we comparing those people with? Obviously, we can compare them with the way they used to be, but given the way in which these things change and the complexities of the housing and labour markets and so on, it is hard to compare now with then. We want to compare now with a different now. What work is the Department doing on coming up with control authorities? How will that process work?

Will the pilots teach us any lessons about the social rented sector? That is where the bulk of housing benefit tenants are, where most of the money goes and where many of the problems are. Will the pilots tell us anything about the main group of people who have problems with the housing benefit system? I fear that we are talking about the end of the decade or the mid-2010s before we get on to the private sector. Admittedly, I would be happy to take that in my in-tray as the incoming Secretary of State at that stage, but it would be nice to think that some work had been done beforehand—I think that I got away with that.

It behoves those of us who quibble and criticise to suggest what else might be done. I want to float an idea that I believe was original when I thought of it, but which has been suggested by many other people since, so I cannot claim that it is unique. There are two big problems with the route that the Government are taking: one is an omission and the other a commission. The omission is low-income homebuyers. This debate is about housing benefit, not renting benefit. If we believe that there are so many issues, such as poverty traps, that affect low-income renters, why are we so silent on homebuyers?

The consultation document cites approvingly a report that discusses shopping incentives and housing benefit reform for renters, but that report also discusses support for low-income homebuyers. Mysteriously, the Department does not cite approvingly the sections of the report that discuss homebuyers.

[Mr. Webb]

What is the strategy for low-income homebuyers? The real poverty trap that I come across in my surgery is not primarily experienced by people with high rents who cannot afford to work—perhaps because the rents are not as high in my area as they are in some—but by people with big mortgages who cannot afford to work. Is it not time to get rid of the distinction between a low-paid person trying to pay a rent and a low-paid person who cannot afford a mortgage?

How might that be done? Now that the tax credit system has been extended not only to families with children, but to childless couples and single people over 25, some sort of flat rate housing credit—not pro rata to housing costs—could be put into the tax credits system. That credit could then be top sliced off the eligible rent in the housing benefits system. In that way, low-income homebuyers could be brought into the equation, and the number of people receiving both tax credits and housing benefits could be reduced, which is the opposite of what the Government propose to do.

The pilot schemes will increase the number of people receiving both tax credits and housing benefit, because by paying a flat rate rent, rather than the actual rent, some people who would not have qualified will be brought in. As a result of the proposed changes there will be more, rather than fewer, people on housing benefit and more people receiving both tax credit and housing benefit.

However, with my proposal, if, for example, the first £20 of someone's rent or mortgage was met by a £20 payment through the tax credit system, then the eligible rent for the remainder would be £20 less. Thus, if that person was only receiving £5 or £10 per week in housing benefit, they would not have to touch housing benefit at all. That would mean less hassle for local authorities and would give them more time to spend on anti-fraud measures or other areas.

Will the Minister reflect upon what I have said and tell us what his strategy is for low-income homebuyers? Will he also tell us why he did not take the route of putting fewer people on housing benefit, rather than of adopting a strategy that will increase their number?

I welcome the fact that the Department has sought to bring the issue before the House and that we have had the chance, in this forum, to have a more measured consideration of such matters than we often do. I hope that the Minister will respond to some of the concerns about whether the pilots will achieve, even over nearly a decade, some of the things that have been claimed for them.

4.2 pm

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): I start by declaring a couple of interests. I write for *Housing Today*, and I receive some research support from Shelter.

I welcome this debate and the fact that, as has been said, we are able to analyse in a more considered way some of the issues arising from the proposed flat-rate housing allowance and the policy implications of housing benefit more generally.

I intend to speak about some of the problems associated with housing benefit as it currently applies, and as it will probably continue to apply for some years, to the majority of claimants across the country. I will reflect in some detail on the ways in which we should monitor the pilots of the proposed flat-rate housing allowance, and I hope that hon. Members will forgive me for doing so in such detail. I believe that it will be helpful to have on the record some of the means of measurement that we will need to adopt to ensure that we have rigorously analysed whether the scheme will work. I shall also refer to one particular group of people for whom I have concern—households in temporary accommodation.

I welcome the fact that the proposal will be piloted. That is an important gesture, because it allows us to take a considered approach to whether it will work. As someone who is deeply sceptical about the proposal, I will be happy to be proved wrong. If the proposal works, by increasing access to housing supply, increasing choice and helping to cut poverty, no one will be more pleased than me. Those are shared objectives. I doubt that those things will happen, but I shall be pleased if they do. I share the objectives stated by the Government of greater transparency, greater clarity—some of which may be afforded by a flat-rate allowance—and greater choice.

I accept—it is an extremely important point that was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper)—that the Government's proposal may work in some parts of the country but in others it could be a disaster. As with anything housing related, we have to come to terms with that reality. Policies that could work wonderfully in areas crippled and blighted by the crisis of low demand may benefit from a choice-based system, and I would be the first to say that they should. However, we should also recognise that there is another side to the coin. There are wide areas, primarily in London and the south-east, where such a system could have the opposite effect, and people should not be driven into homelessness or debt as a consequence.

My hon. Friend said that if the policy worked in Brighton it would work anywhere. I beg to differ slightly with him for one reason. Brighton is a self-contained community; it is a town in which people may look within the local market for housing. My hon. Friend may want to contradict me—I appreciate that people go to Brighton from London and other areas. However, the city of London is subject to the separate problem of displacement. That is something that worries me about the single London pilot—it will be in the borough of Lewisham—that my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) mentioned. If people are unable to access properties in Lewisham, they will find a rented property elsewhere, and if that does not work out they will end up in the queue for social housing in that area. That will have to be measured, and I will return to the matter briefly later.

I am schizophrenic about what the Minister said in his introductory remarks. If the roll-out for the private rented sector is not completed for several years, part of me cheers. My heart soars like a lark because I am so anxious about it. On the other hand, there is the consequent likelihood that for the majority of people caught by other problems in the present system of housing benefit there will be no possibility of change, and they need such a possibility for two reasons.

It is different in parts of the north of England, but the present system in London and parts of the south-east fails, first, because the absence of choice in the private rented sector for low-income households is driving an increasing number of families, households and individuals into the queue for social housing. My borough and other London authorities cite the fact that the end of an assured shorthold tenancy is a major route into social housing. Access to the private rented sector by households on housing benefit has declined dramatically since the mid-1990s, for reasons such as the housing market, trends in buy-to-let and so on. It is possible that the pilots may exacerbate that trend, and we will have to measure it.

The queue for social housing is lengthening dramatically. One of the principal routes into the queue for social housing in high-demand areas is through a short-term, unsustainable private tenancy. That is bad news for local authorities in high-need areas and for those who are forced through a series of moves into an unstable lifestyle. In my casework experience, that frequently results in people running up thousands, if not tens of thousands, of pounds of debt as they attempt to sustain a tenancy that they cannot afford. People in the private rented sector are often in deeply unsuitable, unattractive and poorly maintained properties; they are asked to pay £300 or £400 a week and their housing benefit is restricted. That issue was raised by the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb).

The Minister will correct me if the figure is wrong, but I understand that 70 per cent. of private tenancies have a rent restriction applied to them, and that the average rent restriction is £19. In Westminster, which I admit is at the sharp end of the trend, it is common for people to face a rent shortfall of £60, £70 or £80 a week. People are trying to manage that on income support. They fail, and end up being accepted as unintentionally homeless and joining the queue for social housing. That is utterly mad. We must seriously address the failure of the present system, which, even if the pilots provide us with a workable alternative, will continue for many years to drive households into the lengthening social housing queue.

The second and related point is the fact that housing benefit shortfalls are a major contributory factor to poverty. The Government are to be wholly commended both for their targets and for their action in reducing poverty, particularly child and pensioner poverty. I am an enthusiastic supporter of almost every element of that policy and am happy that the Government are achieving demonstrable success. However, we have a blind spot about housing costs, particularly in areas such as London. As a result, inner London has the most child poverty in Britain—41 per cent. of our children are in poverty. Before housing costs are taken into account, there is a relatively even pattern of child poverty across the country. When housing costs are taken into account, the picture is transformed, and the figure for London is devastating. If we are to tackle poverty, as the Government are committed to doing, we have to do it evenly across the country. It is no good saying that places such as inner London, and other areas with high housing costs, can go hang; the issue is too difficult to deal with.

In the short term, alongside any pilots—which I hope are successful—we must recognise the chronic nature of the housing benefit shortfall and find a better way to integrate housing benefit with tax credits. Part of the poverty problem in London is that there is a considerable pool of people who are some distance from the labour market. Many of them cannot get over the barrier of high housing and child care costs. We must not allow that situation to continue for years.

I also support the point made by the hon. Member for Northavon about low-income homeowners. Even allowing for the fact that—thanks to the Government's economic stewardship—mortgage rates are admirably low, in London and some other areas with high housing costs, people who are on mortgage protection and income support and have high mortgages are unable to make the transition into the labour market for fear of losing their protection and being unable to maintain their mortgages. The problem must be addressed.

Those are my concerns. I have a few questions for the Minister concerning the flat rate housing allowance. I am not expecting him to reply now, but hope that he will respond in writing. Will he test a number of issues in the pilot schemes as an ongoing baseline assessment, with control groups and with what I described earlier as a posthumous assessment? That involves, first, local reference rents, which were also mentioned by the hon. Member for Northavon, whom I support. There is evidence from some areas that the clustering of localities for local reference rent purposes leads to a significant increase in the local reference rent. That happens in areas with sharply contrasting housing costs, such as the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn), and it is bad news. It means either that people cannot access housing at all or that they are forced entirely into low-income housing, which undermines the Government's objective of creating mixed communities. Will the Minister revisit the already flawed system of determining local reference rents, and make sure that the rent officers reality test local reference rents against the availability of properties, because there is undoubtedly a disparity in several areas? Given that local authorities have strategic housing responsibilities, which the Government recently reinforced, will the Minister give them a role, alongside rent officers, in determining the localities for local reference rents?

Will the Minister consider using indicators in the pilots to measure changes in the supply of property at, above and below local reference rents? Will he look at precise data on the extent and scale of shortfalls between rent and housing allowances? Will he consider the number of homelessness applications that are made because of private sector rent arrears and the loss of shorthold tenancies? Will he take account of the reasons why people lose such tenancies? They may do so because of the rent or for other reasons. Will he also look at the change in average rent levels during the pilot schemes, at the distribution of rents across the deregulated private sector in the relevant areas and at evidence of clustering around local reference rents, which would show that some landlords were taking advantage of them?

When he winds up, will the Minister comment on the under-occupier incentive scheme, which the Department for Work and Pensions introduced? Cash incentives do not seem to have a significant effect in

[Ms Karen Buck]

encouraging people to move to smaller properties. Does he accept recent research, which compounds the findings of earlier studies when it suggests that

"the quality of vacancies and the practical help offered to potential movers are much more significant than the availability of incentive payments"?

Clearly, one objective for the schemes is to encourage people to utilise the housing stock better, but cash incentives do not appear to do that. Would a penalty component—people facing loss of income if they remain in a property with a rent higher than the reference rent—have an impact on behaviour?

Will the Minister commit himself to regular surveys of tenants to establish whether they find it easier or more difficult to find property at or below the local reference rent?

Can the Minister let me know what percentage of claimants in each authority is paid under the new rules and is, therefore, affected by the change? I assume that tenants who are still under the old system, in which the difference between the rent and the local reference rent is topped up, will continue to get that top-up. Will the Minister confirm that?

We also need to know how many landlords of properties where a current shortfall is due to the property-specific rent accepted the benefit that was previously paid but then increased the rent to the flat-rate level. That would illustrate that landlords who provide substandard accommodation can charge the same as those who own similar accommodation of a decent standard. As I said, I do not expect the Minister to respond to such detailed points today.

Lastly, the Minister will be aware that the number of families housed in self-contained temporary accommodation is rising rapidly. That is partly thanks to the admirable commitment to remove families from bed-and-breakfast accommodation. However, families remain in so-called temporary accommodation for many years, and the rents are extremely high. Something must be done to enable such people to enter the labour market. Families in my constituency often rent ex-council flats that were sold under the right to buy, and they pay £300 to £350 a week in rent. The money is reimbursed through housing benefit, because they are in temporary accommodation. However, it is impossible for those people to enter the labour market. Sixty thousand households are in temporary accommodation, and the figure is likely to rise, certainly in the short term. Can the various Departments do something to provide proper work incentives for families in temporary accommodation to keep them in touch with the labour market or to help them back into it after suffering the trauma of homelessness? Otherwise, a huge pool of people will be locked out of the labour market for many years, to everyone's detriment.

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to make these points. I am sceptical about the flat rate allowance, although I am sympathetic to the idea of making one available through the tax credit system to people in all housing sectors. Obviously, that would require a form of means-testing, but I can live with that because the benefits outweigh the disadvantages. The critical point, however, is that, alongside any such system, there must be scope to act sensitively in individual cases and to top up the rents of people in very high rent areas, whether they live in the social housing sector or the private rented sector. Otherwise, the consequences for them could be very severe.

4.19 pm

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): I echo the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) in saying that it is a pleasure to take part in this afternoon's debate. The measured and thoughtful contributions to an important subject show the House at its best.

Housing benefit is extremely important, involving nearly 4.5 million households in the UK. The cost to the Exchequer is about £11.5 billion—12 per cent. of all social security benefits—and it is paid by the Department for Work and Pensions. The figure approaches nearly 1 per cent. of total GDP. It is also worth noting that council tenants' rents in England and Wales contribute £1.5 billion towards the cost of paying for housing benefit.

When the Labour party wrote its manifesto in the run-up to the 1997 election, it rightly identified some £2 billion of housing benefit fraud per year. The Labour Government came into office with the laudable intention to do something about that. We are all enemies of benefit fraud; it benefits no one other than those who defraud the system and it brings the welfare state into disrepute. We are all committed to doing something about it.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I agree that fraud is wholly unacceptable, but does the hon. Gentleman agree that another form of fraud can be seen in the incompetent delivery of housing benefit by contracted companies such as ITNet? The people in my borough suffer from that and it amounts to fraud.

Andrew Selous: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. I hold no brief for any company involved in the outsourcing of housing benefit, to which the hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) has already alluded. In some parts of the country, that clearly has been a disaster. Like me, the hon. Gentleman probably knows of some successful experiments in outsourcing. I shall be moving on to administration later, but the hon. Gentleman is right in what he says.

The National Housing Federation report, "Housing Benefit—missed opportunities", claimed that the £2 billion figure had become considerably larger since it was first identified by the incoming Labour Government in 1997. The report stated:

"In much of the country the problem has reached, or gone beyond crisis point".

In the light of the available figures, it is regrettable how little success has been achieved in tackling this laudable aim of 1997. In 1997–98, 220,000 cases of fraudulent weekly claims were established, from which only 700 successful prosecutions resulted. In 2000–01, only 100,000 such fraud claims were established, which I find alarming. I fear that that is not the result of the disappearance of fraud from the system, but due to local authorities, the Benefits Agency or Jobcentre Plus giving up the task of identifying and tackling the problem. Of

the 100,000 cases, only 1,100 resulted in successful prosecutions, yet 460,000 were referred to the fraud and investigation section. Only the tip of the iceberg results in a successful prosecution, which is extremely worrying.

We know that 40 per cent. of authorities did not prosecute a single case, which I find especially worrying. Not one incident has been reported in the local media that can be drawn to people's attention to let them know that they will be prosecuted if they defraud the system. People get the message that they can get away with it, that this is an easy benefit to fiddle, that everyone does it and that nothing will be done about it. It would have a marked effect on the problem if only one or two high-profile prosecutions were given sufficient publicity in every local authority.

Why not incentivise local authorities by letting them keep some of the savings from successful prosecutions? There must, of course, be the highest standards of evidence and proof; we do not want local authorities bringing spurious prosecutions. Where the due process of law is observed and the correct evidence is collected, why not give local authorities an incentive to tackle the 460,000 cases that are going unchallenged and unprosecuted?

It is a fundamental principle of English law that we do not presume guilt before it has been proved. Cases have come to my attention—I raised them with the Secretary of State—where housing benefit was stopped while the local council made its investigation, only to be reinstated later when the local authority admitted that there was no proof or evidence of any wrongdoing. The tenant had to endure the fear of eviction, if not eviction itself. That is wrong. We would not stand for that in our legal system, and I fail to understand why we permit it to happen in relation to housing benefit. We should be tough on fraud, but things have got out of hand in that area. We must not stop benefit before guilt has been proved.

The Audit Commission severely criticised the administration of housing benefit in their report published in 2001, which has been mentioned. We know that some authorities are taking 100 days to process new claims and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) pointed out, the time taken to process claims varies greatly throughout the country. Some authorities are especially good, such as Camden council, which always does well. Others offer their residents a very poor service.

The Conservative party had two proposals in its manifesto for the general election in 2001 that would have helped. I ask the Minister to comment on them in his closing remarks. We proposed that the administration of housing benefit should revert to Jobcentre Plus—formerly the Benefits Agency—where local authorities clearly cannot cope; my hon. Friend has mentioned the worst 14 per cent. The Department should consider that option if it is clear that a local authority is giving an appalling service.

Our second proposal was that regulations should be changed only once or, at the most, twice a year. It is incredibly difficult for local authorities to cope with the constantly changing regulations, especially with all the different elements that must be entered into computer programs that run housing benefit. We all accept that there will have to be some changes, and that changes will not disappear. However, can we please have them at just two fixed points a year—say, in January or July—and can they be delayed until that time? It would be a considerable change if they could.

I welcome the fact that the Minister says that he is bringing in more money for the administration of housing benefit but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury rightly pointed out, there has been a huge increase in the number of statutory instruments and circulars to local authorities. It would do as much as anything to help the administration of housing benefit if there could be a decrease in the volume of such regulations to local authorities.

Many elements of the reforms proposed by the Secretary of State on 17 October 2002 are welcome. As the hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) said, I am sure that they will be successful in the parts of the country where there is genuine choice; mainly those parts north of Birmingham. However, in other parts of the country, it is clear that tenants do not have a great deal of choice, and the evaluation of the pilots will be critical. It is worth pointing out that even if the pathfinders were deemed to be successful and the scheme was rolled out nationwide, it would affect only some 800,000 out of the 4.5 million tenants who are on housing benefit. We are talking about reform of only a small part of the housing benefit system, and I urge the Government to move housing benefit further up their list of priorities and, in particular, to tackle the remaining tenants who will not be affected by the reforms.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): Does the hon. Gentleman include in the choice the introduction of Supporting People, which is happening this April? Supporting People has a particular impact on tenants living in sheltered accommodation and a disaggregation between Supporting People and the housing benefit budgets will possibly result in a stark choice for those who get housing benefit, who may lose out, and those who do not get housing benefit, who may end up paying increased charges. I hope that that can be examined—the Minister may wish to respond later—because it is an important aspect of housing benefit.

Andrew Selous: The matter of rent restructuring is also significant for housing benefit. I know that some district councils, not least my own, are severely concerned about the impact of both Supporting People and rent restructuring on their budgets. The integration of that with housing benefit will be critical to local authorities' budgets, as well as to the tenants themselves.

I want to examine the rights and responsibilities of housing benefit. In his statement to the House on 17 October, the Secretary of State said that in making tenants responsible for paying their rent, he was reinforcing the link between rights and responsibilities. Many Members welcomed that element of his statement. Indeed, if I remember rightly, the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) described that element of reforms as an end to serfdom for tenants. In pursuing the theme of rights and responsibilities, I am particularly exercised by cases of "neighbours from hell" who are in receipt of housing benefit and their effect on the communities that they terrorise. By what

[Andrew Selous]

right do those tenants take tax payments from the neighbours whom they terrorise and claim housing benefit to pay their rent? The Government are examining different measures, including how to improve antisocial behaviour orders and acceptable behaviour contracts.

Ms Buck: On the point about taxpayers funding families who are guilty of antisocial behaviour, is the hon. Gentleman also proposing that jobseeker's allowance, income support and child benefit should be withdrawn from such families?

Andrew Selous: No. We should consider what the right hon. Member for Birkenhead said in an article in *The Sunday Telegraph* on 5 May 2002, from which I shall quote briefly:

"When thinking about what might tip the scales of justice away from the brutes and bullies, and towards my decent constituents, I singled out housing benefit above other social security payments precisely because so much trouble is generated by a few families, whose arrogance and aggression is increased by their sense that they are untouchable."

Such people think that they cannot be moved from their properties, whatever behaviour they indulge in.

I shall illustrate my point with two cases from my constituency, which are fresh in my mind because I have dealt with them recently. We know that the Government want to make more use of antisocial behaviour orders and that they are trying to improve acceptable behaviour contracts. We know that they are also considering introducing stricter tenancy agreements. The threat of withdrawing housing benefit should be one weapon in their armoury. The Bill introduced by the right hon. Member for Birkenhead proposed that housing benefit should be withdrawn from any tenant who was found guilty twice by a court—there is a high standard of proof; it is not something that can be done on the whim of a local authority—of antisocial behaviour in three years, and that the tenant should possibly be threatened with eviction. The Government have said that they support the Bill in principle and intend to take forward the idea.

It is no part of my brief as a Member of Parliament to see a single extra homeless person on the streets. However, I served on the Committee that considered the Homelessness Act 2002—along with the Minister who is here today—and I went into that Committee with a genuinely open mind. I did not know what my views on the subject were. I sat and listened to Labour Members from all over the country, including areas where things are probably much tougher than they are in my constituency, and to many of my own colleagues, and every single one of them supported the measure because of their experiences of seeing constituents terrorised by a minority of families.

A couple of months ago, there was an extremely nasty case of aggressive, racist antisocial behaviour in my constituency, where one coloured family was being terrorised and the whole community suffered badly. I attended meetings with the police, local authority and local clergy, and it was only when local council officers went and spoke to the two families responsible and those families realised that their tenancies were at serious risk that they stopped their bad behaviour. That community is now peaceful, the two families who were responsible for the bad behaviour are behaving better and the family who were terrorised are no longer being affected.

Mr. Love: I am sure that all hon. Members would agree that we face some terrible difficulties with antisocial tenants in our constituencies. Did the Committee to which the hon. Gentleman referred—whose members, he suggested, all agreed on the proposal—consider the consequences of withdrawing housing benefit and its likely impact not only on the immediate family, but on a wider group of people?

Andrew Selous: Yes, indeed. It is not just my suggestion that everyone on that Committee agreed. If the hon. Gentleman cares to examine the record of the Standing Committee, the votes make it clear. He will see that every single Conservative and Labour Member voted the same way. Indeed, it is a pleasure to be able to say a few words about that Committee because the filibustering of one Committee member prevented us from getting a word in edgeways.

I want to illustrate my point by referring to another case in my constituency. An Indian gentleman visited my surgery twice in the past two months. He and his partner, who is expecting their first child, have been terrorised for months by their next-door neighbour. The council has tried every single measure known and open to them to stop the antisocial behaviour of the council tenant who lives next door, sadly to no avail.

Jeremy Corbyn: It is good of the hon. Gentleman to give way. Is he aware that racist behaviour is a criminal act anyway and there is a criminal law to deal with it? It does not have to be dealt with through tenancy law; criminal law deals with it. Likewise, if an owner-occupier behaves in a socially unacceptable way, housing benefit cannot be taken away because there is probably none to take away. Criminal law is there to be used for that purpose.

Andrew Selous: I find myself in the strange position of agreeing with both the hon. Gentleman's points. It just happens that the two incidents that I mentioned had a racist dimension. However, I have many other examples of constituency cases, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman has, in which race has played no part. Of course I accept that there are laws that deal specifically with race crimes. Race crimes are hateful, and it is right that we have such laws. However, race was an incidental factor in the two cases to which I referred.

As far as those two cases are concerned, the local authority has tried everything. In the Indian gentleman's last letter, he asked whether it was worth coming back to see me. He had been through all the options with the council and had tried all that I had suggested to him, yet it seemed impossible for the council to obtain the required level of evidence. The Government must consider that in their reform of housing benefit. Indeed, the former Minister, the right hon. Member for Birkenhead, has said in the House that he is committed to the principles of housing benefit reform.

The current Minister, when he took the Housing Benefit (Withholding of Payment) Bill through Committee, said that he was committed to and

understood those principles. Therefore, this is an important area. I hope that the threat of withholding housing benefit will result in people ceasing appalling behaviour. I hope that the threat is used rarely, if ever, but I have already seen that when a council gets really serious and says that someone may lose his home if such behaviour continues, that can lead to a great improvement.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Sir Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): Before I call the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Sir A. Kirkwood)—I hope that I shall have the support of all Members here—I congratulate him on the award of a knighthood in the Queen's new year's honours' list. It is an honour that is richly deserved. I call Mr.—I mean, Sir—Archy Kirkwood.

4.42 pm

Sir Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I am humble and happy and proud, Sir Nicholas, because you and I both know that there have been only two such awards made for services to Parliament. I am deeply delighted to follow you, the first person to receive such an award. I am sure that Members here would want me to recognise that.

This has been a good debate. It is a pleasure to follow my colleague the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous), who makes a thoughtful contribution to the work of the Select Committee. He made a thoughtful contribution this afternoon, as indeed did all colleagues who preceded me. It is a particular delight that the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper), my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Richard Younger-Ross) and the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz), who all represent pilot areas, have taken the trouble to attend. The Minister is correct—this is an important debate which has been well attended. Not only is it an important subject but it is being seriously and tangibly piloted throughout the United Kingdom in a way in which we shall have a continuing interest. It is a pleasure to be here.

I can make a shorter speech because of the quality of the debate so far. Many of the salient points have been made. The Minister has done reasonably well. I gave his consultation document on the pilots a warm welcome before Christmas because I was desperate for something to be done. I must say, however, that having read the consultation document over Christmas, I am now less enthusiastic about it. I shall come to that in a moment.

We must understand that bigger forces are at work in the formulation of housing benefit policy. The Government need to sort out housing policy before housing benefit will ever be positively affected. A diversity of rented accommodation and affordable owner-occupation has to be available to communities. There is no magic formula. There is no piece of algebra that will suddenly simplify housing benefit. We must all recognise that. The only way in which the Minister could have made real progress in this area would have been if the comprehensive spending review last year had afforded some more money. I know that the Government are trying to make some progress, but more money needs to be put in and more thought needs to be given to providing affordable housing throughout the United Kingdom.

The Government's policy is to make strategic wholesale moves in the direction of tax credits rather than benefits. The Minister cannot ignore that; he has to work within and around it. There are some real worries there. I agree with the hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) that the Government have done a lot of commendable work in addressing poverty. They have targeted poverty for their own reasons and have taken the whole profile of public spending in the direction of tax credits. The worry for housing benefit is that the ways in which tax credits are being delivered, based on annual gross household assessments, do not sit that well with the legacy system that he is left to work with for housing benefit based on income support. There is a disjunction between the two systems.

There are bigger forces at work within which the Minister must work as best he can. He has £30 million for this important pilot. We have to make the best of it. Like the hon. Lady, I have an open mind on this. I wish the pilot well. However, having looked at it more closely, I wonder whether we are going to get much out of it. She is right to want to nail down what we are trying to get out the results of this pilot by way of monitored measurement that is meaningful and can be translated to other parts of the country in other ways.

We should not forget that there are still big problems in the current system. Much has been dealt with in earlier speeches. The Government seem to be saying in the consultation document that they have ticked the box of addressing the administrative problem of the current system and are now moving on. That was the sense I got from the consultation paper. That is not quite right. It is true that the situation has improved, dramatically in some cases. In my local authority some of the problems are being addressed. There is more consultation between central Government and local authorities. That is welcome. But there are still far too many circulars going around. Too much concern is given to minor changes of income from week to week. It is all de minimis. It should all be swept away. Little would be lost in terms either of additional fraud or extra expenditure if changes could be accepted more easily. People have to register all sorts of tiny changes and then they are sent another form. That does not help the system.

There is real concern about some of the non-dependent deductions. That has been mentioned earlier. There is an ethnic dimension to that. I have learned much about this from my colleagues on the Select Committee. There are not large numbers of people from the ethnic minorities in south-east Scotland. Non-dependent deductions bear down heavily on ethnic minorities. The single room rent restrictions have a particularly bad effect on disabled people who sometimes need larger properties to live in. A whole series of things must still be borne in mind, not least take-up. Take-up is an issue with all these new means-tested benefits, but it continues to be an issue in housing benefit.

It is not safe to assume that the administration of housing benefit, improving as it may be, is yet properly addressed. More needs to be done. The second point that I should like to make, which was made eloquently by my hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) is that home ownership issue needs to be addressed, certainly before 2010. The focus of the

[Sir Archy Kirkwood]

debate in that period of time will be on the private rented sector. If we are to be effective in dealing with poverty, something must be done in the home ownership category.

I refer the Minister to a valuable new piece of work by Roger Burrows, using the Joseph Rowntree Foundation poverty and social exclusion survey of Britain, which was reported in yesterday's *Financial Times*. I find it surprising that, according to his research, half of all people living in poverty are home owners. He asks, with some force, whether it is equitable that home owners receive only 8 per cent. of state support for housing costs. We must be careful not to spend all our time focusing on a small, although important, piece of reform that we hope will go well; there are bigger issues to be considered, as my hon. Friend the Member for Northavon said.

Mr. Brazier: The hon. Gentleman is the second Liberal Democrat to raise this issue. Is he suggesting that part of the £11.5 billion currently spent on housing benefit should be redeployed, or that there should be a substantial, costly new benefit, that will affect large numbers of people?

Sir Archy Kirkwood: The Institute for Fiscal Studies has made the sensible point that the Government missed an opportunity in addressing private and public aspects of housing benefit when they put large amounts of money into dealing with child poverty. There is an argument for doing so, and they have made progress in that respect, but the point that the IFS makes is that to go so far in that direction without doing anything to redress issues surrounding benefit in general was a missed opportunity, and I agree with that. I am not the Liberal Democrat spokesman on the matter, so the hon. Gentleman cannot pin what I say on my party, but we do need to put more money into housing support. However, I am not going to be daft and say that on Monday we should introduce huge extra public expenditure on home owners. What I am saying is that between now and the end of the decade, as growth develops, resources become available and reform evolves, we must not forget low-income home owners. I do not say that off my own bat: there was a unanimous, all-party Social Security Committee report on housing benefit in July 2000 to which three distinguished Conservative Members signed up. If the hon. Gentleman has a problem with that, I suggest that he talks to them, not just to me.

I hope that we will have the opportunity to say that the pilot did not work if that is the case. If it takes us no further forward and no conclusions can be drawn from the £30 million spent after the evaluations have been made, I hope that we will be big enough to say, "Okay, we tried it. It didn't work and we need to try something else." That is not to prejudge the pilot but to say that pilots are not necessarily for ever. If it makes no effective difference or, indeed, if it causes unforeseen problems, we should reserve the right to say that it was worth trying but we do not think that it will be fruitful to pursue such a proposal.

From a Scottish Member's point of view, I am nervous that in the long term, in the next 10 years, we will end up with a devolved rent policy and a reserved UK housing benefit policy. The Minister is making a claim for a policy in England whereby English and presumably Welsh social rented sector markets will be reformed over that period, but I am aware of no such policy in Scotland. I am in favour of devolution, but we must be careful to avoid ending up not only with different policies in the tiers of the private rented and home owner sector. It is a problem throughout the UK, but we must keep the policy in some sort of kilter. Otherwise, it will cause us problems in future.

Finally, I do not think that the Government have finished with tax credits; I believe that there will be more reform in that direction. We must therefore find a way to ensure that, as things evolve, housing benefit is properly integrated with tax credits, as the July 2000 Select Committee report also said. That cannot be done on a cost-cutting basis. All the reforms undertaken before 1997 were difficult and failed because the agenda was really to save money. I do not believe that this Government's reforms fall into that category, but unless we ensure that proper integration continues and that proper housing provision is a priority, there will always be problems with housing benefit.

4.56 pm

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): I was not sure whether it was appropriate for me to make a contribution this afternoon. With so many Front-Bench spokesmen and Select Committee members present, I felt a little isolated. In any case, much of what I wanted to say has already been said, so I shall try to be brief, but it is important that my hon. Friend the Minister hears views on housing benefit issues from throughout the House.

This has been an excellent debate. Hon. Members have made measured and thoughtful speeches, and I do not particularly want to strike a party political note, but it is important to remember that housing benefit was introduced under the previous Conservative Government and that in many ways we are still living with the consequences.

The complexity and confusion of housing benefit has been talked about, and a number of contributions have focused on fraud and error. One of the propensities of such a complex system is that, in the main, it allows error, but also a significant level of fraud. Much has also been said about overpayments, but the other side of that coin in housing benefit administration is that there is a significant level of underpayment, which is even more worrying.

I think that the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) spoke about work disincentives. We must put that in context: 42 per cent. of housing benefit is paid to pensioners. When talking about work disincentives, we must be clear who is affected. I believe that it is mainly a problem of high-rent areas, such as Greater London, Brighton and some of the other areas that have been mentioned. There is a very significant disincentive in those areas.

Shopping incentives have been mentioned. Again, where there is an adequate supply of rented accommodation, such a system may be appropriate and may work, as my hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) said, but I am sceptical about its ability to work in some of the more stressed areas of the country, particularly Greater London.

There are many problems with housing benefit administration, from low standards to the very variable way in which many people, including my constituents, are treated daily. It is a considerable problem. Many tenants are threatened with eviction because of administration failures. Looked at the other way, that means that many landlords do not receive the correct rent because of those same failures. We need to put that into context; it is a significant problem, but others are more serious. The steps that the Government are taking to harmonise rent structures, among other things, are leading to a radical change in housing benefit. However, as the Minister said earlier, that will happen over 10 years. The problems are so great that we should do something immediately. Therefore, with some caveats, I welcome the reform that we have discussed today and the introduction of the standard local housing allowance.

One of the things that has reassured me about the pilot schemes is that the document "Building choice and responsibility: a radical agenda for Housing Benefit" produced by the Department for Work and Pensions, says that the intention of the reform is that rents will "aim to reflect market conditions and reflect rents in the middle of the market."

That is important. I hope that that policy will overcome some of the problems caused by rent restrictions, which we have debated. Not only are people in great difficulty because they have to bridge the gap between the benefit payment and their rent, but society faces a significant amount of homelessness and has to deal with the costs that that entails and the additional demands that are placed on social housing. That is a significant issue, especially in Greater London.

It is important to echo the comments made on a number of issues by the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) and by my hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North. The first is transparency. One of the great difficulties with the current rent officer service is that nobody seems to know how determinations are reached, yet there is great controversy over them. We must consider seriously how the system of rent determination can be made trustworthy, so that people can have confidence in it. I should not like there to be litigation in this area, but if we are to avoid controversial situations, transparency is the first principle that must be underscored.

The second is accuracy. When I deal with local cases, I hear of determinations that are based on statistics that are a year, 18 months or two years out of date. That cannot be the right basis on which to make a rent assessment. It is particularly important in areas that have experienced enormous house price inflation and private rent inflation in the past couple of years. If I were to compare rents there now with those of a year or two ago, there would be a significant difference. That affects those who are hoping to move into the private sector and are looking to housing benefit to meet their costs.

It is an important principle that there should be consultation with local organisations that are familiar with the localities in which determinations are made—local authorities, Citizens Advice bureaux and landlords have a role to play. We must ensure that we have accurate, up-to-date figures.

We have talked about localities. We need to reflect the housing markets in each locality. As has been said, if there is an enormous variation in rent in a locality, people will inevitably move from the higher rent areas to the lower rent areas. We therefore need rent comparability across localities. If the proposals are to work, that point will be particularly important, particularly in the context of London, where there is an enormous variation in the rents that can be charged, even within relatively small areas.

We have talked about tenants taking responsibility for the payment of their rents. Like others, I would not quibble with that. However, there have been good reasons why rent has been paid directly to landlords and those will not be whisked away because of the introduction of a pilot scheme. We should consider people who are particularly vulnerable and whether eight weeks is the appropriate time, as tenants and landlords will be in difficulty in relation to housing benefit payments. I would like the Minister to consider that carefully. Although I accept the principle, and know that the matter will be dealt with sensitively, cases in which it would be appropriate to make the payment directly to the landlord need to be considered, as that will ensure the success of the scheme.

People have talked about changes in circumstances. I will not go into every improvement that the Government have made, all of which I welcome. However, I would like the Government to go further; for instance, by looking at the week-by-week adjustments made to housing benefit in an area. In terms of the working families tax credit and the new credits that will be introduced, a longer time scale will be used. The Government could usefully look into that in trying to merge the ways in which the housing benefit and those tax credits are dealt with. Improvements could still be made there.

My hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North mentioned pathfinder areas. I am disappointed that only one London authority has been considered. Lewisham shares some inner and outer London characteristics, though I think that there are issues that are specific to inner London. Choosing another area of London to be part of the pilot scheme would help to ensure that the right lessons are learned about the pilot schemes in the different areas.

In relation to the scheme's introduction, it will be important to monitor the results. We must ensure that the scheme that is to be rolled out nationwide takes into account the lessons learned from the pilots. For example, organisations of landlords have expressed their concerns about the impact of the pilot schemes on them, and about whether they want to enter into them. The word "choice" is used a lot. The hon. Member for Northavon said that the change is perhaps not as radical as some suggest. I agree that the choice will be limited. However, any increase or improvement in choice for tenants is to be welcomed. I hope that we shall monitor that carefully.

On the impact on work incentives, one of the Government's central aims is to get people back to work. We should consider how the pilot scheme assists that. Housing benefit has generally not been very good at providing work incentives, particularly in high-rent areas. It would be good to know whether the pilot schemes will improve that situation.

The single room rent provisions are now called the younger person rent restrictions. Others have commented on the matter before, and it is important to

[Mr. Andrew Love]

do so. The research that the Government carried out showed that the restrictions on single room rent, as it was called then, were causing financial hardship. There was considerable debt among young people under 25, and eviction. The extension to the scheme was introduced because that and other research, on which hon. Members have commented, showed that the shortfall between the amount received in benefit and the amount of rent that young people were having to pay was around £34, and could be even higher in Greater London.

The scheme was introduced more than 18 months ago in, I believe, July 2001, and should be evaluated because of concern expressed by organisations such as Shelter and others to which hon. Members referred that it has made little difference. People are not receiving significantly increased housing benefit and are still facing similar problems. The Institute of Revenues, Ratings and Valuations, which I hope we can regard as an independent body, has said that the scheme has made little practical difference. An evaluation of the scheme and a report to Parliament are now overdue. I believe that a report was promised when the changes were introduced, and I urge the Minister to produce one.

In general, I welcome the pilots and the new scheme, which offers the prospect of a significantly different benefit scheme that will ameliorate at least some of the substantial problems with the current scheme. That must be welcomed, and I look forward to seeing a report to Parliament on how the scheme is going.

5.11 pm

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): I thank the Minister for saying that he will involve the Members responsible for the pathfinder areas. We all look forward to seeing how the detail is rolled out, as it is only through the detail that we will see just how effective the scheme will be, whether it will ultimately work or fail, and whether it will throw up unexpected problems.

I have concerns about the scheme, especially about the effect of the standard allowance. If a level is set above the existing lower rents, as it is in the documentation distributed by the Minister, there has to be an expectation that the rent levels will rise in areas with a housing shortage. There can be no other consequence. If landlords can see what the rent level is, they must use the opportunity to raise their rents. That will not matter to the Minister as it will have no effect on Government money. Its impact will be to undo one of the benefits claimed by the Minister—that it is putting extra money into the pockets of people on benefit.

Such a level will also affect those people who are not on housing benefit, as well as those on low incomes who are not entitled to any Government help but who are in rented accommodation. Many people in a constituency such as Teignbridge fall into that category. They already struggle to find appropriate accommodation. I fear that any jacking up due to the allowance will have a detrimental effect. I am not saying that that will necessarily happen. I hope that those predictions are wrong and that the Minister is right, but I have my concerns.

I have a second, albeit lesser, concern. Any scheme that is to work and be effective must be seen to be fair and just. How the boundaries are drawn up may throw up apparent injustices on both sides of the same street. It is possible to have identical properties with identical tenants but with different rent levels because the properties fall into different areas. The result may be that a couple on one side in No. 48 may have an extra £5 a week in their pocket, but the couple opposite may have an extra £15. That will create a sense of injustice and unfairness. Any system with such a built-in injustice will eat like a cancer into the long-term viability of the scheme.

As I mentioned earlier, I am concerned about the impact on the availability of rented accommodation. As the scheme is reviewed, we must have clear, comparable control areas in order to assess the exact impact on the market. It would be easy for people to see an apparent reduction in rented accommodation in an area for X, Y and Z, but we cannot have excuses for any reduction: we need a proper comparison to show that the scheme is the reason for the reduction. Control zones are crucial to the task.

Teignbridge is an area of high-cost housing, but low salaries. The ratio between salary, income and housing costs is as bad as in the south-east and we suffer from many of the same problems. The area has a real shortage of rented housing. Costs are lower than in London, so when some Londoners retire, they buy a small property in Teignbridge, perhaps after selling their Kensington property, and have enough money left over in the bank for their retirement. That forces up housing prices and impacts on the availability of accommodation for people on low incomes.

The scheme relies on landlords buying into it. People moving into second homes or seeking summer let holiday accommodation exert pressures on the market. If landlords fear that some tenants will not pay, they will look for the easy option. In a place like Teignbridge, that means selling up, realising the capital and investing in something else, so we might face the prospect of significant reductions in available accommodation. Furthermore, Teignbridge has already stretched the number of people paid directly by the Government rather than landlords. As the Minister said when he visited Teignbridge, nationally about 60 per cent. of housing benefit is paid to landlords and 40 per cent. is paid directly to tenants, but the reverse is the case in Teignbridge, so we have a smaller element to play with. If we lose that smaller element, the effect on Teignbridge will be catastrophic.

Until recently, Teignbridge has not had to put people into bed-and-breakfast accommodation. Any reduction in the housing market will result in more homeless people unable to secure accommodation. When they come to the local authority for help, all it can do is find bed-and-breakfast accommodation for them. That will mean greater costs for the authority and worse conditions for all concerned.

Another concern is the impact on rent deposit schemes. The local organisation wrote to me to say that its rent deposits system will not work under the scheme. I ask the Minister to reflect on the problem and talk to the rent deposit schemes in the pathfinder areas to

establish how best to overcome it. I cannot give the Minister any instant answers, but we might be able to find a solution in the coming months.

5.18 pm

Malcolm Wicks: With the permission of the House, I shall say a few more words. We have had a serious debate, reflecting the importance of housing benefit. At times the scrutiny of our proposals has been detailed. At least one hon. Member was generous enough to say that she did not expect me to answer all the questions today. Although she reserves the right to change her mind, I reserved the right to listen to her the first time. As usual on these occasions, if it would be more useful to answer some points in writing, I shall of course do so.

At the start of the debate, Sir Nicholas, you advised that succinctness would be a virtue. So it is, but I have a fistful of replies to present and scrutiny, too, is important. However, I shall try to be as brief as that balance allows me.

One theme of the debate, not least of the contribution of the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) at the opening of the debate, was the issue of antisocial tenants. There is widespread concern about that in our communities, let alone in the House. At this stage, I can say only that, as announced in the Queen's Speech, the Government will be legislating further, with a range of measures, to tackle those problems that seriously blight the lives of so many of our constituents. For example, the Government will be legislating for new action against antisocial tenants in the social housing sector. As has been noted, were it not for the Liberal filibuster we would now have on the statute book a minor but useful measure providing housing benefit sanctions; but despite the clear will of the House, that was stopped by the Liberal Members, and they need to explain that to the electorate at the relevant time. The Government will be legislating widely on the matter.

As a footnote, I add that whenever such proposals are brought forward we understandably hear that it might create homelessness. We need to look at the problem more widely than the Liberals were able to do. For instance, at least one of my constituents was a victim of antisocial tenants and had in effect to make herself homeless because she was not prepared for her children to be subject to abuse and cruelty from a neighbour. She became homeless and her child, therefore, had to go to another school. Homelessness should not be used as a card for only one side of the debate; far from it.

Ms Buck: Certainly for me, the point is not primarily about homelessness, because that must regrettably be used as a tool only in extremis. My concern is that we already have tools to evict people—the antisocial behaviour order and the acceptable behaviour contract—which are well used in my locality. I do not believe that we need to add extra penalties; we need to make the existing penalties work effectively.

Malcolm Wicks: I understand my hon. Friend's point. I shall not say more, because the Government will be making proposals across the board on antisocial behaviour.

The hon. Member for Canterbury spoke about housing benefit expenditure, rather implying that it continues to increase. Let us look at the facts. Housing benefit expenditure more than tripled between 1979—a significant date—and 1997—another significant date. Since then it has fallen by about 20 per cent. in real terms. That speaks for itself. It is not about the Government setting out to reduce housing benefit expenditure per se, but about the success of other antipoverty and welfare-to-work strategies, which people will welcome.

Another theme raised by a number of hon. Members was that of regulation, red tape and the number of circulars being issued. I am sensitive to that. Nevertheless, we need to bring a bit of common sense to bear. Some of the circulars are not always there to change benefit regulations in complex let alone needless ways. Some of them will simply present local authorities with helpful information on how to run the scheme more effectively, or reflect other changes being made by the Government.

To play the red tape card all the time can be a little silly, although there is a substantive point to be made. For that reason I have established within the Department a regulation scrutiny group, which includes local authority representatives, that advises the Department on the flow of regulations that we need to make. I cannot remember whether the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) said that it was in the Tory party manifesto, and it is not my job to deliver all the manifesto commitments of every party; and I did not know about that. However, I have done it: whenever possible, which is not always, we now endeavour to introduce changes only in April and October. That is important, and our regulation scrutiny group helps us with that. We have introduced a monthly newsletter to local authorities that includes some of the helpful information that previously might have been in circulars. Partly as a result of that, but for other reasons too, the number of circulars issued in 2002 reduced substantially. Hon. Members will be pleased to see my commitment to Tory party manifesto pledges in that respect as well.

Jeremy Corbyn: On the question of circulars and information, the Minister will be aware that the benefit inspectorate has examined the administration of housing benefit in Islington and found its system seriously wanting. Many other authorities are in the same situation, with contractors failing to deliver an adequate system. Is he prepared to intervene and hand back the systems to local authorities to run them in the way that Camden does so efficiently?

Malcolm Wicks: That is a matter for the local authority concerned. In this debate, we have sometimes not allowed for the fact that although housing benefit is a social security policy administered at one level by our Department, local administration is carried out by local authorities. They are democratically elected and make different judgments from time to time, not least in London, about whether to contract out or to contract back in. Some have chosen the latter course.

Much of the detailed work that we have done has removed burdens on local authorities. For example, we have piloted and will now go nationwide on the idea that registered social landlords—or housing associations as I still prefer to call them—may in future help verify claims for housing benefit, rather than the local authority

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having always to do that. That was a successful pilot that removed a piece of bureaucracy. We have also allowed agency and contract staff, some of whom are highly professional and experienced as I saw in Hackney, to undertake more functions in housing benefit determinations, which we discussed in a delegated legislation Committee. The local authority will conduct a 10 per cent. check on quality, and it is a way of cutting out needless bureaucracy because, at the moment, the contracting agency or agency staff member in the town hall makes the determination before the whole decision is then gone through again. Those are small but significant ways in which we are trying to improve the situation.

The hon. Member for Canterbury outlined many criticisms of housing benefit administration, some of which I agree with. I mentioned some in my opening remarks, and my next comment has to be, "hence our reform programme". The problems are why we are scrutinising housing benefit in ways that I outlined, including measures such as the performance framework, the help team and extra money to local authorities. We have listened to local government about the funding, and our medium-term reform programme is about that. There are also our more radical ideas, if the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) will forgive me for using the word "radical", for a housing allowance scheme.

Understandably, we do not talk tough only on fraud, but are delivering results. Fraud in related benefits—income support and jobseeker's allowance—has declined in recent years by some 24 per cent., which has saved the taxpayer £230 million. We take fraud seriously, which is why we are undertaking a research exercise to establish a new measure of how much fraud exists in the housing benefit system and why, in advance of that, we have established for the first time a fraud reduction target for housing benefit of 25 per cent. by 2006.

Like many other Members, the hon. Member for Canterbury raised the pros and cons of enabling the tenant to receive housing benefit, rather than paying it directly to the landlord. It is a strategy not without risks, which is why we are piloting it and will evaluate it carefully. However, the hon. Gentleman should understand that we have to get away from a nanny state and the assumption that we cannot trust the citizen, individual or tenant to receive her or his rent but that it should go directly from the state via the local authority to the landlord. That is not about citizenship or empowerment, and both the Conservatives and the Liberals need to take seriously the notion of balancing individual responsibility with individual rights.

Mr. Webb: If the Minister recalls what I called for, it was to give individuals choice about the way in which they wanted to receive their money. If an individual finds it easier for the assistance he or she gets with the rent to be paid directly to the landlord and to budget with what is left, is it not empowering to give that individual the choice rather than to take it away from them?

Malcolm Wicks: The majority of landlords are responsible and decent, but as many of us know, not least in London, not all of them are. We need to be careful that a tenant—

Mr. Webb *rose—*

Malcolm Wicks: Hang on a minute, if I may use such an unparliamentary term. The hon. Gentleman must realise that some tenants who appear to be making the choice that the money will go direct to the landlord in future may have been pressurised into that choice by the landlord turning up on the doorstep. There is no need for naivety about that. I have met one landlord—I will not say from where—who told me that he had already asked his tenants, and that they would all like him still to receive the money. Let us not be too silly about this.

Mr. Brazier: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way again on the same point. I asked him to evaluate in the pilot whether there would be a disincentive for landlords to take tenants, particularly those in some of the more sensitive categories. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have testified to the huge areas of southern England where landlords can choose their tenants because there is such a shortage of rented accommodation. My concern is that the pilot should address the question whether that has the effect of disadvantaging some people in the market.

Malcolm Wicks: Obviously, we need to safeguard the privately rented housing system. In many areas, it is the oil in the housing market, and can make the market more flexible and provide housing for vulnerable people. That is why we will continue to talk to landlords about that issue, and will include them fully in the evaluation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper) raised a number of important points. I was pleased that he was able to participate in our meeting at Brighton city hall. I believe that I have to call it the city hall now, since for some reason Brighton narrowly beat Croydon to get city status. My hon. Friend enabled me to meet a number of local representatives from the voluntary sector and landlords in Brighton and Hove to discuss the issues. I recognise the difficulties of the Brighton housing market. The rents are high, and it is a city that is under pressure in many ways. That is one of the reasons why we wanted it to be a pathfinder area. Later in the debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) referred to Brighton as self-contained. That is not a phrase that I would have applied to Brighton—I would have called it extrovert rather than self-contained. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion for his intervention.

With regard to transparency, the advantage of the housing allowance scheme is that tenants will know their budget in advance, and as any renter knows, that is the first condition for finding accommodation. I hope that even in difficult housing markets such as Brighton, the housing allowance scheme will have many advantages.

The issue of information and communications technology has become increasingly important in a whole range of social security policies, as we in the Department know. We will work closely with the software suppliers in the 10 pathfinder areas. We have already had some discussions with them to ensure that they are fully on board and aware of what the pathfinders scheme is about.

The issue was raised about landlords finding it more convenient to be paid in advance rather than in arrears. I understand that point, but housing benefit is paid in arrears like other benefits, and that is the way in which most of us are paid our wages and salaries. Changing to payment in advance would instantly worsen the problems of delay and overpayments. There are difficulties.

The Chairman of the Work and Pensions Committee, the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Sir A. Kirkwood), spoke about vulnerable tenants and about paying landlords directly. We will be talking very carefully to local authorities about the discretion that they have in the matter. We believe in a social philosophy of empowering tenants by giving their housing allowance to as many of them as possible. It is their housing allowance; it should not go directly to a landlord. Many vulnerable tenants, although by no means all, may wish to continue paying the landlord directly.

One or two hon. Members raised the issue of the single room rent. I understand its importance, and it has been acknowledged that the Government have made some progress on it. There are serious difficulties; perhaps that was an omission in our deliberations this afternoon. If we are to be wise about social policy and about those who are heavily dependent on benefits, we must also consider their position vis-à-vis that of many of our other constituents. We must consider the housing experience and aspirations of those who are in work but who are not well off. There is a difficulty in that most under-25s who are not on benefit can afford only shared accommodation. That is the experience of the young people whom I know.

Would it be right or wrong for us to enable those on housing benefit to have superior accommodation, perhaps not very superior but still superior, to that of young working people? That poses a serious difficulty. We must consider how the experiences of those on housing allowances should compare with those of the working population, as it could raise serious issues. At present, most working people in London or in Brighton, for example, cannot choose exactly where they want to live. We must consider those difficult issues more deeply than perhaps we have.

Mr. Webb: Another comparator is the many young people who are lucky enough to have a loving, secure home where they can live until they have enough money to live independently. They have a choice; they have somewhere where they will be looked after. I am sure that before the Minister became a Member of Parliament he would have attacked the single room system; he would not have supported it then. The Minister is penalising those who have no choice; they do not lead the life of Riley; they are often forced out of their homes. How can it be fair to tell such people that we will not even meet their rent?

Malcolm Wicks: We have become fairer on that. As a result of the changes that we made, the average rent level has risen by £5 a week—I will check that and verify it if necessary—and that is reflected in housing benefit. There has been a not insignificant change in that matter. I understand the point that the hon. Gentleman is making. There have been welcome changes for children who have been in care and who, until recently, were left at the age of 16 to fend for themselves. Our mind is not closed on the issue. Nevertheless, we must consider the needs of other young people if we are to get the broad acceptance of the welfare state that we all want.

Mr. Drew: With regard to my earlier intervention on the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous), does my hon. Friend accept that this is not just about working people? Pensioners are also affected; that is the point that I made about Supporting People. We must consider very carefully how housing benefit affects those who do not get it as well as those who do.

Malcolm Wicks: That point is well made, and we must reflect more on it in future. I may have only 11 or 12 minutes now and I have a fistful of scrutiny to get through. It would be wrong for me to allow any more interventions, if colleagues will forgive me.

The hon. Member for Northavon made several points. He challenged how radical these proposals are. The last radical thing that a Liberal Government ever did in this field was to introduce rent controls in 1915 when the working class in Glasgow rose up during the first world war as their men were fighting at the front. The hon. Gentleman often sounds older than he looks, but I do not think he was there at that radical moment.

People will judge whether we are being radical. We are starting with the private rented sector. The hon. Gentleman seemed to get excited about page 9 of our document, which he was reading in bed last night. Perhaps, tonight, he should venture on to page 19, where we say

> "In principle, however, we shall also look to introduce standard allowances for social rented housing and would like to test this out through an early Pathfinder where conditions allow."

I refer him to page 19, to read with his mug of Horlicks tonight, and he may be excited by our radical ambitions; but that is another debate.

I was disappointed that the hon. Gentleman seemed to raise doubts about the proposals. They are not without risk—that is why we are evaluating them—but I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman is not more in favour of our proposals because, in terms of choice, empowerment and a proper sense of citizenship, they set out the direction that our social policies should take.

What is the alternative? I cannot believe that the radical Liberal alternative is simply to stick to the existing housing benefit system, which requires us to make detailed inquiries about each and every rent that is paid. We still tolerate a situation in which the rent of six out of 10 people is paid to landlords. I doubt whether that is where we want to be in the future.

The hon. Gentleman is in danger of supporting the status quo, and I do not think that he entered Parliament to do that. All the issues will be properly evaluated and there will be control groups of local

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authorities to reflect different markets; high, medium and low rents. We are thinking seriously about the problems. The hon. Gentleman and I have backgrounds in social research, and I hope that he will trust me to take seriously the evaluation process. I am happy to talk to him about that.

Another important issue is that of low-income homeowners. We all understand that, compared with 30 years ago, there are now many homeowners on lowish incomes. That is partly to do with the ageing of the population, but partly to do with marital breakdown. It may have something to do with the adverse consequences of the policy of selling council homes. Some people who have become homeowners might have fallen on difficult times, although they still live in those dwellings.

There is no code here, but we are actively thinking about all those issues. Indeed, only next week, I am meeting with the homeowners steering group, which includes representatives from the industry, academics and others. We talk to the likes of Professor Steve Wilcox. I have noted the new Joseph Rowntree Foundation report on these matters from the professor in the department at York university where I used to work at the beginning of my career. I hope to be talking to him about these serious and challenging issues.

My hon. friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North is sceptical about our proposals, but she will not want to become a force of conservatism on housing benefit because that is not her instinct. She hoped that she was wrong about the issue. We can agree on that; I hope that she is wrong, too. London Members understand—my London accent is at least as good as that of the hon. Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love)—the current acute housing difficulties. If, on further reflection, it seems necessary to start another pilot scheme in inner London, we shall. I cannot promise that, but we have an open mind on the matter.

I understand the difficulty with housing benefit restrictions affecting the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North and many other people throughout the country. It is proper for there to be some restrictions. For example, the community would expect restrictions to be in place to deal with cases in which people are living in accommodation that is far too large or in which the landlord is asking an extortionate rent for the property. The community would expect us to have those restrictions in place. However, I understand those concerns.

My hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North might be surprised to learn that a smaller percentage of rents are restricted in London than in any other region. I shall send her the figures; they are 59 per cent. in London—I have to say that that surprises me—against an average of 67 per cent. However, the absolute level of restriction tends to be higher in London than elsewhere, which reflects the higher rent levels in the conurbation.

I was asked whether the so-called housing benefit top-ups would remain in place. Local authorities will still be able to use discretionary payments to top up people's benefits if they want to. There are no plans to abolish those additional payments, which will continue to be available in exceptionally difficult circumstances.

My hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North was generous enough to say that I could not be expected to reply to all the points raised during the debate, but she raised important points about the evaluation—I put a lot of store by it—such as local reference rents, the concept and nature of localities, questions of supply and homelessness. I promise that we will consider all those issues.

The hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire focused particularly on fraud. I take the problem of fraud seriously. The verification framework was introduced, not without some controversy. The work of the benefit fraud inspectorate includes trying to drive up housing benefit standards and the encouragement of home visits so that local authorities can ensure that the claimants are who they say they are and that they have not sub-let the house. Those issues are important, and we take them very seriously.

The latest figures show that in 2001–02, local authorities successfully carried out 50 per cent. more prosecutions than in the previous year. Local authorities started making full use of formal cautions in 2001–02. I am encouraged by those figures. The hon. Gentleman mentioned, at the extreme, those local authorities that take more than 100 days to process claims; there are some like that, but we should not exaggerate. For the record, our quarterly monitoring figures show that only 20 authorities—that is too many—out of 408 take more than 100 days. However, the overall record is not good enough and we are trying to drive up standards.

I was asked whether, in extremis, the Government could take over the powers local authorities. We have powers to issue directions, and we have done so on a limited number of occasions. We order local authorities in specific ways and monitor them while they get their act together. In a different way, we had quite properly to be heavy-handed with Hackney and I am pleased to say that the authority has now seriously turned the corner in the right direction.

Jeremy Corbyn: They got rid of a contractor in order to do so.

Malcolm Wicks: That was certainly part of it.

The Chairman of the Work and Pensions Committee, the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, raised a number of important points. The background to the debate is the sheer importance of housing and housing policy. Housing benefit alone cannot solve what are essentially housing and policy questions. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the importance of home owners, and I promise that our minds are not closed on that. He also asked whether we would still proceed if the pathfinder or pilot schemes went seriously wrong. No, we would not. We call them pathfinders because we are trying to find the exact detailed path to follow. I do not anticipate it but if something went seriously wrong, we would think again. The hon. Gentleman also mentioned devolution, which was interesting, as housing has been devolved and housing benefit comes under the United Kingdom social security system. We have to work through those matters; I had a meeting with the Scottish Minister responsible for housing on that very subject.

My hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton spoke about the problem of underpayment or non-take-up. Our position is clear; we want every social security pound to be properly claimed and paid honestly and properly to all those who have a proper entitlement to it. Housing benefit take-up figures may not be good enough, but they are not too bad compared with other benefits. About 92 per cent. of people entitled to housing benefit receive it. I am not complacent about that, but it is at least moving rapidly in the right direction. My hon. Friend suggested that rent officer data could be out of date. I understand that, but rent officers use only recent market evidence; it is up to six months old. Reference rents are reviewed every month to ensure that they keep pace with changes in the market. I hope that I have reassured the hon. Gentleman.

Sir Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): We are grateful to you for what you have done, Minister, but we have run out of time.

It being ten minutes to Six o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the sitting lapsed, without Question put.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 14 January 2003

[MR. JOHN MCWILLIAM *in the Chair*]

Equity Release Mortgages

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

9.30 am

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship again, Mr. McWilliam. At a previous sitting, I recall our having some interesting literary exchanges, but I will spare you those today. I do not think that the work of D. H. Lawrence is appropriate to today's debate. Our discussions will be important, although they probably cover only a small group of elderly people who were mis-sold home income plans in the 1980s. At the end of my remarks, I shall refer to the current situation.

I have been a Member of Parliament for 11 years and I took up such cases in 1991 before I was elected. The fact that I still have some of them on the books, so to speak, is of great concern. The problem has caused anxiety to other hon. Members, in particular my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), and my hon. Friends the hon. Members for Poole (Mr. Syms) and for East Devon (Mr. Swire). They would have liked to be present today, but they are in Committee this morning. What I am about to outline affects their constituents, too.

Back in the 1980s, many people who had retired on small pensions were attracted by sales people who sold them home income plans whereby they could not only increase their income but usually receive a cash sum to spend on something that they found attractive, such as a trip abroad to visit their children or a new car. Such transactions were not explained to them, however, and were clearly cases not just of mis-selling but of fraud. People were sold equity-linked, high-risk products on which they were told that they would receive a return that would not only provide them with an additional income but would pay off the interest on a mortgage if they remortgaged their property.

When I raised the matter in 1999, I received great assistance from the insurance ombudsman, who took up many individual cases in my constituency and restored several constituents to the position that they were in before they unfortunately took out the home income plans. However, five constituents have been unable to access such restoration and the interest on their properties is still mounting. The building societies that set up the mortgage have made helpful arrangements whereby they have promised not to foreclose so that people have the right of tenure in their property until they die, but many elderly people wish to sell for one reason or another—often to go into residential care. As the interest is compounding, when they die, the property is likely to be owned outright by the building society.

I draw attention to the cases in my constituency involving people who were sold policies by Sonia Thompson who worked for DBS Financial Management Ltd. The case has been before the court, but I have clear evidence that I will share with hon. Members of that particular lady falsifying mortgage applications. Even when the building society concerned was informed about the falsified documents, it still agreed to go ahead and co-operate with Miss Thompson in arranging the home income plans. That is why the building societies that still hold the deeds for the properties should do the decent thing.

Mr. John McWilliam (in the Chair): Will the hon. Lady assure us that the case to which she is referring is not lying before the courts and that it has been decided?

Mrs. Browning: The case is not lying before the court, Mr McWilliam. It went before the court, but unfortunately it was thrown out because the witnesses were elderly and unable to do justice to it. I shall quote from a letter that I received from the Britannia building society, which is one of the building societies involved in such matters in my constituency. When I raised the matter on the Floor of the House in 1999, Britannia agreed to visit my constituent. The letter stated:

"we are more than happy to try to deal sympathetically with members who have problems relating to the DBS settlement and I am hopeful that we will be able to do something positive to help."

I am sorry to say that, despite that assurance, nothing has happened with Britannia building society. The people who were involved have moved on to other departments or have left the organisation. I raised the matter because I believed that Sonia Thompson, acting on behalf of DBS, acted illegally in the way in which she carried out her work. One of the policy holders and mortgagees, a Mr. Budgen from Devon, who gave me permission to put his details before the House today, wrote to Britannia building society and explained his experience. He said:

"The Mortgage application form was completed by us and signed as true. Since then a figure of over £22,000 has been added by Miss Thompson, a representative of D.B.S. Financial Management Ltd. as being our income ... Immediately we received this copy ... we spoke to your manager at Barnstaple",

but they still processed the mortgage.

Unfortunately the lady was allowed off the hook by the courts, but there is an onus of responsibility on the building societies that were involved in processing the mortgages. That is an extreme case due to the way in which Miss Thompson conducted her business, but there are examples of such activity throughout the country. A couple of my constituents have other building society mortgages and there are certain requirements for building societies to check the validity of what is offered in a mortgage and the person's ability to repay that mortgage.

People may be surprised to hear me say that such requirements are not bound up in sufficient regulation, and that there is therefore a free-for-all in the area of financial services. We must bear it in mind that the purchase of a home is the biggest financial investment that any individual or family makes. Given that the problem affects people who have already paid off a mortgage and are now in retirement, it compounds the vulnerability of the people taking out the schemes. Therefore, there is a real imperative for the schemes to be brought within the remit of financial services and dealt with by the ombudsmen who handle complaints and restoration. Some schemes have been subject to such guidelines, but not all.

[Mrs. Browning]

The difficulty is that the people so affected are now elderly and frail. They are dying without having had the benefit that others have had of their cases being brought to justice. That is why I am bringing such cases before the House. Time is running out for that vulnerable, fragile group of elderly people. It is time for some action to be taken so that at least their final years can be spent without the anguish and anxiety of compounding interest and living in what was their family home but in many cases no longer belongs to them.

Looking at what needs to be done, I am looking for a minimum of a freeze on the interest that is rolling up. I cannot believe that that would cost the building societies an arm and a leg, because there are so few of those people. Talking of arms and legs, if one considers the amount of money that has passed from the mortgagees to the building societies, one can see that the building societies have made a fair old return from those people already. It would not hurt the building societies to do the decent thing now. They should freeze the interest, look at terms of restoration as others have done in identical cases and determine how those people initially came by the policies.

We should consider how the building societies came to be involved in allowing the policies to be sold to that particular group of clients under rules quite different to those that would have applied to younger people of working age. I am aware that some building societies have tried to help, for example, by saying that those people have security of tenure for the period of their lives, and I welcome that. I feel, however, that more needs to be done.

We should be looking to bring equity release mortgages within the regulatory framework and we should consider the situation of elderly people who are remortgaging their homes. I do not say that that is always a bad thing. I know that people are interested in such policies, particularly those who do not have families to which they wish to leave the family home, or who find that they are on a very low income in retirement. None the less, such people do not seem to have the protection afforded to others and the Government have an opportunity to do something about that.

I received a letter from the National Consumer Council that said,

"We welcome the prospect of Financial Services Authority regulatory protection for consumers of lifetime mortgages from 2004. We are concerned, however, by the exclusion of home reversion schemes from the FSA's regulatory remit."

I hope that the Minister will be able to say today that she will look again at this issue. There is time to consider whether to bring such policies within the scope of the regulations. Many organisations that deal with the elderly and with such products, including Britannic Retirement Solutions Ltd, Help the Aged, *Which?* and the Consumers Association, are anxious to see changes in this area. I hope that the Minister will be receptive to this request today. That would not, however, necessarily help the vulnerable group about which I speak and I want to flag it up that that group is in need of urgent action.

Such cases were brought to my attention before I was elected in 1991 and, 11 years on, I cannot think of any other open casework on which I am still trying to get a resolution. We have had meetings in the House over the years with Back Benchers of all parties, lawyers and buildings societies and Ministers have talked to us to try to find a way through. I cannot believe that the will is not there to resolve the problem for this small group of people and that we cannot find a way forward today in order to do something for them.

In 1991 I wrote to the Council of Mortgage Lenders, which was at that time quite resistant to any increase in the regulation that affected it. I hope by now that it has had second thoughts, because we are 11 years down the track. Most of us recognise that there is always a need for the individual to assess risk and take some responsibility for that. However, the way in which the policies were sold, and in many cases sold fraudulently to pensioners, means that one could not realistically have expected people to realise what the full consequences would be.

There must be a greater input into the detail and the consultations that people are given, because they are jeopardising the very roof over their head. One feels that, particularly when speaking to people such as my constituent, whom I will call Mrs. X because she does not want to be named. She explained in a tearful conversation with me how she was suddenly in the frame of being able to visiting her close relatives in Australia, perhaps more than once, although she had not seen them for a long time. That was the result of a sales pitch that was put to her suggesting that not only would she have more income in retirement, but that something that she thought well beyond her reach—visiting her close relatives—was suddenly a realisable dream. One can understand that such people are severely vulnerable when small print is put before them by those who have no good intent and simply want to collect commission on a policy. On behalf of that group, I ask the Minister to bring to bear whatever influence she can on the building societies that still hold the mortgages to do the decent thing—restore people to their previous position and freeze the interest.

I ask the Minister to examine the cases because this is not the end of the story. Such practices and policies may well be put before a future generation of pensioners. It is incumbent on us to ensure that when we regulate, we regulate to protect the genuinely vulnerable. We need not overregulation but a measure so that the roofs over people's heads are not put in jeopardy as they retire.

9.46 am

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I am delighted to contribute briefly, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) on the way in which she comprehensively introduced this extraordinarily sad saga. As she mentioned, there is a long history of all-party concern about this matter on behalf of our constituents. Several of my constituents were also sold dud schemes in the late 1980s, which was a classic case of mis-selling. I shall return to that point in a moment.

I shall outline more history to add to what the hon. Lady said. She will recall that the schemes were explicitly endorsed by the then Government when they were first introduced in the late 1980s. Margaret Thatcher, the then Prime Minister, went on record to support the schemes as an easy and effective way for

those in the circumstances that the hon. Lady described to release equity, to take advantage of the increasing value of their property and to get additional income for old age. The then Government were involved at that early stage.

Like the hon. Lady, I was visited in the early 1990s by constituents who realised just what they had been sold. Most were not only very elderly but in ill health. One of the reasons why many had taken up the schemes was that they needed additional income or released capital to improve their property in order to cope with the difficulties of old age and infirmity.

When I was elected in 1992, I formed a little informal group. I am delighted to see the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones) here because she, I and Mr. William Powell, the then Conservative Member for Rugby—*[Interruption.]* For Corby—I am sorry, my memory has collapsed. The three of us tried to get some sense out of the various regulators and Treasury Ministers. Throughout the Parliament of 1992 to 1997, we fought a lonely battle on behalf of a lonely group of vulnerable and elderly people.

One of the great questions that hangs over the sad problem, as the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton effectively demonstrated, is why nobody was prepared to accept responsibility during those five years. The Council of Mortgage Lenders, the insurance industry, the insurance ombudsman, the Securities and Investment Board, which we visited, and Treasury Ministers were not prepared to say, "Yes, we recognise there is a problem here and we are going to take it up."

Mrs. Browning: I must put it on record that the then Insurance Ombudsman Bureau resolved several of my problem cases and restored people to the position that they had been in before they took out the policy. From my experience, if everyone had been treated by the insurance ombudsman in that way, there would be no need for me to speak in today's debate. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will endorse my opinion.

Mr. Tyler: I am grateful to the hon. Lady, but I think that the experience that she describes came later. From 1992 to 1997, it was difficult to pin down responsibility. I endorse what she says, but, in my experience, the ombudsman was prepared to come in only somewhat later.

Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): To clarify the hon. Gentleman's point, my recollection is that there was a different regulator for products sold with insurance policies as opposed to financial services products, which were regulated by FIMBRA. Responsibility was then taken over by the Securities and Investment Board. One problem with which we all tried to grapple was the plethora of regulatory bodies. At the point at which FIMBRA had produced a report and was starting to use its teeth, it was taken over, and the report was hushed up and not acted upon.

Mr. Tyler: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for succinctly making the point that I was just about to make. I do not blame anyone, but, unfortunately, the time scale of changes in the regulatory systems did not help. The hon. Lady made that point vividly.

I pay tribute to some individuals who, at their own expense and with considerable personal commitment, have tried to support those affected, especially Mr. Phillip Cheal and Mr. Tony Craven of the two support groups, who have done a fantastic job. Perhaps their most important act was to alert Members of Parliament to the fact that the individual cases brought to Ministers and the regulatory authorities were examples of a large number of cases—the tip of the proverbial iceberg. They also managed to get the commitment and interest of the Consumer Association.

I am delighted that, even at this late stage in a long and sad story, the Consumers Association has taken such an active role. I intend to use the excellent brief that it has provided for this debate to exemplify exactly what has gone wrong with the investment schemes. I shall also quote details of individual examples obtained by the association, obviously with the consent of those concerned.

The major problem is that the way in which the schemes were introduced was almost invariably linked to expectation about the rise in value of the stock market and the inevitable and continuing rise in the value of property. Hon. Members may say that anybody in their right senses would know that anything that rises that fast is likely to fall. Unfortunately, that is not always the case with forecasts. Indeed, to a large extent, when one examines the small print, the mis-selling that undoubtedly took place was dependent on a continuing and considerable rise. Therefore, those who invested in schemes in the property boom of the late 1980s suddenly found themselves at a considerable disadvantage.

As the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton said, some of the more responsible lenders have done their best to mitigate the problem, and I pay tribute to them for that. However, many people, including some of my constituents, are considerably out of pocket. I must emphasise that those who were caught in the situation have almost invariably lost their legal right to redress. It has gone; they are out of time. Several thousand retired people have mounting debts and cannot pay them off by using interest payments or by remortgaging.

If the person in debt dies, the debt must be met through the sale of the home, which may well be repossessed and sold at a reduced price, and the family is then placed in an even more difficult situation. The most desperate part of that desperate situation is the length of time—more than 10 years, in most cases—for which uncertainty hangs over so many people. I know of people in my constituency whose lives have been ruined by the uncertainty, the constant threat to their future and their homes, and the worry about how their families will look after them if they become too ill and disabled to stay in their homes.

I shall give three examples that the Consumers Association told me about, having of course obtained the consent of those concerned. First, I give the example of Marion Grimshaw, from my county, Cornwall. The lender was the Chelsea building society. She borrowed £17,000 in 1990, ironically just before such schemes were removed from the market. She had the use of all £17,000 and has not been able to repay anything so far. The amount still owing is £60,773. Imagine such a debt hanging over an elderly woman living on her own.

[Mr. Tyler]

Then there is the case of the scheme sold to Mabel de Morgan's mother, who is from Anglesey, in 1989, when she was 88 years old. The lender was the Staffordshire building society. The mother borrowed £15,000; she had use of £5,000 and invested the other £10,000. She has already repaid £27,900, and yet £18,800—a considerable sum—is still owing.

Mr. and Mrs. George Carrod were lent money by the West Bromwich building society. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak will recall the various exchanges that we have had with that building society. Mr. and Mrs. Carrod borrowed £49,500 in 1989 and had use of £8,600. Some £5,000 was kept back from the loan, and £200 a month was taken from investments for 18 months. The amount so far repaid is £57,580 in compensation and investment value, and the amount still owing is £20,715. Those are huge sums of money.

Hon. Members will agree that such schemes are an extraordinary scandal that has affected some particularly vulnerable people. The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton is absolutely right to say that those lenders who have insisted on getting their pound of flesh should accept a freeze on any further interest. However, that is not enough. There should be compensation for the mis-selling of those schemes, just as there has been for the mis-selling of other financial products. Government responsibility has been acknowledged for the way in which the episode was so disastrously exploited because of the endorsement by the then Government.

My constituents and I are fed up to the teeth with the game of pass the parcel that has gone on for far too long. It has to stop at some time. As I have said, legal remedies are now effectively blocked to those affected; the cases are out of time. The Government have a responsibility, particularly to those who are not very articulate and who are not only elderly but ill and frail. Such people have been kept in an impossible situation for far too long. We are talking about classic cases of mis-selling, and the Government must act.

9.58 am

Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): I, too, pay tribute to Phillip Cheal and Tony Craven of the home income plan scam support group, and to Vera Hawkins, who is sadly no longer with us. Perhaps her dogged work to support elderly people caught up in the home income plan scam led her to her premature death, which has come to many elderly people because of the worry resulting from such plans and from the growing debts that they have led to.

Unfortunately, I was not sufficiently well organised to bring my file on home income plans from my constituency office, so I will have to speak from memory. As far as I am aware, I no longer have any elderly constituents who continue to be dogged by increasing debts. Most reputable building societies have frozen those debts—although not before they had accumulated to unacceptable levels. Some, but by no means all, the growth in debt has been paid off by compensation. There is not a lot that the Government can do, but I ask the Minister to look in detail at the policies of different building societies and lenders and perhaps name and shame those that are not following the practice of those that have done the best for their elderly customers.

The scandal with which I was most involved was that of the West Bromwich building society. Elderly people were encouraged to embark on financial investments by an organisation called Fisher Prew-Smith. People were signed up to schemes without being given any explanation of what was involved, and they were told to sign legal papers with a solicitor whom they had never met who was apparently acting on their behalf. That enabled the building societies subsequently to wash their hands of any responsibility—even though the suppressed FIMBRA report makes it clear that building societies such as the West Bromwich knew what they were getting into and embarked on loans to elderly people with the specific objective of increasing lending.

It took many debates and many meetings to expose what was happening. Belatedly, the West Bromwich building society accepted some responsibility when it agreed to freeze some loans. Many people have had appalling experiences. Elderly people, including at least one constituent of mine, have gone to their graves prematurely through worry over the debts with which they were burdened as a result of home income plans.

Today, elderly people own a great deal of equity in property. Elderly people come to my surgery who cannot afford to pay for essential maintenance work on their homes. Those people are on low incomes, and very little help is available to them to get work done. One way to help such people—or people who struggle on low incomes but have high capital assets—would be equity release schemes. However, adverse publicity and the worry associated with equity release and home income plans mean that many elderly people are reluctant to embark on such schemes. I am pleased that the Government have raised the issue in the Green Paper and are considering options to create a level playing field for the regulation of equity release and home reversion plans to protect consumers and make the market work better. I hope that the Minister will say a little more about that.

I am thankful that our regulatory system is now less of a maze than it was in 1996–97, when my constituents and I had to attempt to grapple with a complex system in which different regulatory bodies were allowed to play off against each other, each claiming that things were not their responsibility. I congratulate the Government on having made some sense of the maze, and I look forward to hearing what they will do to help elderly people who are still struggling with mounting debt and to ensure that the elderly will be able to make the most of their capital assets.

10.5 am

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I thank the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) for introducing the debate. She recounted her constituents' experiences effectively, but I wish to add a different dimension to the discussion.

This is a current problem: last week I noticed a headline in the letter column of my local borough newspaper that said, "Caught in SAM Trap"—SAM stands for shared appreciation mortgages. Over the past few years hundreds of local people have bought into those schemes,

and they will be caught up in the problems that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones) is so troubled about. She and my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) have brought a useful historical perspective to the debate.

I agree with what the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak has just said. If people's wealth is locked up in their homes, it makes sense to try to help them to liberate some of it rather than its being just paper value—and if that can be done in a safe way, we should encourage it. It is not only Mrs. Thatcher who agrees with that; it is basic common sense. The problem has been that many of the products that do that have been, and still are, unsafe.

I also wish to touch on a broader issue that the three hon. Members who have already spoken did not mention. It relates to the wider picture of heavy mortgage lending and the potential instability that that will create for the housing market.

There are two types of products. The straightforward mortgage lending type of equity release is unproblematic and uncontroversial; the mortgage is repaid on death and the products are regulated. The controversy revolves around reversion products, whereby the mortgage lenders acquire a share of the equity. The figures for the past 18 months suggest that we are dealing with a very big market: about one third of all equity release is in the form of reversion products. That amounts to £300 million over 18 months, which is very big business.

The history of reversion products is chequered, for the reasons that the three previous speakers have mentioned. Reversion products that achieve equity release were started in the 1970s, and even at that stage there were some unhappy experiences, particularly with products that had variable interest rates locked in. People were in effect giving up the equity in their home, but acquiring liabilities with very high interest rates when the economic cycle was in a phase of high rates.

The industry claims that some of those products were banned in 1990, and I would like the Minister to confirm that that is the case. Since then, the industry has been governed largely by self-regulation under the safe home income plans—or SHIP—scheme. I have just looked through the code of practice that governs safe home equity release plans, and it is fine—it has been approved by Age Concern, I think. Many of the elements in it are progressive; for example, there is a commitment to give an absolute guarantee that there will never be negative equity under these plans.

If the code of conduct were honoured and universally applied, the problems that we are debating would not be serious. However, a good deal of equity release reversion lending is operating outside the voluntary code. One of the most striking cases is that of the shared appreciation schemes that the Bank of Scotland and Barclays bank operate. Many of the people who are victims of the type of reversion scheme that I have mentioned are those who have bought into those banks' schemes.

I shall illustrate what the shared appreciation schemes do with reference to the experience of one of my constituents, a Mr. Brooking, who came to see me about the matter. His home in Twickenham was valued at £190,000 four years ago, but Twickenham, like many other suburban areas, has witnessed an extraordinary boom in house prices. Mr. Brooking's property has now more than doubled in value to £400,000. On the back of his £190,000 home, Mr. Brooking took out a £30,000 mortgage. However, in addition, half the appreciation in value of his home—more than £100,000—also belongs to the Bank of Scotland. It has earned a return of about 250 per cent. over four years, assuming that the market stays up and that Mr. Brooking, who is an elderly gentleman, moves house or dies.

What is striking about that case is that my constituent is not naive; he is a highly sophisticated, well informed, clear-thinking man who read all the small print. However, the small print in no way prepared him for what happens in a world of rapidly rising house prices. The assumption that the Bank of Scotland used, and presented to all its clients, was that house price appreciation would continue at about 4 to 5 per cent. a year. All its modelling and examples were based on that assumption. Mr. Brooking was given no warning; he had no reason to expect such an extraordinary outcome. He has since referred the case to the ombudsman, who has been totally obtuse and completely failed to understand the issues. She had a very unsatisfactory correspondence with the ombudsman.

Thousands of people have got involved in the shared appreciation scheme and feel a serious sense of grievance as a consequence. Apart from the fact that schemes such as SAM operate outside the code of practice, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak also underlined a broader point. Mortgage lending has been regulated since 2000, but reversion products are unregulated. The Government have given a commitment in the Green Paper to look into that, and perhaps the Minister will give us a few more indications today about where Government thinking is heading.

My final point relates to the broader issue of mortgage lending and what it does to the housing market. Equity release is part of a much bigger phenomenon—an enormous amount of money goes into the housing market, and that contributes to the enormous appreciation of prices that we have seen. The Government broadly take the view that we should not worry too much about that, although borrowing-to-income ratios are at record levels. The fact that interest rates are low historically means that there is no particular reason why people should have enormous difficulties in repaying those mortgages—provided that interest rates remain low.

The problem with that optimistic scenario is that should incomes fall and unemployment rise—bearing in mind the fact that there is no longer any fall-back ability to make mortgage payments through the social security system—prices could fall rapidly. That hypothesis is not mine alone. The Governor-designate of the Bank of England has already warned of the potential for a serious shock to the economy if house prices fall substantially.

Other members of the Monetary Policy Committee have said openly that they cannot do anything about the problem. They cannot deal with this bubble and the potential crash because to cut interest rates would add to inflation. Low interest rates might be good from the manufacturing sector's point of view, but they would aggravate the housing boom. On the other hand, to raise interest rates to deal with the housing boom would be

[Dr. Vincent Cable]

bad for the rest of the economy. The Monetary Policy Committee is trapped, because it cannot do anything through its conventional mechanisms.

Are the Government thinking at all about whether there is any way in which the asset bubble in the housing market, to which equity release has contributed substantially, can and should be managed? There are ideas out there. Some fairly conventional people have said that we should reconsider special deposits, which quarantine some of the cash in mortgage lending institutions, including that in equity release schemes. The money can then be released if the housing market crashes. However, that is an old mechanism, which may not work in our much more sophisticated times. Do the Government have any thoughts about the way in which the overall market should be managed, or should it simply be allowed to take its course?

To conclude, there are two sets of problems. First, there are the products themselves. How will the different treatment of reversion and other mortgage products be dealt with? Secondly, there is the overall housing and mortgage market, and I hope that the Minister will put the issues in that wider context. Are the Government content with the way in which the market is evolving, or have they undertaken provisional thinking on how it might be managed in future?

10.15 am

Mr. Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) for securing this timely and important debate on equity release. The subject has gained considerable attention from the press and the general public, and it is appropriate that it should be the subject of full parliamentary consideration.

In discussing equity release mortgages, it is crucial to consider equity release in general. Such provision has become increasingly important as more elderly people use the resource of their home to provide additional income in retirement. During the debate, I want to determine whether the Government are prepared to demonstrate that they understand the importance to the elderly of such income by making a commitment to introduce swiftly appropriate regulation of the market.

As Her Majesty's official Opposition spokesman on the issue, I approach it in what I hope the Minister recognises is a constructive manner. I seek the Government's support in particular on issues on which Members of Parliament can have a real and current effect. Many of the issues raised by my hon. Friend relate very much to the past, and I shall address some of them, but it is important, given our responsibilities in the House, that we learn from what happened in the past so that we can prevent similar problems arising in the future.

There is great confusion about what equity release is, what risks underpin it, and when it is appropriate to purchase. Equity release can simply mean down-sizing the family home, or extending an existing mortgage. I shall focus on a specific financial service product, which uses the home of an elderly person to generate income or a cash lump sum. Such schemes can take the form of a loan or a reversion: a loan is a mortgage, while a reversion is the sale of all or part of the house.

It is inevitable that more people will turn to equity release. According to the Council of Mortgage Lenders, the average price of a house in 2001 was £115,700. By comparison, the average retirement fund in 2001 was only £24,000, according to the Association of British Insurers. That means that many so-called cash-poor pensioners are sitting on increasingly valuable assets.

For many people, equity release may be the only way in which to top up their retirement income, whether that is to fund a lifestyle need, care fees for a loved one, or policies for one's own future domiciliary care. That will be inevitable given falling annuity rates and stock markets, which are due, as much as anything, to the Chancellor's tax grab of £25 billion and £5 billion per annum on the pension schemes of those who have been doing the right thing by putting money aside during their earning lifetime to provide for their retirement. When that is coupled with low interest rates and increasing longevity, it is certain that more people will turn to their property to provide much-needed additional income in retirement.

That seems especially likely when one takes account of today's terrifying and growing retirement savings gap, which is at least £27 billion. The failure to take advantage of equity release where appropriate could increase that gap to as much as £40 billion. That is why the current, relatively small, equity release market in the United Kingdom, estimated by Datamonitor to be worth about £750 million, and by the Council of Mortgage Lenders to be worth about £1 billion, is deemed to have the potential to support sales growth of up to £4 billion or £5 billion a year for the next decade to achieve a market of £50 billion or, some would say, even £100 billion.

Two major factors have hindered the growth of that potentially critical market. The first relates to reputation. The home income plan saga of past years continues to have a serious and damaging effect, as my hon. Friend cogently described. That point that was reinforced by the examples cited by the hon. Members for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) and for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones). That can only undermine confidence generally in a potentially important market. I urge the Minister and the building societies involved to act urgently to freeze interest on those loans. I recognise that that is ultimately a decision for the building societies, but however much we in opposition prefer it were not so, the party in government unquestionably carries influence, so we urge the Minister to put her full weight behind that cause.

The second factor that hindered growth is confusion about the regulation of equity release products. In its consultation paper CP 146, the Financial Services Authority announced that it was prepared to regulate mortgage-based equity release—the regulation is due in 2004—but reversionary equity release would fall outside its remit. Therefore, the distinction described earlier, between mortgage-based and reversionary equity release, currently carries significant consequences. That would mean that cash reversions would be wholly unregulated in what we know will be an increasingly important market, but one with some identifiable risks of consumer detriment, especially for vulnerable older people.

Not surprisingly, that has caused considerable concern among several organisations, ranging from Britannic Retirement Solutions in the private sector, Help the Aged and Age Concern in the charitable sector, the Consumers Association and the National Consumer Council in the consumer sector, to trade bodies, such as the Association of Independent Financial Advisers. Given the attempts at populism that inform the Government's actions in their every waking hour, the Minister should be aware—if she is not, she can certainly take it from me, as a fellow north-west Member of Parliament—that this subject currently forms a major story line in "Coronation Street". Surely the Government will now do something!

Concerns were raised that the proposed action would both fail to provide the ageing consumer with an important safeguard, and maintain confusion in the market, thereby stifling its anticipated growth and ability to provide additional income for people in retirement. The Treasury's argument for partial regulation of the equity release market appears to have been as follows. The FSA is empowered under the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 to regulate mortgages, but it is unable to regulate reversionary equity release as that is deemed to be a contract. In effect, caveat emptor applies under the legal doctrine of privity of contract, and reversionary equity release is not regarded as a financial services product. Consequently, equity release is not currently included in the regulated authorities order, hence the nonsense of partial regulation.

We were led to believe that the only way to bring reversionary equity release schemes under the proposed FSA equity-release regulatory umbrella was to enact primary legislation to change the Financial Services and Markets Act to include them. Imagine my surprise, therefore, when paragraph 72 of the Government's pensions Green Paper, entitled "Simplicity, security and choice: working and saving for retirement", published on 17 December 2002, announced:

> "The Government needs to ensure that the market for equity release is effectively regulated and that individuals fully understand the implications and risks of the deal. One issue of potential concern is that while equity release mortgages will be regulated by the FSA from 2004, home reversion plans are outside the scope of regulation. The Government will be looking at options to create a level playing field for the regulation of equity release and home reversion plans to protect consumers and make the market work better."

I am relieved that the Government have recognised the anomaly and have decided to deal with it by creating, in that important phrase "a level playing field" for the regulation of equity release and home reversion plans, also known as reversionary the equity release, to protect consumers and to make the market work better. The Government have the opportunity today to tell us how and when they will do precisely that. Will the Government enact primary legislation to amend the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 to enable the FSA to regulate equity release mortgages and home reversion plans? If so, are they prepared to tell us when and whether it will be in this year's Finance Bill?

The Minister should have some very clear information and I look forward to a clear answer. Bearing in mind the importance of this market to the cash-strapped pensioner, I hope that the Government agree that the issue needs swift and prompt attention; it cannot be left to drift. Consumer protection and the confusion surrounding it, which has been highlighted yet again in this debate, show that it is unacceptable to let the matter drift.

Alternatively, do the Government now wish to change their mind on whether reversionary equity release falls within the definition of a financial services product—that is, to say that reversionary equity release is more than a mere contract? A case can be made for that less painful approach to ensure consistent regulation, not least because most consumers and intermediaries recognise reversionary equity release as a differentiated financial product targeted at a differentiated class of people, primarily the vulnerable elderly, for what is likely to be a once-in-a-lifetime transaction using their main and almost always only dwelling house.

If the Government are to take that route, why were they not prepared to do so last year or earlier? The matter was raised, as I am sure the Minister is aware, during the passage of last year's Finance Bill. Failure to deal with the issue earlier has undoubtedly affected consumer confidence and the growth of an important market. However, the Government cannot and must not provide a system of regulation for reversionary equity release that is not policed in the same way and by the same body that polices mortgage-based equity release. By this I mean that if the FSA is to regulate mortgage-based equity release, and it is intended that it should do so from 2004, it must be the body that regulates reversionary equity release.

If the Government were to provide another body to carry out that task it would immediately cause additional complexity and perpetuate the consumer confusion that the regulation was intended to deal with. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak pointed out that recent experience and increasing knowledge of how market regulations operate suggest that it would be better to bring the regulatory approach under one umbrella. I notice that the Liberal Democrat spokesman, the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable), rightly did not attribute blame, but said that we must learn from experience.

The Green Paper refers explicitly to creating "a level playing field" for the regulation of these products, and that can only mean consistent regulation; therefore the FSA should be the regulatory body for reversionary equity release products. I hope that the Government can now reassure my colleague the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton, her constituents and me. Although it would be small comfort to people involved in the continuing saga, it would be at least some comfort to them to know that the pain that they have suffered will not be visited on future generations.

Mrs. Browning: I hope that the Minister can help us with the older cases as well. Since initiating today's debate, I have heard from Norwich Union and Nationwide that both support changes to introduce regulation in this area. Nationwide sent me a letter, which I received only this morning, saying

"consumers that are most likely to use these products are often elderly and vulnerable. Without much-needed clear regulation, there is a danger that current practice could lead to future accusations of mis-selling."

Across the piece, even before its introduction, there seems to be great support from the industry for more regulation. That is not something that one often sees.

Mr. O'Brien: I thank my hon. Friend for having made that important point, because it is critical that that area of the market is appropriately regulated, not least so that it operates on a level playing field. There is also a need to enhance consumer confidence in the light of the concern provoked by home income plans. The market will certainly be a major one, even allowing for the inevitable cycles that can be predicted for property values. The capital assets locked up in people's homes are massive compared with the amount of money that is being put aside for pensions—the disparity is far greater than was formerly the case. I endorse my hon. Friend's comments. She recognises the extraordinary amount of third-party and business support from all quarters, not only for market regulation, but for that to be coupled with proper recognition of and redress for those who have suffered. I hope that the message that she takes from the debate to her constituents who have suffered so grievously will be that something is going to happen. We look forward to hearing the Minister's response to all the issues that have been raised.

It is important to recognise that, while the Green Paper's wording is somewhat woolly, it is common knowledge that the FSA is working on the assumption that the Government's intention is that the product sector should come within the FSA's remit, after what will be described as tricky boundary issues have been ironed out and the details have been discussed. I imagine that the FSA's high street firms division will deal with it. That will tie in with the long-term care issues that are already under review by the FSA. It is therefore a wholly appropriate expectation for the FSA, and one that I would encourage, as it is consistent with its stated concern about the rapid growth market in products directed at asset-rich, cash-poor, often elderly, vulnerable people. By today's standards, it is odd that reversionary equity release is not already covered and that mortgage equity release is not expected to be covered until 2004.

The Government must be in no doubt that the vulnerable elderly consumer expects and deserves a high level of protection when purchasing such products. For him or her, regulation means the guarantee of effective monitoring of and punitive systems for product providers and advisers who are in breach of regulation. Consumers also demand the confidence given by a reliable compensation scheme and an effective ombudsman. The roles and powers of such regulation should be enshrined in legislation. I hope that the Minister will agree that voluntary regulation cannot work and should not be expected to do so, given the potential size of the market and the variations within products.

My concerns have been echoed by the private sector and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton pointed out, by many consumer groups and charitable associations. It might seem counter-intuitive that it is a Conservative who is calling for more regulation, when it is normally our role to try—often vainly—to stop the Government from indulging their whim for excessive and stifling regulation. However, we have a responsibility to do so in this instance, because the Government have not introduced the safeguards that both the private sector and consumers have called for, in the light of experience and of the recent exponential growth of the market, to meet their needs and release for their lifetime use the equity value that is pent up in property, rather than, as often happens, leave that value to pass to others after their death.

Concerns about the regulation of equity release have been expressed in both Houses of Parliament. Baroness Greengross is today asking an oral question in the other place to find out how the Government plan to regulate and promote the development of equity release schemes. No doubt, the Minister's colleague in the other place will read with great care what she says here, in order to guarantee consistency. We would ask that that consistent message be expressed in the terms for which we have all called.

The Conservative party is pleased to note that the Government have at last recognised the importance of the market—the elderly—and of the need for effective regulation, but it is up to them to let us know what they intend to do and when. There can be no fudge. A paragraph in a Green Paper, which is what they have provided on so many occasions, is no substitute for action. To do otherwise would be no more than disingenuous spin about their intent in a critical market. I hope that the Minister's answer will, for once, absolve the Government of that charge.

10.35 am

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly): How pleased I am serve under your chairmanship, Mr. McWilliam.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) for securing this debate. I pay tribute to her, the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) and my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones) for their campaigning. They have brought to the attention of the House and people outside the importance of these matters and the injustice that has been done to certain people by the mis-selling of certain financial products.

I am aware of the distress that has been caused by the mis-selling of these plans not only because of the representations made by hon. Members but through correspondence. However, in response to the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien), I must say that the Government recognise the role that assets in their broadest sense—non-pension assets and, in particular, housing and equity release—can play in the provision of retirement income. As the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) said, it is common sense that people ought to be able to secure an income from their assets in retirement if that is what they want to do. If that is done in an informed way, and if it can be done safely, such practice will grow, and rightly so, but we must ensure that those products are provided in as safe a way as possible.

Equity release schemes are financial products that allow home owners to release the value of their property over and above any amount owed on a mortgage. Those schemes involve providers giving home owners a lump sum or income, or both, based on the value of the home. The providers receive their return when the home is sold. There are two basic types of scheme. One is mortgage-based; the other is the reversion plan. In the mortgage-based scheme, the householder retains ownership of the property; but in reversion plans, the reversion provider becomes the owner of whatever proportion of the property is sold.

There are several variants of the mortgage-based scheme. The mortgage annuity scheme, usually called the home income plan, allows the home owner to take out a fixed-interest mortgage, which is used to buy an annuity for a fixed income for life. The rolled-up interest mortgage allows the interest on the mortgage to be rolled up and added to the amount owed, which is repaid on death or when the property is sold. The shared appreciation mortgage expresses the cost of the loan as a percentage of any growth in the property value, payable on death or the sale of the property. Finally, some interest-only loans are available. I am aware of the concern expressed about many of those categories.

Under the home reversion plan, home owners sell their house at a discounted rate in return for a lump sum and/or income, and they continue to live in the house rent-free or for a peppercorn rent for life. The amount paid to the house owner is based on a number of factors, including the value of the property, the proportion of the property being sold, the life expectancy of the home owner, long-term interest rates and expected house-price inflation.

As with other regulated mortgage contracts, mortgage-based equity release schemes will be covered by the Financial Services Authority's regulatory regime that is due to come into force in October 2004. The FSA considers that such mortgages, which it calls lifetime mortgages, are high risk, and it has accordingly devised a regulatory regime for them. The proposals are set out in consultation paper 146—the FSA's approach to regulating mortgage sales—which was published in August 2002.

Mr. Tyler: As the Minister has already made apparent, the schemes are extremely complicated. She has also made it clear that some are high risk. Does she accept that such schemes were sold, particularly in the late 1980s, to a large number of people who could not get independent advice and were not expert in such matters, and that the schemes were demonstrably high risk to the seller, not to the buyer? Does she accept that the worst feature of that mis-selling was the fact that salespersons were able to say that the then Government had endorsed—guaranteed, even—such schemes?

Ruth Kelly: I am not going to comment on individual cases with which building societies or others may now be dealing. I shall come on to the different types of scheme and the problems with each, but to continue on appreciation mortgages, I understand the interests of the hon. Member for Twickenham in such matters.

Concerns have been raised about the returns that lenders receive if borrowers sell their property, having received a shared appreciation mortgage. The return a lender receives from a shared appreciation mortgage is dependent on the increase in property value. In most cases, no interest is payable. The borrower repays the amount borrowed, plus three times the agreed percentage of any increase in value. For many shared appreciation mortgages, the maximum percentage is 25 per cent., so at most the borrower will be charged three times the increase in value. With the value of some properties rising substantially, however, lenders could receive a large return—indeed, some have done so. The hon. Member for Twickenham drew attention to the example of one of his constituents. Few people could have foreseen the extent to which house prices would grow. However, if house prices had fallen or risen more slowly, borrowers would have received a lower interest or even an interest-free loan. The risks should be properly understood and explained, and people should exercise an informed choice.

I am pleased to say that, when the FSA's mortgage regulation comes into force, the proposed advice and disclosure regime will enable borrowers to become fully aware of the implications of all equity release loans before they take a decision on the right one for them. I believe that the new regime will cover the anxieties that the hon. Member for Twickenham expressed. In the meantime, if hon. Members' constituents believe that they have been badly advised, or that their mortgage was mis-sold, and, assuming that all internal complaints procedures have been completed, they may be able to seek redress from the financial ombudsman service.

Home reversion plans are not currently covered by the FSA regime. That is because they are considered to be pure sale and purchase agreements, and not financial services products, as the hon. Member for Eddisbury pointed out. Just because home reversion plans are not financial services products does not mean that there is no scope for abuse. Vulnerable consumers may still be at risk of mis-selling and a lack of redress if things go wrong. There is also the possibility of distortion of the equity release marketplace in favour of the unregulated plans if there is not a level playing field and regulation between reversion-based plans and mortgage-based plans.

I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak mentioned the pensions Green Paper, and acknowledged the paragraph in it in which the future of home reversion plans is considered. I also note the commitment of the hon. Member for Eddisbury. He too thinks that it is a good idea to consider the matter closely, and wants a commitment from the Government to regulate.

The Government recognise the concerns that have been expressed and are concerned—for the reasons that I have described—about creating a level playing field for the regulation of both equity release and home reversion plans, aiming to protect consumers better and to make the market work better. We have already begun to meet interested parties to find out how a system of regulation might work. We are still gathering evidence of possible and likely consumer detriment in order to decide the appropriate degree of regulation. We do not want to overregulate—I am sure that the Opposition would have us bang to rights if we pursued that route. We want to get things right and we want consumers to be properly protected. Were we to go ahead on the basis of consultation, the process would be to publish a

[Ruth Kelly]

consultation paper—probably later this year—and then to decide after taking legal advice whether regulation could be implemented using secondary legislation or whether primary legislation should be pursued.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: If it was felt that such regulation was appropriate to achieving the Green Paper's stated aim of creating a level playing field, will its introduction coincide with the introduction of regulation of mortgage equity release, which the FSA is due to introduce in 2004?

Ruth Kelly: We will keep such dates in mind when we carry out our consultation and consider the possible legislative routes. As I have suggested, we are not holding back. We have begun to meet interested parties and are in discussion with them. We are determined to find out what we can do in this area.

Dr. Cable: The Minister is clearly trying to reconcile avoiding overregulation and protecting vulnerable people who are dealing with complex products. Has she considered that the sale of such products should involve independent financial advice?

Ruth Kelly: We will consider all the options that are put to us, while bearing in mind the fact that creating as close to level a playing field as possible for different types of regulation will be desirable. After consultation, we will determine the best way of regulating. One possibility is that the FSA will carry out the function; and the FSA will have views on the best ways of conducting any such regulation.

It is not the case that consumers have no protection at present, or that they will have no protection in future. As has been pointed out, the main reversion scheme providers are members of SHIP—safe home income plans—which is supported by leading providers of equity release plans. Members of SHIP agree to comply with a code of practice and undertake to provide fair, simple and complete presentation of any plan that they offer. I understand that the charity Age Concern has welcomed that code of practice; it may well improve the code, as the hon. Member for Twickenham has suggested. A SHIP plan guarantees that consumers will not lose their home whatever happens to the stock market or interest rates. In addition, and importantly, consumers' solicitors act on consumers' behalf—they are independent of the providers—when advising on the sale.

For the future, the FSA proposes that those firms that sell both mortgage-based equity release schemes and reversion plans will be required to take account of both types of product when giving advice. The proposed training and competence requirements will also include knowledge of both lifetime mortgages and reversion schemes, whatever the Government's decision. That is because the FSA is able to make rules in respect of the unregulated activities of regulated firms.

I turn now to home income plans. There were indeed serious problems at the end of the 1980s with schemes based on investment bonds. Those schemes used the proceeds of a mortgage raised on a property to invest in a bond designed to provide sufficient returns to repay interest on the mortgage and, in addition, to provide an income. Unfortunately, the investment bonds failed to provide the returns required and investors found themselves with rising levels of debt to their lenders. The problem is well recognised by us and a range of measures have been implemented to help.

The sale of investment bonds was regulated at the time under the Financial Services Act 1986. Effectively, the then regulators banned home income plan schemes involving such bonds in the early 1990s. Using complaints procedures that were established under the Financial Services Act, home income plan investors were able to claim against their advisers, who were required to return the capital invested. About £70 million has been paid in compensation to 4,500 home income plan investors either directly by advisers or, if they had gone out of business, by the investors compensation scheme, which was the predecessor of the financial services compensation scheme.

Mrs. Browning: On that point, may I quote from a letter that I received from a former Economic Secretary to the Treasury—a dear colleague—that was put out on 20 November 1992? On home income plans and the investors compensation scheme, it states:

"In cases where the financial adviser was not the only party responsible for investors' losses, the ICS will not delay making an offer of compensation but will attempt subsequently to recover an appropriate element of the costs of compensation. I understand that one building society has, whilst not accepting legal liability, agreed to make a contribution to the costs of compensating clients."

That is a written precedent showing that there was culpability on behalf of not only the independent financial advisers, which is clear, but building societies. We want the Minister to show those who are still caught by the policies and increasing debts that the Treasury will put its weight behind getting building societies to do something to restore people to their original position and, as a first point, to introduce a freeze on the interest that is rolling up.

Ruth Kelly: I shall come to the hon. Lady's point in a moment.

I recognise that the Financial Services Act was able only to deal with funds that had been put into an investment bond. There were other cases in which people used sums raised for other purposes that are not covered under the Act and, consequently, many were left with residual debt to their lenders even after the compensation that was allowed. Although the lenders themselves should respond to residual debt, we take a serious interest in victims.

Fortunately, most lenders have offered a package of measures to home income plan investors in respect of such residual debt. The terms of packages typically include cash payments, reductions in interest rates charged for mortgages, capping mortgage interest rates and allowing people to stay in their homes for the rest of their lives. Additionally, the then investors compensation scheme agreed additional financial benefits for former home income plan investors with several lenders.

There is still scope for negotiation with lenders on those issues and I know that the Financial Services Authority has taken an interest.

Mr. Tyler: The Minister has said that the Government are taking a serious interest in people who are still caught by the schemes to which the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton referred. What exactly does that mean? We accept that comparatively few people have not benefited from compensation in the terms to which the Minister referred. What are the Government going to do? It is 11 years since the severity of the problem was first recognised, and there are damaged, distressed and vulnerable people out there.

Ruth Kelly: The fact is that there is very little that the Government can do except bring moral pressure to bear. The lenders must resolve the situation with the people who took out the plans.

Lynne Jones: I agree that the issue comes down to moral pressure, but it would be helpful if investigations were carried out to determine which lenders have the best records. That could be benchmarked, so that pressure could be put on other lenders to be that helpful to borrowers.

Ruth Kelly: I thank my hon. Friend for that. Clearly, lenders have different records on that matter. The Government and the FSA are aware of the issue, and following this debate, I shall take a closer interest in it. The investors compensation scheme has been able to negotiate settlement terms with the West Bromwich, the Cheltenham and Gloucester, and the Stroud and Swindon building societies, but other lenders have not been so co-operative.

It is interesting to consider the case of one building society that went beyond the package of terms resulting from the ICS. In a court case, it was decided that responsibility lay not just with the independent financial adviser but with the building society, and that as the two were engaged in a joint enterprise or had a common design in marketing such products, they had a joint responsibility for compensation. That creates a precedent.

Mrs. Browning: I am very pleased to hear the Minister acknowledge that, because in all the outstanding cases that have come to my attention, homes were mortgaged with one branch of the Britannia building society some 60 miles away from where the people involved lived. It was not the nearest branch, which one would think would be the obvious place to go. One has to conclude that there was a liaison between that one branch, for which Britannia's head office has responsibility, and those doing the selling.

Ruth Kelly: I acknowledge that I am not familiar with the particular branch that the hon. Lady mentions. I am more familiar with the general issues surrounding such plans.

There has been some success in persuading lenders to aid their victims and those who have been caused distress by the plans. That will continue, but we are determined to ensure, over time, that such distress will not be caused unnecessarily in future. That is why we are considering how such plans might be regulated in future. Of course, home income plans and mortgage-based plans will be brought under regulation. We hope that lenders will take account of the views that have been expressed today and in the past and will take as generous and as sympathetic an approach as possible to any residual debt.

These are involved, technical and emotive subjects that range over different types of financial products governed by different regimes and sold at different times. In the background, there is the emotive issue of home ownership and the horror that many people, particularly the elderly, feel at the thought of losing so much of what they have worked so hard to gain. We are right to be concerned about that, and I welcome this opportunity to set out the Government's position. I hope that I have said enough to assure hon. Members that the victims of mis-selling have appropriate mechanisms for redress, and that the FSA takes the matter seriously and provides adequate levels of investor protection, although of course we recognise that some cases are still outstanding.

Through the great pensions Green Paper, the Government are taking the steps necessary to enable people to save with confidence, and use not just the simpler financial products but equity release—if they are properly informed and fully aware of the risks involved—as a potential additional source of retirement income. I agree with the hon. Member for Eddisbury that we are talking about a growing market, and one in which consumers should have confidence if they are to make proper investment decisions. We are putting in place a framework that is right for the future.

10.59 am

Sitting suspended till Eleven o'clock.

Road Safety (Wiltshire)

11 am

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury): BBC Wiltshire put it to me this morning that a senior Minister's being clocked doing 99 mph along a stretch of the M4 in Wiltshire might have been the inspiration behind today's debate. That is not so, but traffic speed will feature largely in what I have to say.

Shortly after I was elected, the Wiltshire policeman who took me around pockets of petty lawlessness in my constituency was called to a traffic accident on the A36 north of Warminster. As we approached the scene, it was clear that it was a major incident, and it subsequently became apparent that a family of four had been killed when a lorry crossed to the wrong side of the road. That truly harrowing introduction left me with enormous respect for the emergency services and what they do and focused my interest in road safety. I am grateful for the opportunity to indulge that interest today.

In 1997, the Government set up the post of Minister for Public Health, and I have questioned elsewhere whether that was helpful in reducing mortality and morbidity in transportation. It was spectacularly unsuccessful in the context of road traffic accidents. After dramatic falls in road mortality in the 1980s and 1990s, progress has stalled. *The Times* reported only last Friday that the number killed and injured fell by less than 1 per cent. last year, which is short of the Government's 10-year plan to cut the numbers by 40 per cent. by 2010. There is a faint whiff of complacency about that and, indeed, a Department for Transport spokesman has been quoted as saying:

"Ministers are content with the progress we are making."

I invite the Minister to correct that impression—I am sure that he will do that.

Most deaths of car occupants occur on rural roads and the downward trend in total deaths since the 1980s continues at a slower rate in the countryside. Traffic is expected to increase more rapidly on rural roads than in urban areas, so it will be difficult to close the gap. I am happy to say that Wiltshire appears to be bucking the trend and, despite its rural nature, the county enjoys an enviable safety record. Against the background of the target set by the Government for the years to 2002, which was itself set against the 1981 to 1985 baseline, Wiltshire achieved a reduction of 54 per cent. in those killed or seriously injured, compared with the national average of 47 per cent. That trend was mirrored in total accidents and we appear to be doing better than Somerset, our next door neighbour, which is in many respects a similar county. It is difficult to work out the secret of Wiltshire's relative success, but one factor may be the willingness of the county to impose speed limits. In Wiltshire, less evidence has been demanded than would be required under Government guidance. For example, an accident record is not necessarily required in order for a speed limit to be imposed.

Wiltshire has been trialling vehicle-activated road signs. The success of that study should surely warrant the inclusion of such signs in the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 1994, which would allow local authorities to introduce them without prior reference to the Secretary of State. I would appreciate it if the Minister would tell us when such an inclusion will be made, because my highways authority is keen to know.

Wiltshire has been anxious to ensure that its interventions are firmly rooted in available evidence. That is especially important in respect of road safety, because that subject is emotive and there is a tendency for politicians to want to be seen to be doing something, even if that may be neutral or worse. The use of 20 mph restrictions in the immediate vicinity of schools is one such example. Intuitively, one would think that such a measure is bound to help, but as the Government have pointed out, the evidence is less than clear cut. Children, especially young ones, are fairly well marshalled in the immediate vicinity of schools. They play close to their homes. The difficulty arises some distance away from schools, in the exact spots at which traffic speeds rise after leaving a 20 mph zone. We should not be tempted into tokenism and must look at wider areas.

Furthermore, evidence suggests that, to be respected, a 20 mph zone must be complemented by physical cues and attention to the general roadscape. Nowhere is that more true than in the linear villages of Wiltshire, where long, straight main streets encourage speed. A short while ago, the children of Dilton Marsh primary school wrote to me with their thoughts about how to improve road safety in their village, especially close to their school. The head teacher, Mrs. Judith Finney, invited me to visit and talk their thoughts through with the children.

I am sure that many hon. Members are humbled, as I am, by the sound good sense of young constituents. This occasion was no exception. The children pointed out that their main street was long and straight which encouraged people to drive fast. They said that the speed limit could be reduced, a pelican crossing could take them from school to the other side of the road where there was a post office and sweet shop and that general traffic-calming measures could be introduced. However, their most sophisticated observation was that it was difficult for children and their parents to walk to school because of the layout of the village and its pavements. The children said that it would be helpful if there were continuous pavement that did not end in a grass verge or hedge because they could then walk to school.

The children actually suggested what clever officials at the Department for Transport had come up with after months of careful consideration—so-called safe routes to school and school travel plans. In many areas, especially rural ones, there are no pavements and, where they do exist, they often end abruptly, forcing pedestrians into traffic. My young constituents rightly pointed to that as a hazard as well as an incentive for parents to take them to school by car.

In many areas, parents on the school run effectively use their cars as armoured vehicles to protect their children. We know that that sets in train bad habits that will probably stay with children for ever at great cost to public health and their health as individuals. By paying attention to how children get to school, we can demilitarise the school run.

Road safety is full of paradoxes. Until recently, I owned an elderly Nissan 1 litre car as well as an equally ancient Volvo estate. Apparently, I was more likely to injure and be injured while driving the latter than the

former because, although Volvo has an enviable and well-publicised safety record, it encourages a tank mentality. Although my Nissan was a wonderful car, it did not encourage the same sense of immortality, which made for much better driving.

Many people were initially taken aback when Wiltshire county council decided to dispense with white central markings along some stretches of road. Research and experience from abroad suggests that doing that reduces the biggest killer on our roads—speed. It removes any sense of comfort that road users may have and engenders caution. Unfortunately, that well-meant and evidence-based intervention produced some of the most craven, ill-informed opportunism that I have ever seen from the Liberal Democrats. It was shameful and I am sure that the Minister and I will find common ground about that.

Frankly, I am sure that the Minister will agree that what the Liberal Democrats say and do in Parliament does not matter much, but it does matter locally where they are often in positions of responsibility. In the context of the problem that we are discussing, they seem to be offering only a simplistic diet of speed restrictions. The evidence tells us that lower speed is necessary but by no means sufficient. Indeed, research suggests that the environmental context is the most important influence on driver's behaviour. At this point, the problem becomes a lot more difficult to solve than is implied by the Liberal Democrats' easy solution of sticking up speed signs so that they can tick the box marked road safety and consider that the job is done.

Evidence from Europe suggests that we need to improve the ability of drivers to read the road; we need legible roads. That suggests—almost counterintuitively—that the intelligent use of speed restrictions must be supported not only with physical barriers but with the absence of comfort cues that separate road users. In effect, that extends the home zone concept and the quiet lanes initiative that has had some success in Kent and Norfolk.

We learned from the Government's response to the Select Committee on Transport's report on road safety in October that demonstration projects are planned to trial suggestions for good practice in rural areas. They will be in line with the highly successful Gloucester safer city project. I think that all of us could welcome that, and I want the Minister to say how much progress has been made.

In October 2001, the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions published a progress report that it had commissioned from the consultants Babtie Ross Silcock, which was entitled "Development of a Rural Road Hierarchy for Speed Management". The following month, it appeared on the Department's website. It recognised that the main killer was speed and that a blanket 60 mph limit on rural roads was inappropriate. The idea that it came up with was a reclassification of roads with easily understandable speed limits and corresponding traffic-calming measures where appropriate. It was quite far reaching and we understand from the Government's response to the Transport Committee's report of June 2002 that a working group was set up to carry the recommendations forward. Since then, we have not heard anything further, and I want the Minister to say where he has got to with this.

At the end of 2001, the Government put on ice a number of important road building and improvement projects that would undoubtedly have saved lives. Those included the A36 improvements to the road from Codford to Heytesbury; that is a notorious stretch of trunk road, which is known colloquially as "Death Valley." That project—like the Westbury bypass—was a stand-alone local project that should not have been dependent on the outcome of the south coast to Bristol and Bath superhighway consultation exercise, which, we understand, is due to report in the summer. Nevertheless, it was put on ice pending the outcome of that investigation. Such delaying tactics are transparent, and they do not help to improve our road safety record.

Public health policy is meant to focus on where the greatest potential benefit lies. Every year, about 3,500 people are killed on Britain's roads, 40,000 are seriously injured and there 300,000 casualties in total. Each year, about a fifth of all deaths of those aged between five and 19 are due to road traffic accidents. In public health terms, that is quite a lot—and things are particularly bad if the age distribution of casualties is taken into account, because that considerably magnifies the significance of road accidents in terms of quality-adjusted life years lost.

The toll from road traffic accidents vastly exceeds that from air, sea or rail travel. The tragedy at Potters Bar in May 2002 killed seven people, and all of us can recall the furore that appropriately and understandably surrounded that sad event. However, 10 people die on our roads every day, but in spite of the public health challenge that road accidents present, road safety appears to be the poor relation when one considers the effort that we put into safety elsewhere in our transport network. In *The Guardian* two years ago, Rob Gifford of the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety was reported to have said:

> "Someone needs to do some hard thinking and ask why we are prepared to invest so heavily in rail safety and so little in road safety which offers much better value for money per life saved."

As a result of the Potters Bar tragedy, we are likely to get a specialist rail investigation branch from the forthcoming Railways and Transport Safety Bill—which, I understand, we will hear more about this afternoon. That is good; it will add to similar outfits that exist for air and sea transport, and it is broadly to be welcomed. However, on road transport, policy makers are strangely silent. That is especially odd, given that there has been a Minister with responsibility for public health since 1997 and we might therefore expect a sense of proportion in policy making. If we are serious in our cross-cutting attempts to improve public health, the Government need to concentrate on where the toll is greatest. Of course, they must deal with the all-too frequent tragedies on rail, sea and air that fascinate the media, but in addressing death and serious injury from accidents, they must be less willing to be reactive. They must look first at where their capacity to do good is greatest and that is on our roads.

It is clear from the copious material that I have ploughed through over the past few days that the evidence base available to Ministers for policy making is finite. In observing the investigation held by the police following the accident that I attended on the A36, I was able better to understand the role of the police in such matters. It is clear that, appropriately, their first

[Dr. Andrew Murrison]

consideration is law enforcement and not accident investigation. Indeed, they have neither the numbers nor the tools, given the skills that they are provided with to act as specialist accident investigators, to conduct investigations in the way that, for example, air, sea and rail investigators may.

Now is the time to set up a road casualty investigation branch to hold thematic inquiries into why certain types of accident happen. It could be located in the Department for Transport and funded through existing resources. It is worth noting that the total cost of road accidents in the United Kingdom in 1998—the latest year for which the figures are available—was £11.5 billion.

11.16 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): I congratulate the hon. Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) on securing the debate and on the exemplary manner in which he has presented his case today. Notwithstanding that, I am sure that he will not mind my chiding him gently on the matters on which I disagree. I share his distress at seeing major incidents such as the one that he described on the M4 in which people were killed and seriously injured. I assure him that every time such accidents happen—in my own constituency or anywhere else—they have an impact, not only on people like myself but on those in the Department. That is partly what drives us forward to do the things that we are doing.

I will chide the hon. Gentleman gently on the importance of such events to Government policy. I assure him that road safety is very prominent in the Department's thinking. It permeates our road transport policy. There is no complacency. We have a 10-year target to reduce the number of those killed and seriously injured. However, my reading of those figures is that we are now just ahead of the target. It is encouraging that we compare very well internationally—we are probably the best in terms of overall road safety—but our record on accidents involving children has not been as good as that of other countries in the European Union. It is encouraging to see that we are now making an impact on the number of accidents involving children.

I share the hon. Member's interest in the west Wiltshire "People's Voice", which sounds like the Liberal Democrat's version of "Focus". I have a saying, "In politics, there are lies, damned lies, statistics and Liberal Democrat focuses", in that order. I agree with him that there is "craven, ill-informed opportunism" in the document. It is nonsense to suggest that the whole road safety problem could be solved by spending £150,000 on 20 mph zones around schools—and that the policy was cruelly voted down by Tories and Labour councils. As the hon. Member for Westbury pointed out, our experience is that reducing speed limits and putting up signs in the road has little impact on the speed of vehicles. Such actions must be associated with other measures, such as engineering changes or speed cameras. There are many possible changes that could reduce speeds. As has rightly been pointed out, different measures can be combined. We should not detain ourselves for too long on the simplicity of the Liberal Democrats' so-called solutions.

Before I move on to some general points, I want to deal with a couple of questions that were raised. The hon. Gentleman spoke about talking to children at primary schools in his area. I have consulted widely with children in my area on what policies they think important. Interestingly, road safety features highly—children are the ones who experience the problems day by day when going to and from school and when playing. We should never ignore the sound good sense of children. We are considering ways of interacting with children in our consultations, so that we can hear some of that good sense and condense it into our thinking and our policies.

The hon. Gentleman asked about vehicle-activated signs. In some areas, they can certainly be very effective. Revised guidance will include approved legends for those signs, and the Highways Agency will soon provide guidance on approved types of equipment.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned the Gloucester safer city project, which I had the pleasure of visiting just under two years ago. The project has been extremely successful in involving local people and finding out the issues that they consider must be dealt with. Finding local solutions to local problems is very important. The full report on the project will be published some time in the spring of this year. It has taken time to discover what we have learned, but I assure the hon. Gentleman that we will learn important lessons from the experience in Gloucester, where the measures taken have led to a huge improvement in road safety and general quality of life.

I understand the hon. Gentleman's impatience about the Codford to Heytesbury section of the A36. However, the roads programme that we are undertaking, and the amount of money that we are spending both through the Highways Agency and through local transport plans, is unprecedented in the past 50 years. Although it has made good sense to defer this particular project while the south coast to Bristol and Bath study was carried out, recommendations will be made again in the spring. It would not be sensible for me to comment further before then.

I am sure that hon. Members are aware that the Government produced in October last year a response to the report by the Select Committee on Transport on road traffic speed, which the hon. Gentleman mentioned. That response included mention of work that my Department is doing and will be doing to combat the effects of not only excessive but inappropriate speed. That work will help us to achieve our casualty reduction targets—a reduction of 40 per cent. in the overall figures for those killed or seriously injured, and a reduction of 50 per cent. in the figures for children, by 2010. We are aware of the problem of inappropriate and excessive speeds, especially in rural areas. We acknowledge that many of the measures that we have developed to improve safety in urban areas are not always appropriate for rural communities. We are working hard to address that imbalance.

It may be of interest to hon. Members that work is in progress or is planned for the near future. We have already begun to consider the merits and the practical implications of introducing a rural road hierarchy—which, of course, will be important in a largely rural county such as Wiltshire. We are also considering village entry signing and are simplifying the procedures for introducing 30 mph village speed limits. In addition, I

am sure that the hon. Member for Westbury will be interested to know that work has already started on the development of a framework for assessing which speeds are appropriate and comparing them with the speeds that are actually being driven on our rural roads. We expect the first results of that work to be available in the early part of this year. They will feed into our plans to revise the guidance on setting local speed limits more appropriately. We plan to publish the advice on village entry signing later this year, to assist authorities in introducing more 30 mph speed limits in rural villages.

The hon. Gentleman will be aware that responsibility for safety on local roads rests largely with the local highways authority. However, the system of local transport plans requires local authorities to include separate road safety strategies for achieving the new reduction targets in their bids for capital funding for local transport measures. Wiltshire's funding for integrated transport measures, which includes measures to promote road safety, has increased from just over £350,000 in 1998-99 to almost £4 million in the current financial year. The hon. Gentleman will agree that that is a substantial and welcome increase in local authority funding for transport purposes.

As the hon. Gentleman said, Wiltshire has made real improvements in road safety. They are largely consistent with the national trend and have generally exceeded the relevant targets. It is a tribute to local highways authorities and the police that they have promoted better road safety education, engineered solutions and introduced better enforcement where appropriate.

As the hon. Gentleman said, however, that is just the start, and we have no reason to be complacent. In 2002, Wiltshire county council signed a public service agreement with the Government, which included a more challenging casualty reduction target than that which applies nationally. We welcome that. The public service agreement sets a target of reducing the number of those killed or seriously injured on Wiltshire county and trunk roads to 288 by 2005. Without the public service agreement, the national target for Wiltshire would be 311. The county is half way towards achieving the national target for 2010, and I congratulate it.

The hon. Gentleman could not resist making some comparisons within Wiltshire and with the neighbouring county of Somerset. It is difficult to compare one county with another. Counties have their own problems and needs, and they must develop an appropriate road safety strategy. I have looked at Somerset's figures, however, and they show the same downward trend as those for Wiltshire. That is welcome.

We want to encourage the introduction of 20 mph speed limits outside schools, and we will do so where appropriate. As the hon. Gentleman said, however, such speed limits will often have to be associated with other measures, and I am sure that Wiltshire is considering that.

Speed limit enforcement will remain an important part of our road safety strategy. One of the most effective road safety tools that we have introduced to combat excessive speed is the netting-off scheme, which allows some fixed-penalty speeding fine revenue to be reinvested in safety cameras. The scheme has been enormously effective. Wiltshire joined in 2002 and mainly operates mobile camera units, which specifically target speed-related casualties on rural roads.

The safety camera scheme has been so successful that we expect nearly all police force areas to have joined by spring this year. Wiltshire is relatively new to the scheme, but the hon. Gentleman will be interested to know that there was, on average, a massive 47 per cent. reduction in the number of those killed or seriously injured at camera sites in the pilot schemes. In real terms, more than 100 people are alive and well who would have been killed or seriously injured this year. That is a considerable success on the part of the schemes, and we should flag it up.

As has been highlighted, cameras are an excellent tool in helping to reduce excessive speed, but they cannot effectively combat inappropriate speeds below the speed limit. In our recent television advertising, we sought to encourage people to travel at speeds appropriate to the road conditions and the time of day—it may be raining or children may be coming out of school. Even 30 mph in a 30 mph zone may be inappropriate at certain times of day, although it will be wholly appropriate at others.

As the hon. Gentleman will know, we announced SWARMMS—the south-west area multi-modal study—before Christmas. It will dual much of the A303, which passes through the hon. Gentleman's constituency. Indeed, I sometimes pass along it on the way to my constituency. The study will introduce many road safety improvements, including on the stretch at Stonehenge, where tunnelling is being carried out. It is, indeed, a black spot.

Again, I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on raising these issues. I may not have covered them all in the time at my disposal, and I will be delighted to correspond with him.

11.29 am

Sitting suspended till Two o' clock.

International Criminal Court

2 pm

Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): My reason for requesting the debate is that like many Government supporters, I was extremely proud that after decades of effort, we passed legislation in 2001 to give full support to the establishment of the International Criminal Court. That was the culmination of a process that started at Nuremberg. After the second world war, a judicial system had to be created because the inadequacy of creating a new tribunal or independent process after each outrage had been brought home to people. We needed an established international court in which the perpetrators of the worst crimes against humanity could be prosecuted. The sickening thought of future Idi Amins sitting safely in Saudi Arabia need be no more. If Saddam Hussein can be arrested, he can be prosecuted for any offences that he might have committed since the International Criminal Court was formed. That is truly foreign policy with an ethical dimension, if I may sound out of date.

The former Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister played an active and special role in achieving the Rome statute that we incorporated into our law. Hon. Members of all parties said on Second Reading of the International Criminal Court Bill that they were in favour of the ICC in principle. Furthermore, the European Union, with our influence prominent, acted in unison with a common policy that was a formidable force for good to bring about the Rome statute. Eighty-seven countries have ratified the Rome statute to form the ICC; that has happened much more quickly than many anticipated. That was a huge triumph to end a huge injustice where, in the words of Mary Robinson:

> "It's less likely that somebody who has massacred 100,000 people or has been responsible for their death would be brought before any accountable court than somebody who commits a domestic murder."

It was a therefore a great shock when I found out from isolated newspaper articles and sources abroad that my Government were leading the way in Europe to allow bilateral deals with the United States to exclude US citizens from the provisions of the ICC. In other words, we were excluding the 4 per cent. of the world's population who live in the most powerful state in the world from the International Criminal Court. That was a powerful and wrong message. Entrenching inequality before the law is a denial of the wishes of this House.

I fully accept the right of the United States not to ratify the International Criminal Court. I believe that its fears are misguided and, indeed, in the negotiations in which the United States played a full part that led up to the Rome statute people bent over backwards to accommodate its fears. The principle of complementarity was established and a role for the United Nations Security Council, on which the United States has veto powers, was written in to delay the responsibility of the ICC. Safeguards on the appointment of prosecutors were established and there was a refusal to apply the law retrospectively. However, the United States is still not satisfied.

Angus Robertson (Moray): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is disappointing that the United States maintains its position, especially when one considers that the provisions of the court would cover prosecution for the attacking or bombarding by whatever means of towns, villages, dwellings or buildings that are undefended and not military objectives, such as those in New York?

Tony Worthington: I shall come back to that point. However, the wretched events of 11 September certainly constitute war crimes, and I should have thought that the United States would welcome the establishment of an international criminal court. Unfortunately, not only is the United States not ratifying the ICC but it is seeking to undermine it. In the middle of last year, it blackmailed the United Nations by saying that it would withdraw all its peacekeeping forces from East Timor and Bosnia unless it obtained immediate agreement that none of its people would be subject to any action by the International Criminal Court and that they would have impunity. It obtained a year-long exemption from the provision of the ICC, which runs out this summer.

The United States is now aggressively seeking to negotiate bilateral impunity agreements for its citizens with every country that has signed up to the ICC. Up to now, 14 nations have signed such agreements, although none has ratified them. They tend to be weak countries that are dependent on American favours; they are heavily leaned on if they do not sign. For example, the Philippines was threatened with loss of cash for army retraining and Romania with lack of progress to NATO membership if they did not sign bilateral agreements.

In addition, the United States Congress has passed the American Servicemembers' Protection Act 2002. It has sought to prohibit any US co-operation with peacekeeping operations unless US forces have been exempted. It precludes American assistance to any country unless that country has concluded a bilateral treaty with the United States that stops the surrender of US personnel to the court. Extraordinarily, the Act authorises whatever action is necessary to release from captivity any American personnel detained in The Hague or elsewhere.

Given American attitudes, it was crucial that the European Union stood together to resist demands for bilateral agreement that would undermine the International Criminal Court and that we responded with one voice to demands that severely undermined the credibility of the International Criminal Court. I am told that powerful voices in the European Union wanted to reject American demands. We were not one of them. We led those who were seeking to accommodate the Americans. That led to a position at the meeting of the Council of the European Union on 30 September that established the principles under which bilateral treaties could be signed. The Government claim that they are seeking to allow bilateral treaties with America in a way that does not undermine the ICC. I think that most people find it very difficult to square that circle.

I know that the Government are embarrassed by their role. They are not a modest Government and, rightly so. They have a lot to be proud of. They are fond of pointing out their achievements in international affairs—how they have led the way on certain matters, shown that they are at the heart of Europe, are setting the agenda and so on. However, the Government have been utterly silent on this matter, which has major implications for a

piece of legislation of which we are proud. Apart from a couple of questions in the other place and my modest contribution, they have given no information voluntarily.

As a Government supporter, I think that there should have been a statement on the International Criminal Court. I am particularly indebted to the organisation Parliamentarians for Global Action, of which I am a member and which worked successfully to persuade countries to sign up to the ICC. I am grateful to Human Rights Watch and to Amnesty International because, without them, I would have had no information about what was happening.

The debate gives the Government an opportunity to explain a policy that they have not wanted to explain voluntarily. The situation in which we find ourselves has considerable implications. The likely war with Iraq will be the first one in which British military action will be subject to ICC scrutiny. British military action, however, will not be under British military control. What discussions are taking place with the Americans to ensure that British forces are not involved in activity that could be subject to ICC concern?

I return, by way of example, to the point that was made by the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson). The ICC treaty contains a provision that outlaws attacks on military targets that clearly cause excessive harm to civilians. A court could find that the use of cluster bombs was, in some circumstances and some locations, a war crime. What action are the British Government taking to ensure that their troops are not involved in actions that could lead to charges being brought against them? What steps are the Government taking to ensure that their forces are not implicated in actions that are taken by American commanders, which may be in breach of their own statutes?

In a written answer to my questions in a debate on the action that was being taken to enact a bilateral treaty with the United States, the Minister for Europe told me that preliminary discussions had taken place with American officials on 17 October while they had been on a sweep of meetings in European capitals to negotiate bilateral deals. Other EU countries are rejecting such deals out of hand. What is the time scale on that matter? Does he intend that the bilateral deals should be completed before the summer, when the United States one-year exemption vis-à-vis peacekeeping forces will expire?

One important question is whether the Americans have accepted the terms on which the EU will negotiate bilateral deals. The Foreign Secretary and the EU have said that the bilateral deals proposed by the Americans in other cases, such as in East Timor, infringe the Rome statute. The guiding principles do not give the Americans all that they have demanded with regard to non-surrender agreements, for example, with regard to the categories of people who are granted impunity.

My information is that the Americans have not accepted the guidelines that the EU is laying down for bilateral deals. I would be grateful if the Minister would confirm that. Will the Minister give us a cast-iron assurance that those guidelines will not be departed from and that if the Americans do not accept them then, like the other EU countries, we will not have a bilateral treaty with the Americans?

What action will the British Government take to ensure that Parliament is kept in touch with what is being done in its name? The contrast with the European Parliament and the Council of Europe is pronounced. The European Parliament debated the issue thoroughly and heartily condemned the principle of bilateral agreements. We must be informed about what is happening. Why will the Government not be open and transparent on this issue? Will the Minister give us an assurance that the House will be informed of all future developments? The EU Council instructed states to keep it in touch after its meeting on 30 September. The Government should surely be obliged to keep us in touch.

How would we respond if any other country approached us, or the EU, seeking a bilateral impunity deal? America is not the only signifieant country that has not ratified the ICC. If other countries, such as India, which supply peacekeepers, also sought to withdraw from UN forces, would the exemption policy also extend to them—if not, why not? Surely, we should be stressing equality before the law.

I would welcome the Government's views on the assertions made by the legal advisors of Human Rights Watch about the illegality of the use in this context of article 98 agreements. That respected and well-informed organisation believes that parties to the ICC have a legal obligation that prevents them from entering into article 98 agreements with parties such as the United States, which is the only country to have repudiated the Rome statute. Article 98 was not intended to allow a state that had refused to co-operate with the court to negotiate a web of agreements to secure exemption for its citizens or otherwise undermine the effective functioning of the ICC. It is surely common sense that signing such an agreement with the United States, which is committed to undermining the court, contravenes the obligations that Governments undertook on signing or ratifying the Rome statute. There would have been outrage if, while the Bill was passing through Parliament, a Minister had stated that if challenged by the United States, the Government would cave in and grant it impunity.

Article 27 of the statute incorporates the fundamental principle that no one is immune for crimes under international law such as genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. It says absolutely explicitly that the Rome statute

"shall apply equally to all persons without any distinction based on official capacity",

yet we are sanctioning bilateral agreements with the United States that are in direct contradiction of that ethos. Does the Minister agree with the report in the *Financial Times* of 27 August, in which it was said that the European Union's legal experts advised that countries would be violating their obligations under the Rome statute if they entered into a US impunity agreement? To put it another way, our Government will be breaking a law passed in 2001 if they sign an impunity agreement with the United States.

Another question—my speech is bound to be all questions because we have been given no information—is whether the Minister agrees that, in the end, it will be for the international criminal court as an independent international judicial body and not states such as Britain or the United States to decide what legal effect should be given to any bilateral impunity agreement.

[Tony Worthington]

Is the Minister aware that if Americans who are suspected of war crimes are returned to America, they return to a country that does not have laws to deal with many international crimes under the Rome statute? As the United States cannot prosecute such crimes, a suspect would enjoy de facto impunity. We could not assume that, on the principle of complementarity, a suspect would be dealt with by the United States courts. Not all war crimes defined in the Rome statute are expressly defined as crimes under federal law when committed abroad. Crimes against humanity, apart from torture, committed abroad are not included under federal law.

Does the Minister agree with Amnesty International that if we sign an impunity agreement with the United States, we shall have to renegotiate all or almost all extradition agreements with other states, as most bilateral extradition treaties have re-extradition clauses? Such clauses provide that the state extraditing a person to another state normally retains the right to agree to the re-extradition of that person to another state or international court. If a state agreed to the US impunity agreement, it would have to renegotiate all or almost all extradition agreements that have re-extradition clauses. A new clause would have to be inserted to provide that the second state retained the right to agree to extradition except when the person was a US national or fell within other categories of persons covered by the agreement. What work will have to be done as a result of a bilateral agreement?

Does the Minister agree with Amnesty International that the US impunity agreement is designed to prevent US nationals from appearing as witnesses—even as expert witnesses—before the International Criminal Court? Since such witnesses appear only if they themselves consent, under the US impunity agreement they could be prevented from attending even if they were willing to help the court in its search for truth. The right to testify would be taken away by their own Government. Does the Minister agree that that is the meaning of the proposed bilateral agreement with the US?

Is the Minister aware of those points? What undertakings have the Americans given that they will update their laws to ensure that any war criminal from their country will face justice? A statement from the Council of the European Union confirms that:

"the European Union and the United States fully share the objective of individual accountability for the most serious crimes of concern to the international community."

However, the annex to that statement points out that

"any solution should include appropriate operative provisions ensuring that persons who have committed crimes falling within the jurisdiction of the Court do not enjoy impunity."

Is the US willing to accept the stipulation that it should amend its laws to fit in with the ICC statute?

A further question needs an answer. Does the EU remain adamant that applicant countries must ratify the ICC statute as a condition of entry into the EU and that the conditions for a bilateral agreement for applicant countries will be the same as those for current members of the EU?

Like many others, I feel great sadness about the attitude of the Bush Administration. It sends a dangerous message that the most powerful nation on earth sees itself as above international law. Enormous safeguards were included in the Rome statute to prevent politicisation of the ICC. Ironically, our stance weakens the position of any British nomination for prosecutor to safeguard the court from politicisation, because, in the eyes of most ratifiers of the convention, we have taken actions that weaken the court.

The policy followed by the Bush Administration contradicts the good work done by Americans since Nuremberg, as well as their helpful attitude in establishing the tribunals in Yugoslav and Rwanda and in helping us to establish a tribunal in Sierra Leone. I am disappointed that my own Government have undermined legislation introduced by the House less than two years ago—because that is the effect of impunity agreements.

I would like the Minister's assurance that, at the very least, he will answer my questions in a letter. Much better would be to use the facility of a written statement to the House to explain the current state of play.

2.24 pm

Angus Robertson (Moray): I congratulate the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington) on securing the debate. I am a relatively new Member of this House, so I had to go back through the *Hansard* records of its proceedings to find out quite how many questions he has tabled and debates he has taken part in. This morning, I read his contributions to the debate of 3 April 2001 on the International Criminal Court Bill, and I supplemented my reading by looking at the substantial debates in the Scottish Parliament on the International Criminal Court (Scotland) Bill, which my party supported.

My interest in the International Criminal Court stems from my previous existence as a journalist—especially in the early 1990s, when I reported from the former Yugoslavia and saw scenes that were the results of clearly criminal actions by human beings against one another. My interest in history has also shown me that that is not a new development. Those are a couple of the reasons why my party and I are such strong supporters of the ICC. That is consistent with being in favour of an ethical foreign policy.

My interest in this subject was rekindled a few months ago when a constituent of mine who is an American citizen and whose father worked at the criminal trials in Japan after the second world war came to my surgery. I read about the international military tribunal for the far east with great interest and that reinforced my belief that it is right and proper for every state to support the ICC. Indeed, I pay tribute to the work that the Government have done to try to expedite the signing by the United Kingdom—which of course includes Scotland and the other jurisdictions in the UK.

My other particular interest in the ICC relates to the European dimension. That has been alluded to by the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie, and it is an extremely important dimension bearing in mind the United States of America's efforts to secure article 98 agreements, which are essentially moves to seek exemptions for US service personnel. That is a new

policy, which the George Bush Administration are pursuing; it was not pursued by the previous Democratic Administration of President Bill Clinton. Bush's Administration is clearly pressurising many international states to sign bilateral agreements that would prevent the surrender of any US citizen or anyone who has ever worked for the US military—including contractors—to the ICC, which we all hope will deal effectively with the worst crimes known to humanity.

However, after months of campaigning, the Bush Administration have concluded such agreements with only 17 countries. Only six of those countries have satisfied the Rome statute, and two of them—Romania and East Timor—are now emphasising that their Parliaments must ratify the agreement before it can take effect. Those 17 countries are Afghanistan, Dominican Republic, East Timor, El Salvador, The Gambia, Honduras, India, Israel, Marshall Islands, Mauritania, Micronesia, Nepal, Palau, Romania, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie rightly said that those countries are particularly prone to diplomatic pressure to sign up to such agreements.

I welcome the moves of Germany—supposedly one of our close allies in the European Union—and Canada, which is a strong NATO partner. They expressly said that they will not sign such an agreement. On November 4, the Canadian Foreign Minister, Bill Graham, announced that Canada considers an existing agreement covering the conduct of United States personnel on Canadian soil sufficient to meet US concerns. After the Council of the European Union released its conclusions on 30 September, Germany's Foreign Minister, Joschka Fischer, announced that Germany was

"against the conclusion of special agreements and we will not conclude such an agreement."

If any right hon. or hon. Members have not yet had the chance to consider the full analysis by the German Foreign Ministry of the agreement reached at the Council, I would commend it to them. It makes it clear that pursuing the route of signing an article 98 agreement is inconsistent with the International Criminal Court as established.

The Council of the European Union discussed the matter at great length on 30 September and released guiding principles for member countries that are considering bilateral agreements with the United States. The principles state:

"Entering into US agreements—as presently drafted—would be inconsistent with ICC States Parties' obligations with regard to the ICC Statute."

For such an agreement to be legal for those parties, it would need to include at least:

"No impunity: A guarantee that an appropriate investigation and potential prosecution would be undertaken by national jurisdictions.

No reciprocity: The exclusion of nationals of ICC States Parties from coverage of such an agreement.

No universal scope: The limitation of coverage to those persons present in a territory"—

because they have been sent by a signing state—and

"Ratification: The agreement must be approved according to the constitutional procedures of each individual state."

In addition, the Council emphasised that the

"Rome Statute provides all necessary safeguards against the use of the Court for politically motivated purposes".

I share entirely the concerns raised by the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie, especially on prosecutors. I wish any nominees from the United Kingdom every success in securing a position at the forthcoming selections. However, I would be very surprised if other signatory states did not view any candidate from one of the minority of states that have signed up to the special agreements as compromised in one way or another.

Will the Minister clarify whether he shares the opinion of Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer that the principles that the European Union has outlined represent a concrete move towards a clear rejection of article 98—or does he not see the EU's principles as hindering the UK from entering such an agreement with its US allies? It has to be one or the other; it cannot be both.

Of course, it is up to the United States Administration to form their own policy on the International Criminal Court. As a great fan of the United States and a great supporter of much of its policy, I am very disappointed by the position that it is taking towards the ICC. However, I take some comfort from recent polls on the question conducted by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations and the German Marshall Fund of the United States. They recently released the full findings of Worldviews 2002—the most comprehensive survey ever, apparently, of US and European foreign policy attitudes. The second and final phase of the release of the survey findings shows that 71 per cent. of American respondents support the United States' participation in the International Criminal Court.

I also note with interest the findings of Monroe Leigh of the American Bar Association, which quite clearly show the United States constitution's compatibility with the Rome statute of the International Criminal Court. Those are matters for the United States, but I hope that it listens to the views of people around the world, and pays attention to the increasing scepticism about its diplomatic initiative.

There is another dimension to the issue that goes hand in hand with developments in and around Iraq. Clearly, if the United Kingdom, with or without a United Nations mandate, finds itself involved in armed military action in Iraq, there could be consequences, given that the ICC will shortly be up and running. We should consider the situation as outlined by the ICC:

"if nationals of States Parties to the Statute are victims of suspected crimes within the jurisdiction of the Court in the territory of a State which is not a Party to the Statute committed by persons who are not nationals of a State Party, the Court wouldn't be in a position to investigate except if either the State of territoriality or the State of nationality of the suspected person accepts the jurisdiction of the Court, or if the situation is referred to the Court by the Security Council."

If the UK and the US were to pursue a military campaign in Iraq—and I hope that that would occur only if there were a new mandate from the UN Security Council—and the regime of Saddam Hussein were toppled, it would raise some big questions. If during a future campaign against Iraq, war crimes were committed against UK troops, would the post-war military administration enter Iraq into the ICC? Bearing

[Angus Robertson]

in mind that one surmises that the UK would play a role in establishing the new Government in Iraq, would the UK try to pursue a policy whereby that new Government would sign up to the ICC, or would the UK request that the UN Security Council referred the matter to the prosecutor of the ICC for investigation? That point is germane when one considers that military conflict may be only a few weeks away.

I should like to touch on a point relating to the timetabling of developments at the ICC. At the February meeting, judges will be elected, and in March 2003, there will be the formal inauguration of the ICC. My question is about nominations for judges and prosecutors. The Minister will be aware that the UK nominee for the position of judge is Adrian Fulford, an English judge. I wish him success. I am interested in how future nominations for positions on the ICC, the European Court of Justice or other bodies will be pursued, particularly as the Government have said that they would like a more open system of appointment for judges, and bearing in mind that there are three criminal jurisdictions in the UK.

Of course, if Scotland were a normal independent country, a Scottish Government would—as would any other normal Government, such as that of Ireland—ensure that a nominee from the Scottish legal system were put forward at every point. That is not always so in the UK, although it sometimes happens, as with the example of Judge Edward who serves on the European Court of Justice. However, there is no guarantee, and I view that as a less than ideal circumstance. Nevertheless, I would still like to hear from the Minister what system the Government have in mind for future nominations.

I shall finish with a quotation that I think is germane to ICC developments, and which comes from the time of the Nuremberg trials. It is of the chief US prosecutor, Justice Robert Jackson, who said:

"The ultimate step in avoiding periodic wars, which are inevitable in a system of international lawlessness, is to make statesmen responsible to law. And let me make clear that while this law is first applied against German aggressors, the law includes, and if it is to serve a useful purpose it must condemn, aggression by any other nations, including those which sit here now in judgment."

That was right then, and it is right now. If we are to reach agreements, it should be without exemptions. I look forward to the Minister's reply to my questions, and to those of the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie.

2.40 pm

Ross Cranston (Dudley, North): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington) on securing the debate. He has a passionate commitment to the International Criminal Court—that is well known—and his reputation generally on matters to do with international development is widely acknowledged in the House. When I was Solicitor-General, I was privileged to play a small part in the passage of the legislation, and I support the ICC unreservedly. However, I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me if I put to one side his concerns for a moment, though I hope to return to them at the conclusion of my remarks. I declare my membership of the Bar.

The Government are to be congratulated on their promotion of the International Criminal Court. As my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie said, the Government adopted a positive role both at the diplomatic conference at Rome and in the preparatory meetings leading up to that. After a long struggle—over decades—the Rome statute on the International Criminal Court was finally agreed in July 1998. We took that positive position despite the misgivings of our close ally, the United States. We have continued to support the court. Next month, as the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) said, there will be the assembly of state parties in New York, and the judges of the court will be elected. We have nominated Mr. Justice Fulford. Before his elevation to the High Court, Sir Adrian Fulford was an eminent criminal practitioner.

The success or failure of the ICC, as with other new institutions, does not turn simply on whether Governments agree or pass the necessary legislation. An institution depends vitally on the resources—the human resources in particular—associated with it. In the case of the court, that means the quality of its judges, of both the prosecutors and defence lawyers who appear before it, and of the support staff, such as those in the registry. That quality cannot always be guaranteed. In many developing countries, the best lawyers do not want to become judges, and the judiciary must be recruited from the public sector. Practising lawyers migrate to commercial law, which is more lucrative, and abandon advocacy before the criminal courts.

As for financial resources, there are problems with the existing international criminal tribunals—or, at least, with the international criminal tribunal in Rwanda. There have been operational problems. Verdicts have been handed down in relation to only five defendants, although over 50 detainees are still on trial, or awaiting trial. At the current rate at which cases are proceeding, that court will still be trying cases in 150 years' time.

There are also problems with the UN-sponsored trials in East Timor. The court there is not an international criminal tribunal but is sponsored by the UN as a hybrid court. Again, under-funding and neglect have meant that key appointments have not been made, and cases are proceeding in a desultory fashion.

When we turn to the former Yugoslavia, we can take some comfort from the quality of the tribunal; the efforts of Governments, especially ours, have resulted in a good record. I mention particularly the contribution of the English Bar. No better illustration can be found of the contribution that the UK has made than the trial of Milosevic. The presiding judge is Judge May, whose control over an extremely difficult trial has won universal admiration—although possibly not from the defendant. The prosecutor is Geoffrey Nice QC, and the amicus—he was appointed by the court because Milosevic is defending himself—is Stephen Kay QC. This country is making a superb effort, and its high standards are acknowledged by other countries.

It would be invidious to mention other lawyers from this country, although the senior lawyers whom I have mentioned are not the only ones to have made a contribution to the ICC; many junior lawyers are involved. For example, *The Times* last week contained an article on the International Criminal Court by Sylvia de Bertodano, a London barrister who has practised in these various courts and is now contributing to the

hybrid court in East Timor. The international criminal tribunal on the former Yugoslavia augurs well for the International Criminal Court. It can work.

I wish to make one subsidiary point. Too often in the House, I have to listen to negative comments about the greed of lawyers and about their obstructionism. As with any profession, there are unattractive aspects to some lawyers' practices. As MPs, we sometimes attract opprobrium—and in some cases it is justified.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): You get it for both.

Mr. John McWilliam (in the Chair): Order. I do not work in the international court.

Ross Cranston: English judges and lawyers have done the country proud and, as I said, that has been acknowledged well beyond our shores. Leading practitioners have been to The Hague, to Arusha, and to Indonesia to appear before and work for international criminal tribunals. Although they are paid, they earn much less than they would receive if they were still practising in London; and their practices suffer when they are absent. The English Bar has also done a considerable amount of pro-bono work; for example it has voluntarily engaged in advocacy training for lawyers from other countries who are to appear before the existing international criminal tribunals. I am sure that that will continue for the ICC. The efforts to establish an international criminal Bar for the purposes of the ICC will come to fruition in June 2003. Again, our lawyers have played an important part in that.

To conclude, I make three points. First, I hope that the successful operation of the international criminal tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, and the future success of the ICC, will convince the United States of the value of acceding to the Rome treaty. Secondly, the Government deserve credit for all that they have done within the confines of realpolitik. Finally, as well as taking credit on behalf of the Government, my hon. Friend the Minister for Europe would not be remiss if he paid tribute to our legal profession for what it has done in demonstrating that an international criminal tribunal can be made to work.

2.49 pm

Dr. Julian Lewis: The hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) referred to the debate on 3 April 2001 on the International Criminal Court Bill. I was privileged to take part in that debate and I outlined then six good reasons for supporting the establishment of the International Criminal Court. The first was to punish past killers, the second to deter future killers, the third to embarrass those who shelter killers, the fourth to force countries to put killers in their midst on trial—preferably domestically—and the fifth to prove beyond doubt that the killings took place. The sixth was to bring out aspects of the truth that might otherwise remain hidden.

Like the hon. Member for Moray, I had read a great deal about former international military tribunals dealing with atrocities. I had personal reasons for doing that because my family was caught up in such events before I was born. I read of the way in which some of the worst war criminals were sheltered after the war by countries that ought to have known better, were helped to get there by various organisations—including even some branches of the Roman Catholic Church—that ought to have known better, and were massaged by certain intelligence services that ought to have known better. There were cases that were not properly investigated, such as that of Mengele in Brazil. His family remained in regular contact with him from West Germany until his death—a contact that could easily have been found out if the West German Government had wanted to make the effort.

Like the hon. Member for Moray, I believe that there is a need for an international machine to cope with what he rightly called the worst crimes known to humanity. So far so good; however, this is the third debate on the subject in which I have participated, and it is the one that has made me most gloomy. In the first debate, I was extremely enthusiastic and in the second I was very enthusiastic, but was beginning to have doubts about the ways in which some people might regard the ICC as liable to interpret its work. In today's debate, I am becoming very concerned. If we are considering the worst crimes known to humanity, we should make sure that the ICC confines itself to those.

There are two ways of dealing with atrocities. There is the method that we have now: when the atrocities are sufficiently appalling, a special ad hoc international court is set up to deal with them—whether they be those perpetrated by the Nazis or the Japanese, or those that occurred in the Balkans or Rwanda—and only them. The disadvantage of doing it that way is that it takes a great deal of effort to set up such a court. There must be many borderline cases in which justice is not done because the countries concerned will not make the effort to set up a special court. That is the argument for having a standing court.

Unfortunately, it is beginning to dawn on me that there is a way in which the standing court could go badly wrong. Those doubts have been reinforced by some of the contributions that I have heard this afternoon. We know the saying, "The Devil makes work for idle hands." My concern is that a standing court, once set up, will look for things to investigate that might not come into the category that the hon. Member for Moray rightly defined as the worst crimes known to humanity. If a standing court is not to lose credibility, it should not be playing with definitions, as sometimes happens in domestic courts and even in quasi-legal inquiries. I heard talk of it possibly being appropriate for such a court to investigate the use of cluster bombs, but that would stretch the definition of what the court is designed to do.

I can foresee circumstances—I raised this during the debate that took place in 2001—in which there might be a danger of people trying to take a case to the international court about the fact that certain countries practise a policy of nuclear deterrence, on the basis that the threat of the use of nuclear weapons could be construed, in some bizarre way, as a war crime or a crime against humanity. We must recognise reality; we interfere with countries' sovereignty only in the most extreme and important cases in which the crimes committed are most dire. As someone who has proved myself, on two previous occasions, to be a friend of the idea of an International Criminal Court, I appeal to

[Dr. Julian Lewis]

Members present and to those who read the debate who want the ICC to work, as I want do, not to regard it as a tool for the creeping generalisation of some sort of world order of government. It should not be that. Its purpose should be to deal with the worst crimes known to humanity. If it confines itself to those cases, it will continue to receive cross-party support in this House.

2.56 pm

Mr. Michael Moore (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): The hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) has made a perfectly valid case. I suggest that if the court were not properly set up and did not receive the right backing from across the world, none of his worries would come to pass. We shall, indeed, be in difficult circumstances if we get ahead of ourselves, as he may, perhaps, have been suggesting.

I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington) on securing the debate. He has raised his concerns in various ways in the past—most recently in a debate on Europe in the Chamber—and it has been useful for us to have those concerns set out in more detail today. I look forward to the Minister's response to the points that have been raised, with which I have considerable sympathy.

Genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity are all horrors of the present day in just about every continent on earth, but they have been a feature of our history for many centuries. The international community has set out the principles of law that should apply to us all, from the Geneva conventions to the United Nations charter. Those principles are complex, but the principle that civilised values should be shared, imposed and supported across the world is something with which few right-thinking people would disagree.

Since the second world war, there has been widespread recognition of the need to develop a justice system that is recognised around the globe and can give effect to those international conventions and laws. The purpose of such a system is not only to bring to justice those who commit offences but to act as a deterrent to those who might be tempted to follow suit and, importantly, to ensure that the victims of crime, their relatives and countrymen do not take the law into their own hands to get retribution. The failure to tackle the Nazis after the war—alluded to by the hon. Member for New Forest, East—the troubles of investigating the Rwandan genocide and, most recently, the creation of The Hague tribunal to deal with the former Yugoslavia have taught us different lessons about how we have coped, or not, as the case may be, with the problems that international law throws up. The hon. and learned Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston) rightly pointed out several of the shortcomings in the tribunals that exist.

Liberal Democrats were eager to support the International Criminal Court when it was created—while recognising such shortcomings and a desire to get rid of them—and we supported the passage of the legislation through the House. As we gather just before the judges are selected and the court begins its work, we should be celebrating. It is a fantastic achievement of which the Government should be rightly proud. Instead, we find ourselves in considerable uncertainty as a result of the position of the US Administration.

We have always understood the American reservations. President Clinton signed the Rome statute but made sure that we were all aware that it would never be ratified. There is a world of difference between not ratifying the statute and actively trying to undermine it; unfortunately that is the US Government's present position. There are several reasons why the United States might be motivated to do that. One might be the profound issue of sovereignty, meaning that it does not accept that any body other than its sovereign courts can have jurisdiction over its citizens. That point might carry more weight if the United States showed slightly more respect for the citizens of other countries whom it alleges have committed international crimes. The people who are caught up in Guantanamo bay at the moment might like to pause and consider the irony of that.

Dr. Julian Lewis: For the sake of clarity, is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that what might or might not be happening in terms of prison conditions on Guantanamo bay could be the sort of circumstance that he imagines being examined by the International Criminal Court?

Mr. Moore: I was making a separate point. We do not want to be sidetracked into a debate on Guantanamo bay, but the rights and jurisdiction of those who are there is not best practice as we would enjoy it. The Americans should not be so worried about other jurisdictions when that is the case.

Mr. Savidge: Does the hon. Gentleman think perhaps that the ICC could be the ideal court to deal with people who are accused of terrorist and other offences?

Mr. Moore: It could be. There is a genuine debate to be had, but the core issue at this time is surely that we need to understand the motivation for the American action. I hope that the Minister will give us an insight into that. Attempts to sidestep the whole ICC by article 90 waivers and bilateral agreements are very worrying.

Surely at a time when we are, rightly, trying to exploit our special relationship with the United States, we should be persuading it to change its approach on this matter. Indeed, if we go back to the debate on Second Reading of the International Criminal Court Bill, the then Foreign Secretary, who is now the Leader of the House, said:

> "I regret that the United States does not yet feel able to ratify a statute which it has signed . . . We will continue, as a friend and ally, to encourage the United States to join the International Criminal Court . . . the best way to do so is to show our own confidence in the court by taking part in it."—[*Official Report*, 3 April 2001; Vol. 366, c. 223.]

Surely that is not the same as being party to the bilateral agreements that will undermine the court.

Perhaps the Minister will make the European Union position clear when he responds because it appears that the Government are in something of a bind. They are committed to exploring and finding a bilateral agreement with the United States, but they are committed also to a set of guiding principles agreed on

30 September at the Council of Ministers that suggests that the draft agreements promulgated by the United States are incompatible with the ICC itself.

Given that there is the prospect of our signing a bilateral agreement with the United States, if the Government agree to give the Americans certain rights, the Government must accept some rights themselves. I ask the Minister whether the Government have now had serious second thoughts about the criminal court. If other countries approached us, would we consider bilateral agreements with them, too? Is our position that we shall actively seek to get exemptions of bilateral agreements with other countries?

The deferral of last year's application of the International Criminal Court was a compromise designed to avoid the ICC being stillborn. What is the Minister's assessment of the prospects of that process being resolved peaceably and effectively, leaving us, at the end of the deferral period in a few months' time, with an International Criminal Court that can credibly start to do its work? If the deferral period ends, and few countries have signed up to the bilateral deals that have been mentioned already, what is the Minister's assessment of what will happen next? It is an alarming prospect that we may find ourselves without an institution that has found cross-party support, as well as worldwide support.

At a time when the United States is making a serious case that those who commit horrendous crimes should be fully accountable in the international arena, its action is deeply damaging. Our Government's connivance with that is worrying. I hope that the Minister can resolve that issue for us this afternoon.

3.6 pm

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): I open by congratulating the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington) on securing this debate on a subject of considerable interest that, although it was debated some months ago, perhaps must be looked at again. We are all interested to hear the replies to the questions put by the hon. Gentleman and by the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson). I also take this opportunity to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) on a clear and incisive contribution to the debate.

Hon. Members might recall that we opposed the passage of the International Criminal Court Bill at Third Reading because of its shortcomings, which we felt would cause considerable problems in its practical operation. Support was expressed for the principles behind the establishment of such a court. It is absolutely right in theory and in practice that the international community makes judgments about crimes against humanity.

The 20th century witnessed many bloody wars and saw genocide and crimes against humanity on a scale previously unimaginable. People internationally have a right to react to that. Many of today's conflicts, upon which I shall touch later, revolve around ethnic strife and tensions. Those tensions increase the potential for genocidal acts.

I shall recount a little of the history behind the establishment of the court, and the motivation underlying it. The international community, rightly horrified by terrible crimes against humanity and the genocide perpetrated during the second world war, determined that the guilty should be brought to justice. The principle holds good today, as it did then; that those who commit such crimes should not—cannot—be permitted to escape justice.

Ad hoc tribunals that we have seen in the past may prove necessary again in the future. They can focus on a specific incident or issue and have the flexibility to address the actual circumstances of individual situations and crimes. However, the purpose of such trials must also be one of deterrence. It is open to question how effective such tribunals that are set up for particular cases will prove to be in that respect. They do not seem to have deterred Mr. Mugabe, for example, who, by anyone's standards, is certainly on the way to conducting himself with grotesque inhumanity.

However, while no one can dispute the value of bringing war criminals to justice, we continue to worry about the blueprint for the ICC and how it will work in practice. Concern is centred on a lack of protection for our troops, who are engaged in international operations and peacekeeping. To echo the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East, as it is currently conceived, the court runs the serious risk of becoming a political court. Despite expressing our concerns during the passage of the International Criminal Court Bill and tabling amendments to deal with them, the Government appeared unwilling to listen. The build-up to a possible war in Iraq puts the spotlight firmly on such matters.

It will come as no surprise to hon. Members that we are not alone in our concerns about the ICC and how it will operate in practice. Reference has been made to that this afternoon. The statute of Rome, which established the ICC in 1998, was signed by 120 countries. However, far fewer than that number have so far ratified it; I believe that 87 is the latest figure. The court entered into force in April 2002 as the 60th country ratified the statute on that date, but it is worth noting how many have not. We should question why that is so.

As we have heard at length this afternoon, the most notable country to have grave reservations is the United States. It has lead to President Bush's decision to "unsign" the statute. I can understand that country's worries, but it is not alone. Russia, China, India and Israel also have grave reservations and have not ratified the statute. That means that more than half the world's population is not technically covered and the serious concerns of many other countries have led to their securing opt-outs, such as France's seven-year opt-out. The worries at the root of those countries' reservations resonate the concerns of Opposition Members.

In today's world, peacemaking and peacekeeping play an increasingly important role, as they should do. Many countries torn apart by civil war and conflict are reliant on external peacekeepers to give them the stability that they need to rebuild their countries. Peacekeepers are provided by countries as an act of good will. As we pointed out during the Bill's passage through Parliament, at the heart of our concerns is the way in which the court could become a political court; a weapon that could be used by potential enemies to target British, American, French or other troops and officials who are behaving properly. The filing of charges in the court could leave them open to indictments for

[Mr. Richard Spring]

legitimate actions in the course of their duties. The Government have failed repeatedly to secure protection for our troops in that regard.

Angus Robertson: Does the hon. Gentleman not agree that the use of political and diplomatic pressure to seek exemptions by one country runs the serious risk of politicising the ICC?

Mr. Spring: Countries have to make a judgment. For example, given its huge predominance of military and economic capability and its vulnerability, especially now, the United States is sensitive to actions against its troops. We can see that at every level. We must accept that reality and try to work with it. We are particularly concerned that the Government refused repeatedly to accept our amendment that was aimed at protecting our armed forces. Their broad stance—placing human rights law above the protection of armed forces—means that British armed forces will be less able in the future to fight effectively without fear of arrest. Most ironically, it damages the cause of human rights, as countries will not risk using their troops for potential peacekeeping and humanitarian work, as witnessed by America's threatened withdrawal last summer. The provision of troops is an expression of international good will by countries; good will that may well disappear if the troops become vulnerable. At all costs, we must avoid creating a situation in which it is difficult for law-abiding nations to pursue just action because their officials or soldiers—not those from countries that scorn all law—have to answer to such a political body.

The Minister is aware that if it proves necessary for military action to take place in Iraq, and if it is carried out without the backing of a specific UN resolution, British soldiers who are simply doing their jobs could face prosecution under the terms of the court. We supported from the outset the principle of bringing to justice war criminals and those who commit crimes against humanity. We still do. However, the issue is being distorted. My party's support in Parliament was conditional on the introduction of measures to protect our troops; a seven-year opt-out from jurisdiction over war crimes, greater protection for the armed forces and discretion for the Secretary of State with regard to requests for arrest and surrender.

I ask the Minister to clarify the Government's position on a number of key points. Does he accept that if the Government had adopted those measures, British troops would be better protected? Will he tell us once and for all what protection, if any, our troops will have from malicious prosecutions in the ICC? Now is an extremely important time to clarify the situation. Will he explain why the Government opted not to secure a seven-year veto from prosecution for our troops? He might argue now that a veto was not necessary. If that is the case, it was not the view taken by the French. Does he think that the French Government took an unnecessary step, or is it just another area in which our Government and that of France disagree?

What assessment has the Minister made of comments by Admiral Sir Michael Boyce that, in such circumstances, the rules of engagement might be changed to the point of giving those who do not adhere to international laws first strike? Finally, how does the establishment of the court sit with the doctrine of pre-emption in foreign policy espoused by President Bush and supported by the Prime Minister?

This House, and our troops who are sent abroad on peacekeeping missions to defend our national interest, deserve answers to those questions, particularly at this most anxious time.

3.16 pm

The Minister for Europe (Mr. Denis MacShane): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington) on having obtained this debate. He is right to insist that the House should debate the issue. There were debates in our Parliament leading up to the passage of the law establishing the International Criminal Court and its ratification, and we have heard some points reiterated today. I am happy to try, through normal parliamentary means, to discuss this sensitive issue with colleagues from all parties. It is not my direct responsibility, but I know, from many intense conversations that Ministers have had in the Foreign Office and from questions that have been asked in the House and in the other place, that the matter is important.

On the other hand, there has been a great deal of hypothetical questioning, which it is difficult to answer. I cannot guarantee what will happen; I am not a soothsayer. I know that the provisions of the ICC—this is an important point of debate with the United States of America—make it clear that countries have to undertake their own prosecutions against people accused of any of the serious crimes mentioned in the court's statutes. It is inconceivable that a British or American service person would not face the most relentless investigation and prosecution under British and American laws were he or she to be accused, in the course of a conflict, of any of the crimes mentioned, and I think that the same applies in the case of the other democracies. Let us be honest in admitting—I think of American servicemen, such as Lieutenant Calley after the Mai Lai massacre, who faced the severest sanctions because of such accusations—that the United States has a very good record in that respect. When it comes to motes and beams, I wonder whether every aspect of the post-1945 wars of decolonialisation in which the European powers were severally involved did not contain instances that were not perhaps investigated as fully as the misdeeds of which American servicemen were accused in Vietnam and in other conflicts.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the main reasons for the Americans' unwillingness to sign up to the ICC is that their mentality is to protect their service people at all costs? We all know that American service people committed criminal acts in this country, only to be whipped home before they could be subject to our criminal justice system.

Mr. MacShane: My hon. Friend is perhaps taking us a little far from the International Criminal Court. We are talking, as the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) forcefully reminded us, of the worst crimes against humanity, not infractions, serious though they may be, that can be dealt with by military or other

discipline. The fundamental problem, if my hon. Friend will allow, is of course that although criticisms are made of the current Administration, under the American constitution it is the US Senate that is required to ratify treaties. In over 200 years of existence, it has shown a great reluctance to do so.

Presidents may sign or unsign but there was never, in anybody's judgment, a majority on the Hill for the ratification of that treaty. That is why I say now, as I have said in other debates and publicly, that we need to engage with American elected representatives. We need to engage with American public opinion before the President acts to unsign, rather than protest when the Administration, reflecting what they suspect is the view of their own legislature, cannot accede to what we would like to see happen. I had very good conversations with the executive director of Human Rights Watch, Mr. Ken Roth, who protested, much as some hon. Members have, about aspects of our Government's discussions with the United States and with our other partners on this issue.

I must say pretty bluntly to Mr. Roth that, as an American citizen, he should persuade his fellow citizens, as we have had to persuade our fellow citizens, to support the ICC. He should persuade his elected representatives, as we have persuaded ours, to support, legislate for and ratify the ICC. I found it frankly a bit much to be lectured in the Foreign Office by Mr. Roth—and I have enormous respect for Human Rights Watch—when he should be in New York or in Milwaukee or Peoria persuading his fellow Americans that this is a good and great institution.

If I may, I shall quote from an article in the excellent magazine "Renewal". It was written by the noted American political scientist and philosopher, Mr. Michael Walzer, who is on the progressive left of American politics. He says:

'Consider the issue of criminal justice: the American refusal to join the International Criminal Court . . . I think that the Bush administration's policy is wrong. But it is not crazy or incomprehensible"

if understood roughly along these lines: when war is just and necessary as in the Gulf in 1991 or in Kosovo in 1999, it is the United States that bears the brunt of the fighting. According to the same article, our European allies oppose American unilateralism only this far:

"they want a role in deciding when war is just and necessary, but they are content once a decision is made to leave most of the fighting to American soldiers. Americans are supposed to accept the risks of war, and now they are supposed to accept the legal liabilities. It is American soldiers, and hardly anyone else, who will be accused of war crimes—and they will be accused both when there are legal reasons to think that crimes have been committed and when there are political reasons to pretend that crimes have been committed".

That is a long quotation to read into *Hansard,* but that was a member of the American liberal community rightly stressing the concerns that must be felt. The famous Kipling poem about Jolly this and Jolly that reminds us that when we wants him to do the fighting, we can call on him.

Mr. Moore: I think that I can speak on behalf of the Chamber and say that we always leave debates in which the Minister is involved much better informed, and we shall do so again today. However, will he tell us the Government's position on bilateral deals and how it fits with the EU guiding principles?

Mr. MacShane: I am happy to do so, but it needs to be set in context. It was pointed out earlier that India, the world's largest democracy, has not only refused to ratify the ICC but has now signed a bilateral deal with the United States. France, one of the leading democratic partners in Europe, is insisting on article 124, which allows a seven-year opt-out. When I discussed that with members of the Administration in Washington, France's action was thrown back in my face.

It is precisely because we need to make the court work that simply to say that we are right, that we are the only ones in step and that everyone else is wrong and should conform with us, is not sensible international policy. We understand the US objections to the court: given that country's role on the world stage, it is particularly open to the threat of frivolous or politically motivated prosecution. We do not share its fear of the court, however, because the Rome statute contains sufficient safeguards to prevent it, not least the principle of complementarity.

Mr. Savidge: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. MacShane: No, I cannot. I must get these points on the record.

That is why we worked hard last July to achieve UN Security Council resolution 1422, which allowed the US to continue to contribute to peacekeeping in Bosnia without flouting the ICC.

In reply to the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore), I can say that the resolution allows another 12-month deferral when it comes up for reconsideration. The US is seeking more permanent solutions. It is seeking bilateral agreements under article 98.2 of the Rome statute; and it is seeking to work under the statute to protect what it sees as its own service personnel.

Tony Worthington: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. MacShane: No, I cannot. I am happy to write to my hon. Friend. He asked a long list of questions; if I had done nothing but answer them, I could not have set matters in context.

The original proposal from the US for an agreement to exempt all its citizens from the jurisdiction of the court would be inconsistent with article 98.2 and consequently the statute. With our EU partners, we have drawn up guiding principles, providing that a solution to the problem should not confer immunity for US citizens; that there should be no exemptions for nationals of a state party, such as the UK; and that there should be exemptions only for citizens "sent" or mandated by their Government. We believe that those principles, which are consistent with article 98.2, provide the basis for entering into bilateral agreements. It will be up to each EU member state to decide what to do.

The British Government held a round of discussions with the US on 17 October 2002. They were of a purely preliminary nature, and the US Government have not

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come back to us; they have said that they would reflect on them, but they have not yet reverted to us. The US held similar discussions with other EU partners, particularly Austria, Italy and Spain.

I cannot answer my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie on whether there will be a bilateral agreement; but I can say that the House will be fully informed. I do not know whether the US is willing to amend its laws to fit in with the ICC statute. I am not an American legislator. I can say, however, that witnesses can appear before the ICC, but that will be the decision of the witnesses. If a Government choose to impose a court order preventing a citizen from participating in an ICC hearing, it will be a matter for that Government.

I agree with my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston) on the contribution of lawyers. We are creating an international legal system and we are getting there with some difficulty.

This debate reflects real difficulties and we should cease name-calling and try to work our way through the problems. The British Government want to see the ICC established and working. However, we must bring the rest of the world with us. It is no use standing alone with some of the democracies of the world, saying that everyone else must bend in with our laws when some countries have not ratified. The most important contributor to safeguarding the peace and security of the world has concerns that need to be addressed.

Landfill Tax

3.30pm

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): It gives me great pleasure to introduce a short debate on the landfill tax credit scheme and environmental taxation, and even greater pleasure to know that my questions will be answered by the Economic Secretary to the Treasury. He and I are old friends. Although it is enjoyable chairing Select Committees—I am Chairman of the Education and Skills Committee—some of us are quite glad to escape that role to speak about something else that we believe in.

I must declare an interest. Some six years ago, before the landfill tax credit scheme was introduced, I started an environmental organisation with a professor and a lawyer, which is a strange combination. We started a not-for-profit environmental group—Urban Mines Ltd.—that is now one of the largest in the country. Instead of viewing the waste flowing from our towns and cities as rubbish, we see it as a new raw material to be mined and used again—rather than digging holes in the earth's crust to take virgin material.

Over the past six years, our company has grown to employ 30 people. We have a portfolio of innovative projects and have developed a totally new methodology for identifying brownfield land and giving it new use. We have introduced a range of new businesses that use waste as a raw material—successful private sector ventures that make a profit and employ people on good wages right across the board. Our most ambitious task is to build sustainable growth parks, which are rather like themed industrial parks on which clusters of small, medium and large industries use waste as their raw material. That is the background of my special interest and explains why I am concerned about landfill tax credits.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. John McWilliam (In the Chair): Order. May I check that the hon. Gentleman has the permission of the Minister and the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) to intervene?

Mr. O'Brien *indicated assent.*

Mr. Sheerman: I give way.

Mr. O'Brien: Does my hon. Friend include in his remarks about his own programme all the other agencies that have grown out of the landfill tax credit? They are doing great work and offer tremendous value to communities. They will be hit hard if the programme described by the Chancellor goes ahead.

Mr. Sheerman: I would be happy to include those agencies. I know that my hon. Friend, who is one of the chairmen of the all-party group on sustainable waste, is concerned about the matter.

As you know, Mr. McWilliam, anyone who holds on to the job of Select Committee Chairman for even a short period becomes one of the most knowledgeable people on the subject. I have been Chairman for only

two and a half years, but all the relevant Ministers have changed in that time, apart from one whose ministerial responsibility has changed from early years to higher education. All the others have disappeared, including the present Economic Secretary. I have stayed in the field of education. The great benefit is that one learns and remembers a lot about the subject, including where the bodies are buried.

I have been involved in the sector of the environment relating to waste for a long time. I have had the role—which I have always been positive about—of trying to educate Ministers from the Treasury and elsewhere about an industry about which they know very little. Treasury Ministers usually stay in their posts for only a year or 18 months, but I have to hand it to my hon. Friend the Minister for being the fastest learner of any Treasury Minister with whom I have dealt. He actually understands the subject. He has been a very good and fast learner, so some of the remarks that I will make today are about the Government rather than him. The Government could do better. If they had listened to the people who know the industry and sector well, the proposals that the pre-Budget information suggests might be made in April's Budget would be better.

It is unsurprising that some people are not interested in waste. The Minister's constituency borders Rotherham, which has achieved the magnificent target of 5 per cent. for recycling—although that has now slipped back to 4 per cent. The Prime Minister's constituency is Sedgefield; that has achieved 5 per cent. The area that the Chancellor represents has achieved an appalling 1.7 per cent., which is probably the worst percentage in the country. One might say that it is no wonder that some of the significant actors in this House do not really know how much demand there is for changes in this practical side of environmentalism.

I like this area of environmentalism because it makes a difference at the practical level: I will leave the blue-sky and long-term thinking to people such as Jonathan Porritt. I have always concentrated on this area; if we crack what we do with waste by making a real difference in recycling and the use and the hierarchy of change, which is recommended by all the enlightened people in the environmental sector, we will make a practical difference that ordinary people can participate in. Schoolchildren, their parents and people in communities will be able to improve their locality and the global environment in a practical way—rather than in a highly theoretical way that sometimes puts them off. Sometimes, when someone on the news says that the problem is all about global warming, the people who are listening think, "What can I, as an individual, do about that?" Ever since I became involved in this area, I have responded by saying, "Here is a practical way to do something that will change the planet." That is where I am coming from.

I have also tried to educate the Government. An express train from Europe is hammering down the tracks and it is bringing regulation that is to be welcomed, but that has a dramatic effect on our lives and industries. There are the statutory targets; local authorities must meet very rigid and demanding targets for recycling over the coming years as a result of the European Union landfill directive. That is an important directive, but it means that local authorities have to make superhuman efforts to do something to their waste other than merely dump it in a hole in the ground. Most of them will not meet their targets, and the European Commission will impose enormous financial penalties on them, which will be a great burden on the British taxpayer and council tax payer. That will have a significant impact on our national life. As is suggested by the figures that I have quoted for Rotherham and for the constituencies of the Prime Minister and the Chancellor, the targets will be very difficult to meet.

The end of life vehicles directive will be introduced in September 2003. That is another very important regulation that will make a great difference to people's lives. It will be very expensive to achieve what it demands—£75 million is a conservative estimate of the cost. Following that, there is the waste electrical and electronic equipment directive: every piece of electrical and electronic equipment will have to be taken back by the retailer or the manufacturer. Then there is the hazardous waste directive, which people in the commercial waste management sector—who should know about this—say will result in billions of pounds of expenditure by the public or private sector. Both of those sectors will probably pay for some of that.

I have tried to alert the Treasury to all of this. I saw the Chancellor's chief economic advisor, Ed Balls. I have met a succession of Ministers in the Treasury to try to inform them about the scale of the problem and about how much it would cost the country if we do not act now. I have put two proposals to Ministers.

A strategic waste authority should be set up to bring together all proposals and to give us direction on the different organisations that are spread all over the place, which do nothing to help joined-up government. I see no action on that so far. The responsibility is being left with local authorities, most of which have a poor record in meeting any targets. In addition, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs does not have a good reputation in this area, either in leadership or management. The waste sector is the Cinderella of the Environment Agency, mainly because it does not have the resources to tackle the problem in a significant way.

The country is running into real problems with waste and in meeting the European regulations that will come towards us. A key element in tackling the waste issue was introduced by the Conservative Government in 1996–97. Overnight, the landfill tax increased the cost from zero to £7 per tonne. Historically, 20 per cent. of that tax has flowed into a fund called the landfill tax credit scheme, which goes to a range of environmental initiatives, all of which are worth while.

I know about those initiatives and schemes and about how they have worked since they started. They take time to develop, to mature and to become effective. I have seen them operate from the early days, when most of the money was spent on community and environmental improvements close to landfill and other areas where waste blights the lives of citizens. Having done much work in such areas, the schemes moved on to other purposes, including the remediation of brownfield land and educational priorities in terms of the environment, and to many other things. When the Government suggested that there should be another category and that more money should be spent on recycling programmes and sustainability, the organisations that

[Mr. Sheerman]

disburse the money moved quickly to ensure that 65 per cent. of the landfill tax money flowed in that direction. At the moment, that sum is about £150 million.

The pre-Budget proposals are that £50 million should be retained in local environmental projects, but no one is clear about what those will be. Will those be the environmental projects that have already been going on and which are the most criticised part of the scheme? Why is the £100 million—two thirds of the money from the landfill tax credit scheme—going to be sucked into the public sector, into DEFRA, or to DEFRA's child, the waste and resources action programme? That will do two, very damaging, things.

First, that will withdraw the money from a large range of community, national and regional organisations that have effectively and magnificently tackled recycling and issues regarding the practical sustainability agenda. The Government underrate the effectiveness of such groups.

Secondly, that would kill the ability to use the £100 million for a multiplier effect. It has been assessed that the best schemes can, through match funding, European funding and many other routes, multiply by four or five times the original investment from the landfill tax credit scheme, which is certainly true of my group, Urban Mines Ltd. Such schemes can do that because the money is presently deemed to be private—not public—sector money, so it can be used for match funding, as a multiplier and for leverage. That will go and all that will be left for the Treasury is £100 million. What a strange way to go about things. That must be the worst investment since Jack got the beans and threw them out of the window. The Government are throwing the beans out of the window, but nothing will grow. The £100 million will now be thrown at local authorities, which will enable them to do nothing. All of the really innovative groups throughout the country will cease to get those funds and will gradually go out of business.

It is unclear whether there will be any transitional arrangements or any of the 3,000 to 5,000 jobs will survive. Not only jobs but innovation and partnerships will be lost. Things have worked best when there have been creative and innovative partnerships between universities, green groups, non-governmental organisations and the private sector. I wish that we had the American system that would allow me to read into the record. We have seen a number of magnificent proposals, such as Recycle IT in Norfolk, Cheshire's schools waste action club, Waste Watch's landfill tax case studies, the national industrial symbiosis programme, and the Furniture Recycling Network. There have been dozens and dozens of schemes, some worth £8 million. There has been tremendous innovation and that has had a great effect on our environment.

Unless the Government change their mind, we will lose that environmental innovation and the people who have been brought on—the young staff and the undergraduates and post-graduates, people who have been attracted into that part of the public sector. John Smith said that there are some jobs that are better than simply going into the City of London and making a lot of money. The sort of people who work in the environment are the very people who want to make our country a better and more sustainable place in which to live.

I am worried about what the proposals say about the Labour Government. I have been a Labour politician for a long time; I still believe profoundly in the things that brought me into politics. One of those things is that a Labour Government will be more in touch with ordinary people, with schoolchildren and their parents, and with local communities and grass-roots organisations. However, when I talk to Treasury Ministers, I see that they have a fear of understanding community groups. They say, "Oh dear. They're not a bureaucracy. I can't get the Audit Commission to look into them. Who are they accountable to? How do I assess them? They're not local government. They're not a quango."

There was a disgraceful exhibition from the Dispatch Box during environment questions before Christmas, when the Minister for the Environment told me that the reason for some schemes disappearing was that there had been an element of "dodginess". However, over many years, only eight appeals have been made to the appeals tribunal to do with any wrongdoing. I have picked up on only two cases of any kind of fraud.

This may be unkind, and I am not suggesting any responsibility, but the Minister, who is a good friend of mine, will know that individual learning accounts are an example of a Government scheme that went wrong. My Committee looked into that in some depth. Millions of pounds disappeared and nobody has yet been successfully prosecuted. If one wanted to look for dodginess in a scheme, one would look there, or at a number of other schemes that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has promoted. There has been dodginess around a number of Government programmes. I urge the Minister to be honest and not to discard schemes for any reason such as that. If he is going to say that sort of thing, will he please stand up, be honest, and appraise any schemes in an independent fashion—or get an independent body to do so?

My sadness is that, if we are not careful, we will lose an amazing resource in the country and an amazing number of people who do a good job for the environment. If that happened, the message would go out that the Labour Government did not know how to connect with ordinary people in innovative community groups because they are small, because they are NGOs, or because they are green groups. Such groups are difficult to understand and to put into a tidy category. It is difficult for people at the Treasury to get their heads around them. However, I urge the Minister to try to do so.

3.48 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Healey): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) on securing this debate, which I welcome. Parliament is sometimes short of experts but my hon. Friend's expertise in this area is widely acknowledged, as is that of my hon. Friend the Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien). We have with us the current chairman and secretary of the all-party group on sustainable waste.

The Government, to reflect the interests of the group to which my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield belongs, are committed to a sustained approach to waste management as an essential component of an environmentally sustainable economy. We currently place too much reliance on landfill, which adversely affects the environment through greenhouse gas emissions, water pollutions, the effect on transport and visual intrusion. We give too little priority to recycling and re-use, and arguably put too little emphasis on other methods of waste disposal.

The reforms outlined in the pre-Budget report, which is the subject of this debate, are only the first of the necessary actions that the Government are taking to try to change waste management performance. Between now and the Budget, an interdepartmental ministerial group that I shall chair will co-ordinate plans on waste policy delivery across Government. Despite what was said by my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield, we are acting decisively in view of the challenges we face with waste in the UK. Some, like my hon. Friend, think that they detect a lack of priority and urgency in the attention given to the issue. I hope that the work of DEFRA and the waste and resources action programme—WRAP—and the decisions and long-term signals on landfill tax in the pre-Budget report, as well as the work of the ministerial group and the reform of the landfill tax credit scheme are strong evidence to counter that criticism.

In the pre-Budget report, the Government announced that the standard rate of landfill tax would increase to £35 a tonne in the medium to long term. The current annual escalator of £1 a tonne will increase to £3 a tonne from 2005–06, and the tax will continue to increase by at least that rate thereafter. A clear signal that the tax will ultimately reach £35 a tonne will provide the necessary stimulus for the sort of investment that my hon. Friend is talking about, although we must take account of the often long time taken to develop waste management capacity. The pre-Budget report also made it clear that the measure is to be revenue neutral to business. The Government are considering a range of options for recycling revenue, and are working through some of the issues with stakeholder groups. We will announce our conclusions around the time of the Budget.

Change is always uncomfortable; it creates uncertainty. However, no one can claim that change is unexpected, particularly not in regard to the landfill tax credit scheme. In March 2001, the Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, of which my hon. Friend the Member for Normanton is a distinguished member, reported on delivering sustainable waste management. That Select Committee described the LTCS as providing

"a convoluted and, to date, ineffective method of funding sustainable waste management."

It described the scheme as a "charade" and recommended that it be abandoned altogether.

My hon. Friend will also know that the National Audit Office examined the scheme and pointed out that the operation of the scheme

"makes external examination of the value-for-money achieved by the scheme difficult for anyone to assess."

My hon. Friend stressed several times the effectiveness of the scheme, but when the Public Accounts Committee reported in July last year, it said that there were

"complex administrative and oversight arrangements, a lack of overall accountability for the Scheme and a lack of transparency"

and that the scheme contained

"no arrangements for evaluating the success of individual projects or of the Scheme overall."

Although strictly speaking the funds flowing through the scheme are classed as private, rather than public, spending, the money is essentially tax revenue forgone. Consequently, it is the Government's responsibility and is in the public interest to ensure that the money is spent in the best possible way. It would have been wrong to take such weighty criticisms lightly.

Between April and June last year, the Government consulted on the future of the landfill tax credit scheme. Rather than abandoning the scheme altogether as the Select Committee urged, the Government recognised that, as my hon. Friend points out, the scheme has supported many worthwhile community and environmental projects that are not connected with waste. Those account for around one third of current landfill tax credit scheme spend. Consequently, the Government will continue to make available approximately one third of the funding that currently goes through the scheme—around £47 million a year—for spending on local community environmental projects. The figure of £47 million will be kept broadly constant in real terms, which will ensure that the current level of support for such projects is maintained.

The Government recognise the strength of the criticisms of the Public Accounts Committee and of the Committee on Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs. Although the scheme supports a range of worthwhile waste projects—my hon. Friend's company Urban Mines is a good example of this—the current funding arrangements do not deliver the strategic and coherent approach to waste management that is needed.

I am sometimes asked what I mean by "sustainable waste management". I have some bottom line concerns. One is waste minimisation to tackle municipal waste growth. That is currently at 3 or 4 per cent. above gross domestic product and costs an additional £70 million a year to the taxpayer. Another concern is about diversion from landfill, and, in particular, to boost the current pitiful rate of 11 per cent. We want to use the additional spending to affect the levels of such activities.

The change that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in the pre-Budget report in November will take place in April, reflecting the imperative to improve rapidly the management of waste. However, taking note of my hon. Friend's arguments, I recognise the need for those currently involved in the scheme to be able to plan ahead.

In the representations that I have so far had, a range of concerns were raised, some of which are entirely understandable, whereas others are entirely unnecessary. There is no need for landfill operators to stop allocating funding now. Customs' advice to the landfill operators and environmental bodies before Christmas made it clear that funding from tax credits under the current scheme can still be allocated to waste projects until the end of March. Beyond the end of the March, that funding can continue to be spent until either

[John Healey]

the projects are complete or the funding allocated is spent. The LTCS successor scheme will continue to provide funds for worthwhile community environment projects that do not fall into waste management categories. For waste projects currently funded by the scheme, there are challenges during such change. I have no wish to see good projects go to the wall. I am therefore analysing the transitional challenges that my hon. Friend talked about, to see what support may be appropriate from the public spending stream post April.

I am also committed to taking the decisions necessary to give the greatest and earliest certainty possible, as those involved with the changes plan for the period ahead. That will mean confirming the new ceiling to which landfill operators can claim tax credits as a percentage of their landfill tax liability, and outlining plans for continuity of contributions to support waste projects that are up and running. It will also mean setting out the basis on which prospective waste projects that contribute significantly to our sustainable waste management strategy will be able to draw on the funding reallocated from April to public spending.

We have more work to do. I pay tribute to the co-operative approach that Entrust and the distributive environmental bodies are taking in their work with my officials. I hope to make the decisions and announcements soon. Beyond that, we shall consult the many interest groups on the ways to meet the more serious criticisms that have been made of the landfill tax credit scheme in the operation of the LTCS successor scheme. I aim to set out any plans for reform on a budget timetable.

It is the Government's responsibility to ensure that the substantial level of funding currently going through the landfill tax credit scheme is used as effectively as possible, particularly in waste management. We believe that the reforms will help us to do so. Having heard my explanation of the changes, of the issues that we are currently considering, of the decisions that need to be taken in short order and of the decisions that we shall take at the time of the budget, my hon. Friends the Members for Huddersfield and for Normanton will, I hope, be persuaded that, rather than losing the innovation and badly needed impetus that my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield talked about, the reforms—the rise in the landfill tax rates, the successor landfill tax credit scheme, and the other work, some of which we detailed in the pre-Budget report—will improve the desired objectives.

Mr. McWilliam: Order. Time is up.

Before I call the debate on education and prisons, I inform the Members concerned that at least one, and possibly two, Divisions are likely. When the Division bell goes, I shall suspend for 15 minutes. If during that 15 minutes a second Division is called, that suspension will be for half an hour.

4 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

4.19 pm

On resuming—

Education (Prisons)

Mr. Mark Oaten (Winchester): I am delighted to be able to start the Adjournment debate. When the Division was called the Minister and I thought that we might be saved by the bell. However, we are here and I shall be as brief as I can.

The debate is important and provides an opportunity to discuss an issue that is rarely discussed: what takes place in prison, and especially education in prison. The debate comes at a time when there has been much talk about being tough on criminals and about whether we should send burglars who are first offenders to jail. It also comes at a time when the Government are looking into reforming and changing the criminal justice system and when figures show that we have the biggest ever prison population—more than 70,000—and all projections suggest that that will increase.

Debate often takes place in the tabloid press about who would be tougher on criminals and why we should lock people up in prison. However, the question of what we should do with folk after they have gone to prison is often lost from the debate. We have to question why people go to prison, and punishment is an important aspect of that. However, we need to focus much more on other aspects and on the role that prison can play. Education is a vital part of that process, but it does not make good tabloid headlines. I accept that victims of crime who have just had their house burgled—or worse—do not want to hear politicians talking about providing more education for prisoners. They want to hear tough language about locking people up and throwing away the key. I argue that the tough thing to do is to improve the quality of education in prisons, because that is likely to have a greater impact on reducing crime in the first place.

I hope that the debate is topical, because I understand that the Government are considering a major report commissioned by PricewaterhouseCoopers, which examined education and the reforms that they want to make. I hope that the Minister will comment on the Government's early thinking about how they plan to respond to the report and the time scale in which they will do that.

May I refresh the Minister's memory with several harsh facts and realities about the Prison Service? Home Office statistics show that 60 per cent. of prisoners need help with basic skills. That can be further broken down: 50 per cent. of prisoners lack level 1 numeracy, which is the equivalent of an 11-year-old's achievements; 66 per cent. lack level 1 reading and 81 per cent. lack level 1 writing. There can be no greater indictment than that. We have failed prisoners and the prison system. Those figures suggest to me that only 20 per cent. of prisoners would be able to fill in an application form on release. The rest would be incapable of filling in basic job application forms after leaving prison. Moreover, 49 per cent. of male prisoners and 71 per cent. of female prisoners have no qualifications at all. To put it bluntly, there is little else for prisoners to do in prison. We have a captive audience, but we are missing an enormous opportunity to tackle the problems that those figures highlight.

Why does that matter? It matters because prison is clearly not working. Fifty-eight per cent. of prisoners released from custody in 1997 reoffended within two

years. We know that education can help to tackle that problem. The Correctional Services of Canada conducted research that suggested that vocational and basic skills training could cut reoffending by 12 per cent. That would have an enormous impact on reducing the number of crimes in this country.

What do we need to do and how can we improve the present situation? It is not all doom and gloom, because positive things are happening. I am especially taken with the work of the Prisoners' Education Trust—I met representatives of that charity a couple of months ago—and that is why I secured the debate. The trust does wonderful work in the prison system. An investment of over £200,000 a year has helped to make 852 educational awards this year. Its schemes operate in 75 prisons throughout the country. Of course, that is just one small charity, but several other charities are working in the field. However, I am sure that the Minister will agree that none of that work can replace direct Government action.

We need the Government to do several things. I would like them to produce more figures and data on the impact that education can have on preventing reoffending. I have mentioned statistics from Canada, but I wonder whether the Minister would consider commissioning work in this country so that we can make the case that more education can help to reduce reoffending. We also need a major programme of reform and investment. The PricewaterhouseCoopers study is a good start, and I hope that the Minister will tell us when the Government intend to respond to some of its ideas. I also welcome the 50 per cent. increase in funding—to £87 million—for education in prisons. A large proportion of that—£20 million—comes from the capital modernisation fund and is earmarked for better facilities. I welcome that. However, it is all very well having a spanking new building and computers, but unless the resources are available to enable staff to bring them to life, the money will have been used ineffectively.

The Government have recognised that they need to tackle the problem of the 60 per cent. of prisoners who have no skills, but they must also focus on the other 40 per cent. They need to ensure that the focus is not only on basic skills, but on trying to get much more out of people. The Government could learn a lot from the current work being undertaken by charities. I should be grateful if the Minister would give us his thoughts on how the Government could work with the charitable sector to make a difference, because the charitable sector gets to parts that the Government find it hard to reach. It has introduced considerable innovation, from which the Government could learn. For example, charities have considered ways of focusing education on the individual needs of each prisoner rather than trying to serve the system as a whole.

We need to examine how education is provided, physically, and the day-to-day problems in prisons. For example, there are difficulties in escorting prisoners to lessons. Sometimes, education is available but there are no prison staff to take prisoners to classrooms. Prison officers are currently under pressure, so they understandably have other priorities. Unless we make education a core function of the Prison Service, it will always be knocked down the list in a busy, pressured prison.

Education in prisons is not joined up. There is an artificial divide between some of the vocational services and training provided by prisons, which is very effective as skills are often taught in a workshop environment, and the basic skills and academic education. It makes no sense to have the two run by separate organisations, at different times. Other incentives work against education. The prison pay system allows prisoners to earn money by working, for example, in prison kitchens, but there is no financial incentive for prisoners to take an education course if that course clashes with the opportunity to earn money. That is wrong.

There should be a system of national entitlement to education for prisoners. Such a system has been laid down for young offenders by the Youth Justice Board, but with only one in five prisoners currently involved in education and about 60 per cent. not having access to any form of education, it is clear that the system is failing adult prisoners. Will the Minister tell us whether the Government are prepared to make a similar commitment to give adult prisoners full access to education?

Another difficulty is that the curriculum is inflexible. We need to examine the range of courses that are available and to be more creative about the courses on offer. We also need a system that allows a prisoner who has already started a course at one prison to continue with that course if he is moved to another prison or leaves prison. At the moment, if someone is moved to a prison nearer to their home or to an open prison all their coursework is lost and wasted and they must start again. Worse still, an individual will clearly not want to remain in prison in order to complete a qualification, but the downside of being released is that that person will be unable to continue their education.

We need to reconsider how education in prisons is funded, so that money follows not, in this case, the patient but the prisoner, and so that we can track a prisoner, wherever they are and however long their sentence. At the moment, there is an enormous disparity in the range of money that prisoners receive to help with education. From a parliamentary answer to a question that I tabled a couple of months ago, I learned that the amount of money spent in Wandsworth is £257 per prisoner, whereas in my constituency of Winchester it is £576 per prisoner, and in Wetherby the figure is £2,416 per prisoner. I do not know what they are doing in Wetherby. Clearly, we need to tackle some of those disparities, but not by dragging down the money spent in Wetherby to give more to Wandsworth, because some of Wetherby's educational facilities would be lost.

The report by PricewaterhouseCooper examined different banding according to sentences. A certain amount of money could be allocated to somebody with a sentence of less than a year, an equivalent amount for sentences between one and four years, and a greater amount for those with sentences of more than four years. There is some merit in such a system, and I should welcome some early thoughts from the Minister on that.

All such issues require a change in the way that the process operates at the moment. I understand that February 2004 is when all the tenders for providing education in prisons are due. I am concerned that the Government may pick up on recommendations from PricewaterhouseCooper and try to rush them through, which would cause confusion in the re-tendering process

[Mr. Mark Oaten]

for contracts in February 2004. How does the Minister plan to introduce those changes? It may make sense to change the re-tender date to allow a longer period for some of the changes to be implemented to avoid chaos in the system. If not, when the new contracts come through, a new system of work for education in prisons should be clearly put into practice at the same time.

In the limited time available, I have raised a number of issues and put a number of questions to the Minister to tease out from him what priority the Government give to such matters, and particularly to find out whether they intend to pick up on the recommendations of PricewaterhouseCooper. It is a Cinderella service. It does not attract tabloid headlines, and it is difficult to communicate with the public about it. If the Government want to be tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime, I hope that they recognise that education is not a soft option. It is a seriously tough option to improve the quality of education in prisons. If that were done, it would tackle the reoffending rate and make prisons work more effectively, which has to be in everyone's interests.

4.32 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Ivan Lewis): I congratulate the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) on securing the debate, and I am delighted to hear him adopt the new Labour mantra of investment and reform. Given his contribution to the debate, we agree on a tremendous amount. I will take into account some of the positive suggestions that he made as part of our consideration of the PricewaterhouseCoopers report. I share his view that a more coherent approach to the education and training of offenders, supported by increased investment, is absolutely essential. That should be seen as an integral part of the fight against crime, and provides us with a unique opportunity—I think the hon. Member made this point—to break the cycle of offending behaviour that is so prevalent among those for whom the criminal justice system is, in effect, a revolving door.

There is considerable evidence that prison education makes a significant contribution towards reducing reoffending, and that it could do more. The hon. Gentleman referred to the skills level of more than half the population; let us not exclude them from not only the labour market and further learning, but from integration into the wider community. Half of men and two thirds of women entering prison have no qualifications. The estimated cost of reconviction to the criminal justice system is an average of £13,000. For many offenders—I think the hon. Member will have seen this for himself, as I have recently—prison is their first experience of having the chance to gain a skill, which could be rebuilding a car engine or developing better communication skills. For many, it is the first opportunity to develop any kind of skill or qualification whatsoever.

I was certainly impressed by my conversations with the staff at Preston prison, which I visited recently; in circumstances that are not always easy, they are doing a tremendous job. They are being innovative, imaginative and as supportive as possible in their education and training programmes. I also had some interesting conversations with some of the prisoners. One told me how eagerly he had learned to read and write in prison. Another said that he was looking forward to taking up a college place on release, having gained a number of credits in prison; it meant that when he left prison, the college course would form part of his resettlement programme.

As I told the Education and Skills Committee recently, it would be wrong to say that Preston was a typical prison. A lot of tremendous work is going on there. However, although there are examples of excellence across the prison estate, we have a long way to go before we can turn good practice into standard practice; a point made by the hon. Gentleman. My colleagues across Government—particularly in the Home Office—and I are fully committed to ensuring that we take a joined-up approach to prison education; that is equally important. That commitment has to be supported by investment.

The hon. Gentleman will be reassured to hear that a record level of investment is going into prison education. Core funding will increase from £65 million this year to £125 million by 2005–06. With that funding and the capital investment that we have already begun to put into the system, I aim to equip prisons with the capacity to deliver a tailored programme of learning—another point made by the hon. Gentleman—from induction and assessment on arrival in prison to resettlement in the community on release. There is no point in achieving success with people in prison if it is not consistently followed through on release.

The hon. Gentleman knows that I am also considering the PricewaterhouseCoopers report, which provides a number of options for achieving that aim. It is accepted that we have to move from the present inequality of funding between prisons of the same type; there is no logic to that, other than historical spending patterns. We also seek to create delivery arrangements that support high-quality educational provision. However, as well as quality, we must have the capacity to develop provisions that are relevant to individual needs and match individual starting points. We are completing consultation on that report, and we will consider the hon. Gentleman's comments.

Mr. Oaten: Will the Minister give me a rough time scale for when that consultation will finish and in what form? When does he expect the Government to respond formally to the PricewaterhouseCoopers report?

Mr. Lewis: We have to respond by the end of February to certain issues because of their influence on contactors.

I am in a dilemma; the hon. Gentleman spoke about the balance between getting decisions right and ensuring synergy between contractual arrangements, and wanting to see swift and radical reform. I am committed within the next month not only to being clear about my specific responses relevant to the end of the February, but to laying out a clear and transparent time scale for how to tackle all the relevant issues. I shall ensure that hon. Members have sight of that within the next month or six weeks.

The hon. Gentleman made a valid point on the use of evidence and data in terms of the impact of prison education on reoffending. We have some of that evidence now, but we could do a lot better. I take the hon. Gentleman's comments on board.

The voluntary sector is often imaginative and innovative in a way that the statutory sector never can be. We have to become better at spreading the good practice that already occurs in pockets—it is not mainstream practice—and ensuring that Prison Service officials in all parts of the country give thought to how they can engage with local voluntary organisations that may have something to bring to the table. I believe that the voluntary sector has flexibility and imagination. The community sector has an important role to play in the resettlement of offenders; there can be significant follow-through and support for people once they have been released from prison.

We shall make our position on entitlement clear later. The hon. Gentleman made a valid point; "once in a generation" might be an over-used term, but we do have a unique level of resource available and a commitment across Government—and, in many ways, across the political spectrum—which represents a unique opportunity to make a difference. If it takes an extra couple of months to get decisions right, I would rather take that time than rush the decisions, get them wrong and fail to achieve the step-change. We all accept that tinkering at the edges is not what the system needs, nor what we want.

The hon. Gentleman was honourable enough to acknowledge that there has been significant progress in recent years. It is important to say that, because I want to support the efforts of both governors and frontline staff who make the system work daily. They have not always had the central and external support that they deserve, but many of them, starting at the grass roots, have been incredibly innovative and imaginative. We should pay tribute to that, and highlight some of their achievements.

With regard to basic skills, last year prisoners gained 61,000 qualifications, some 24,000 of them in literacy and numeracy. In the first eight months of this financial year, prisoners had already achieved more than 25,000 basic skills qualifications. We are well on the way to meeting, and even exceeding, our national target of 28,800.

Not only are we meeting targets, we are ensuring that mainstream developments in literacy and numeracy practice reach prisons. It is important that we do not offer a second-rate, out of date service to prisoners; they have access to the most modern and up to date strategies.

We are also supporting prisons proactively, with a quality improvement programme. A body of professionally qualified advisers is working in every prison, advising them how to build on their strengths and how to deal with areas of deficiency. We are told by the Prison Service that the advisers are making a real impact across the country, and are supporting prisons that are preparing for inspection against the new standards of the common inspection framework. They also help prisons with their action planning in cases in which the inspections have identified weaknesses.

We have also required all prisons to set up their own quality improvement groups, bringing together staff across the establishment to improve existing learning opportunities and to introduce new ones. That is already happening across much of the estate and there is no reason why it cannot happen in every institution. We have created a standards fund to encourage prisons to support staff development and training, to share best practice and to develop local quality assurance systems.

It is important to establish a culture of learning in the Prison Service. That is important not only for the prisoners but for the staff. I am delighted that two schemes are up and running, supported by the union learning fund, at Belmarsh and Haverigg prisons, to develop basic skills. That is engaging staff in learning. I recently had a meeting with Brian Caton, the head of the Prison Officers Association, and told him that I would actively welcome further applications from prisons for the next round of union learning fund bids. That area is underdeveloped and we would want to see a considerable growth in the number of prison officers who are involved in learning. I believe that that has a knock-on beneficial effect, in that it creates a learning culture in the prison environment.

The hon. Gentleman referred to vocational training and employment. He is right to make the point about the separation. In response to the PricewaterhouseCoopers report, we need to look at how we can create a more cohesive, integrated approach. In recent times, we have shifted the emphasis towards basic skills. We believe that to be right, given the low level of basic skills of more than half the prison population and the fact that there is a direct correlation between a lack of basic skills and a risk of reoffending. We must not lose sight of the need to help prisoners to improve their employability. The hon. Gentleman rightly spoke about reducing the risk of reoffending. One of the great ways in which to do that is not only to support and encourage people to learn and develop within their education programme, but to ensure that they are employable in a modern labour market. That is why vocational training is so important. Those in work are half as likely to reoffend as those without a job. That is very significant.

It is interesting to note that prisoners have gained 57,000 work skills qualifications so far this year. We have met our target already, which suggests that vocational education and training is working. However, I would like to know more about what those work skills actually mean and how they will feed through. Perhaps I will obtain more information for the hon. Gentleman on that issue.

We can do a lot more. We must ensure a much closer synergy between vocational training in prisons and the labour market. That is complex, because prisoners do not always end up living in the same area as their institution. Increasingly, we are trying to close the gap between what happens in the world of education and training and what is required in the labour market. When people are moving around, there can be different regional and sub-regional economic profiles. That makes the situation complex, but we should seek to close the gap further than we have done in the past.

The hon. Gentleman said that capital investment would be important to enable prisoners to modernise and upgrade their training provisions. Investment will also be required to fund the building of classrooms on

[Mr. Lewis]

prison wings and next to workshops, to help create a more cohesive and integrated approach between learning and more vocationally based courses. With the assistance of the CBI, Jobcentre Plus and others, we are strengthening our links with employers to improve the work opportunities that are available to prisoners during and after their time in custody. We are also using funds from the invest to save budget to develop an innovative project led by Cisco to give prisoners the opportunity to gain valuable information technology skills and either to continue learning or to gain work on release.

I do not need to say to the hon. Gentleman how important information and communications technology skills are in the modern world. They are being used increasingly in the classroom, in the workplace and at home. It is important that we bring prison learning into the 21st century with regard to e-learning. We have done some work on that relatively recently and have had learndirect pilots in five prisons during the past year. All the evidence is that the learners are often less threatened by a computer than by traditional classroom learning, which makes them no different to others who undertake basic skills courses in the community. In the prison population, we are dealing with high numbers of learners who have had a negative experience of school. That makes it even more important to find imaginative and innovative ways of turning them on to learning and removing some of the fear that inevitably accompanies people who have had a negative experience, not only in learning but throughout their lives.

I believe that we have answered a number of the hon. Gentleman's concerns, but we have a lot more work to do. I will consider carefully the lessons to be learned from our work so far and will also consider the recommendations in the report. This is a unique opportunity to get a credible reform and investment system in prison education and training. I look forward to working with the hon. Gentleman and with others in making things happen. Education and training is one of the most powerful ways of reducing crime in our society.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twelve minutes to Five o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 15 January 2003

[MR. FRANK COOK *in the Chair*]

2001 Census in Manchester

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

9.30 am

Mr. Keith Bradley (Manchester, Withington): We meet this morning in very sad circumstances.

Mr. Graham Stringer (Manchester, Blackley): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Bradley: Of course.

Mr. Stringer: I thank my right hon. Friend and you, Mr. Cook, for that indulgence. I should like to take this opportunity, the first that I have had, to offer my condolences to the family of Stephen Oake, who was murdered in my constituency last night, while doing his duty as a constable in the special branch. I also hope that the other offices who were injured in the line of duty make a speedy recovery.

Mr. Bradley: I am sure that the whole House shares those sentiments. We all send our condolence to the family of Stephen Oake.

The debate this morning is to challenge the accuracy of the 2001 national census as it applies to the city of Manchester, to highlight the financial implications of the discrepancy for the people of Manchester and to seek urgent action by the Government to resolve the fundamental and crucial problems that we believe should be clearly identified.

Manchester is one of the country's foremost regional centres and it has made great strides over the past few years to strengthen its economic base. Its success is important not only for the people of Manchester but for the north-west and the nation. Government policies over recent years have recognised that fact.

The 2001 census results published on 30 September by the Office for National Statistics showed Manchester to have a population of 392,800. That is a reduction of 10.4 per cent.—nearly 46,000 people—in Manchester's population between 1991, when the previous census was held, and 2001. It is a reduction of 10.6 per cent.—nearly 47,000 people—in Manchester's population for the nine-month period from the mid-year estimate in 2000 to the 2001 census.

In Manchester, we were, to say the least, utterly bewildered by these figures. During the 1990s, our city centre population increased by nearly 10,000. Mid-year estimates throughout the 1990s indicated that the city's population had stabilised and had started to grow. So the question is; how can these wide variances be justified?

We are told by the ONS that, in Manchester and elsewhere, previously unrecorded discrepancies going back nearly 20 years have flawed the 1991 census and the mid-year estimates since then. The ONS has speculated that the rate of young men in particular emigrating from England was previously underestimated by some 50,000 a year; nearly 1,000 a week. However, this trend has not been substantiated or picked up by alternative sources, including the international passenger survey. Therefore, in our view, it is not credible.

The view of the ONS will be debated by statisticians for years to come, but the issue for the people of Manchester is not an academic exercise. We want to know why the administrative sources available to us and to the ONS showed that the census results from Manchester seriously underestimate Manchester's population. We also want to understand why Manchester's residents are being penalised for these fundamental weaknesses and why serious questions must be asked in Manchester as the revenue budget for 2003–04 is prepared.

Manchester city council is a responsible local authority. It has sought, since the publication of the 2001 results, to enter into a detailed dialogue with the ONS to understand the rationale of its population figures. The initial signs were positive. The chief statistician went to Manchester and met council officers; they agreed a process of what I will call engagement. However, the outcome of these discussions remains as unclear and as worrying for the residents of Manchester as when the figures were first published.

It has taken nearly three months to obtain the information necessary to undertake even partial scrutiny of the results. Critical pieces of information are still awaited. For example, the aggregate general practitioner list data are not yet available. The ONS states that it needs the permission of the NHS security and confidentiality advisory group to release the information. We ask the Government to look at this urgently to facilitate that information being made available to Manchester soon.

A new aspect of the 2001 census was an independent follow-up face-to-face census coverage survey. In order to check the representative nature of this survey and the sample that was used, we need to see whether the survey missed households. We need to know the total number of addresses or household spaces and households in each postcode unit. We need to know the total number of addresses of household spaces and households responding in each postcode. We need to know the number of persons enumerated and inputted for each of the postcodes used in that survey. The ONS says that by releasing the postcodes sampled in the census coverage survey it effectively would be releasing information about the households and individuals sampled. We dispute that and request that the Minister intervene quickly to allow that information to be released to Manchester city council so that it can check the validity of the sample survey. What information has been produced demonstrates that the number of people who live in Manchester is underestimated by the 2001 census.

No substantive reasons have been given as to why alternative administrative sources have been disregarded by the ONS, which was always seen to be part of the quality assurance process and therefore the overall census methodology. I shall return to this point shortly.

[Mr. Bradley]

Crucially, it has also come to light that something like 10,000 properties that the council believes to be occupied, as council tax is being paid, were not canvassed or identified by census enumerators. We strongly believe that if people are paying council tax in the city, they may actually live in the city. We believe that unless we have an accurate property base, we cannot produce an accurate population estimate, irrespective of the competence or otherwise of the ONS.

The city council has asked the ONS to undertake a match between its own property base and that identified by the census. That would at least assist in identifying the differences and therefore those properties that appear to have been missed. That seems a reasonable request and I should have thought that this exercise was quite straightforward. I am afraid that that is not the case. The city council was first told that the ONS had resource difficulties that make such an exercise very difficult in the short term. It was also told that the ONS had additional information requirements, which we believe can be quickly met but are delaying the process. When the city council suggested that an independent specialist agency should undertake the work as agent for ONS, problems of confidentiality were again raised, and these are apparently still being considered. This needs to be resolved as a matter of urgency so that we can test the validity of the property base.

I return to the issue of quality assurance and alternative data sources. The ONS has given Manchester—in confidence, obviously—the child benefit data used for the quality assurance process, which show that there are more children receiving child benefit in the data used by the ONS than were found by the one-number census or the mid-year estimate. It is clear that there has been a miscount. Moreover, the pensions data used for the quality assurance process—again, supplied in confidence—show more people in the 65 to 79 age group in receipt of pensions than were found by the one-number census or the mid-year estimate. That supports our argument that the statistics need to be validated.

It was interesting that in oral questions on Monday, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions said, with reference to pensioner figures:

"The ONS conducted a review of the statistics, and I think it wise to treat all pensions statistics with caution until that review has been fully implemented."—[*Official Report*, 13 January 2003; Vol. 397, c. 404.]

We concur with that, as it reinforces our case for a review of the data on the number of pensioners in Manchester.

The school census data used for the quality assurance process and supplied in confidence show more children aged five to nine and 10 to 14 in the school census than in the 2001 mid-year estimate, further reinforcing the point that when brought together, independent sources show a greater population in the city of Manchester than was shown by the 2001 census.

Similarly, the electoral register in Manchester shows an increase from 310,010 in 2001–02 to 313,573 in 2002–03. The census results for Manchester indicate that the city's total population aged 17 or more was 305,193. The electoral register figure was 4,817 higher than the estimate. If people are registering to vote in Manchester and, as I said earlier, paying council tax, that strengthens the argument that the census underestimated the numbers.

The quality assurance process was a key part of the ONS methodology, which was extensively consulted on by the ONS before the census was undertaken. The issue is not the principle of the process, but how it has been applied and, in Manchester's case, why the information has been ignored. The information given by the ONS shows as a recurring theme for Manchester that there are more people living in the city than were projected in the census results. We need to know the possible reasons why there are more children in receipt of benefit, more children in Manchester schools and more people in receipt of pensions than the census shows. The comparisons with the electoral register and the flaws identified in the ONS property base mean that the census results for Manchester have no credibility.

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): Does my right hon. Friend intend to deal with Manchester's status as a university town? Is he aware that Manchester is not alone in being an apparently thriving area, but having a reduced census figure? Other cities with a similar complaint include Cambridge, Oxford, Bristol, Nottingham and Stafford. Although not everyone may know of Stafford's status as a university town—it is one—the others are well known. Is that a factor in my right hon. Friend's considerations?

Mr. Bradley: Yes. The large number of students in the city is an added factor, a complicating factor, because that is such a mobile population which, to be fair to the census enumerators, caused some difficulty in the count. That is why I have avoided using that as a key indicator of the reduced population, and have instead used data that are easy to substantiate from alternative sources. The student population is certainly another factor that has not been taken properly into account or counted as part of the overall population figure. The examples that my hon. Friend gave of similar situations in other towns with a high student population reinforces the argument for re-examining the census data and the extent to which the population has been underestimated.

Mr. Bob Laxton (Derby, North): I endorse my right hon. Friend's comments. Derby is also affected by a huge reduction in population—about 14,500, according to the ONS—and is also a university town, which must be factored in. My right hon. Friend may be interested to know that I have been contacted by two former employees of the ONS data centre in Widnes, who told me that gross errors were made in the processing of the data, that the optical character reading of the forms was, in many cases, gibberish and unintelligible and that there were huge pressures on the operatives in the data processing centre in Widnes to increase their hourly key strokes to a very high level. That was achieved by cheating; by people holding their fingers on keyboards and blasting through screens to try to get their key stroke figures up. Those two individuals, who have asked to remain anonymous as they are clearly whistleblowers, pointed out forcefully to me that there will be huge distortions and errors around the country

as a result of the ineffective and inefficient way in which the data processing centre at Widnes, which was the only one handling the census details, operated.

Mr. Bradley: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point, which brings me to my next point. Whatever is said about the ability of the ONS to count, as an organisation it does not transmit an image of public accountability and responsiveness. We need to consider that carefully as a crucial issue, on which I am sure my hon. Friend the Minister will want to comment. While it prevaricates or fails to substantiate its decision-making for the results in Manchester and other cities around the country, as we hear, the decisions crucially feed into the rate support grant settlement for the coming financial year, which has been announced by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. We believe that in Manchester we would have lost more than £18 million worth of grant if the figures had been applied to the financial year 2002–03. I shall deal with the current year in a moment.

Such reductions are untenable in the light of what we believe to be the fundamental flaws in the census results and the grossly unfair impact that such reductions in grant will have on the people of Manchester, which is by no stretch of the imagination a wealthy community. It has many areas of poverty and deprivation that can ill afford any reduction in grant. We must address that issue urgently.

In Manchester, we all want to understand why the Government appear to be unwilling to scrutinise the results of the census and satisfy themselves that their resource allocation policies are a fair and accurate reflection of needs across the board. If the Government decide to use the ONS results, they are, by implication, telling everyone that they accept, at least for the time being, the adequacy of the information that has been supplied by the census. That is totally unacceptable. We also want to understand what steps the Government will take to make the ONS more responsible and accountable. The Government have rightly placed public service reform at the heart of the modernisation programme, but the ONS has clearly missed out in that process. The Government must urgently address that point.

We also want to urge my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to examine the evidence that we are placing before her in this debate and to arrange an urgent meeting with Manchester Members of Parliament, the leader of the city council and other key players as soon as possible. As I have already made clear, we would lose £18 million under this year's rate support grant settlement and, under next year's settlement, we are again likely to lose millions of pounds. The settlement and the way in which it is now calculated rely heavily on the population of the city, so unless we get the figure for the population right, we will lose millions of pounds of grant. The city can ill afford that.

Unless we make an urgent reappraisal of the population of Manchester so that we can determine the true figure of grant that should go to the city from 1 April 2003, we shall perpetuate the problem in years to come. Unless we get the baseline right now, the loss of money will be rolled forward in whatever adjustments are used in mid-year estimates or future surveys. There is no sign that the Government will compensate us even if they find at a later stage that the figures are inaccurate in the way that I have suggested.

Immense difficulties have been created for the budgeting process in Manchester. Determining what can be made available under a grant based on erroneous population figures means that services may have to be reduced to meet the reduced grant. That is totally unacceptable to a city such as Manchester that relies heavily on crucial education, social and other services. Any unjustified reduction for the city will be unacceptable to its Members of Parliament and population.

I therefore urge my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to consider carefully the alternative data sources and to examine the validity of the arguments that my colleagues and I will make in this debate. I urge her to take quickly the view that the census figures are flawed and that they underestimate the population of Manchester. She must be certain that the rate support grant settlement from 1 April reflects the city's true population and the true needs of its residents.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Frank Cook (In the Chair): Order. Some Members may not be familiar with the conventions of this Chamber, so I remind them that we begin the first of the three wind-up speeches 30 minutes before the end of the debate. We therefore have until 10.30 am for the general debate. I ask Members to bear that point in mind and to make their remarks pertinent. Will they bear it in mind particularly when they take interventions? Lengthy interventions will not be favoured.

9.54 am

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) on his remarks. He has laid out in a detailed manner the grievances of the people of Manchester. I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary and not another Minister is present for this debate; she is probably sorry to be here too. One thing that the ONS could do is calculate the distances from a Minister of the Members complaining. That would provide a serious measure of the ice or warmth in any relationship.

We come to this debate with a strong sense of grievance. I am aware of many occasions when Members have been responsible for special pleading, but I do not think that this is a case of special pleading. There is a genuine sense that the ONS has made a complete mess of the census results at least in Manchester and—quite possibly, given the anecdotal evidence—elsewhere.

On my point that it might have been better had a different Minister attended the debate, our essential grievance is that an erroneous census matters because the Government will deprive Manchester of many resources as a result. The people of the city—it is still one of our poorer communities, despite the enormous progress that has been made in recent years—simply cannot afford the Government to make decisions about resourcing on the basis of an erroneous census.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington has given a detailed description of the doubt and uncertainty. In fact, the problem is more than one

[Mr. Tony Lloyd]

of doubt and certainty; there are clear signs of a lack of credibility in the census process. I shall illustrate that point by making a few anecdotal observations. A friend of mine was a manager in the census process and he told me of the way in which it was mishandled. For example, the people in one inner-city area of Manchester are not particularly used, for all manner of reasons, to regular form filling. My right hon. and hon. Friends from Manchester know that the ethnic mix in that area is enormous and that a great many languages are regularly spoken. The consequence is that English is not always the language that is first used.

My friend told me that he had encountered about a 100 nationalities in his work. Somalians are now a significant group in my constituency and in those of some of my hon. Friends. However, because of the employment rules, my friend was not able to employ anyone from a Somalian background. That restricted the number of census enumerators able to work in the Somalian language and to determine whether the form returned from a particular household was accurate to any degree. Such details might seem trivial were it not for the fact that they are part of a systematic pattern of doubtful competence.

My friend made a further point that is relevant to the position of students. He told me that people employed by the census physically delivered the forms, but that they were returned by the Post Office. He made the obvious point that the system would have been far more credible if the Post Office—which generally tends to know where people are because it regularly delivers the post to them—had delivered the census forms and the enumerators had collected them. Although it was not the Post Office's fault, it took about two weeks for the forms to begin to be returned and it was only at that point that the enumerators could get out on to the streets to deal with the problems caused by missing forms.

My friend told me that he knew of at least one street in which not a single door was opened when the census enumerators returned. He did not know whether anyone lived in those houses. We have to face up to the fact that it is possible that no one lived in them and that a nil return was accurate. However, it is also possible that many of those houses were students' houses, because the process took place when the students were already returning to their parental homes or were involved in examinations. They may have been reluctant to open the doors. Again, that might seem a trivial point, but the number of students in Manchester is enough to make a whole constituency. An enormous number of them live in the city; we have the biggest concentration of students in western Europe in a small area. Therefore, if the way in which the student population has been accounted for contains a systematic error, it will make a significant difference to the overall census.

I know that there are other problems in determining a student's real residence. However, not all students should be reallocated to the home from which they came. Lifestyles are different these days, and many students are permanently resident in the town where they study. My points may seem trivial and anecdotal, but they illustrate the sloppiness and incompetence that ran through the whole census process.

Fairly senior people working on the census were seriously unhappy about the process, and felt that they did not receive an adequate response from line managers in the ONS. The real charge against the ONS is that it was not fit to carry out the national census. That is an extremely serious charge, but it must be made. I know that you are a traditionalist on such matters, Mr. Cook, but if the census in Bethlehem had been conducted in such an illegitimate fashion, the whole of Christendom would have been remarkably different in the past 2000 years. That illustrates the scale of the problem.

I also want to comment briefly on some of the important points that my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington has made. If the quality control system and the existence of a number of significant variables—child benefit, pensions and the school register—suggest that there are more people in certain categories than the census allows for and if every alternative indicator shows that the census has got things materially wrong and has underestimated the figures, it is bizarre for the ONS to decide to reject the quality control process. Instead, the ONS has insisted that it got it right in the first place. Common sense says that we should be prudent; that is a good Treasury term. Although we might accept that the census has not made a complete idiot of itself, there is a strong suggestion that it may have done that. We should seriously examine the ONS data.

My right hon. Friend has pointed out that Manchester feels that it has been blocked when it has tried to carry forward the debate. The ONS has not made available the information that the city needs. I despair of a retreat into an argument that is based on data protection. I agree that it would be outrageous for the ONS to give details about individual children and pensioners—of course, that would be illegitimate—but the provision of aggregate figures falls well within Parliament's intentions on the right to public confidentiality. We are talking about the protection of the ONS's confidentiality so that it can protect itself from the charge of gross incompetence. However, we are making that charge anyway, so it might has well come clean, own up and say, "Yes, we have probably got it wrong. Let us begin to talk seriously about the figures and the database." That would enable it to convince the public and the people of Manchester that it has got things right.

I understand the position of my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary. She will have received a briefing from her civil servants, but I am sure that she has already thought about the issues. It is not her first exposure to the problems that we have outlined, and I appeal to her sense of justice. The census matters because it is a once-in-a-while account of the population, and we need to know the national trends on the structure of the population and the data on matters such as ethnicity and gender. However, it also matters enormously because of its redistributive effect. It would be a bizarre consequence if a Labour Government, of all Governments, took part in a process that allowed an incompetent census to redistribute resources from one of the poorest communities in the country to those who are generally better off. We have no business being involved that.

My hon. Friend the Financial Secretary must assure us that there is a way of resolving our doubts about the ONS's competence and that a process will examine that

point. We must also know that if the ONS is found to have been negligent, there will be proper recompense: my right hon. Friend has already made that point. It is no good saying—as happened in the past when Manchester lost money from previous Governments—that the loss will be made up in the future. That never happens and you know that as well as anyone Mr. Cook. Money is never made up. If the census is found to be inadequate, we want a guarantee that there will be proper and adequate compensation.

Perhaps the real point is that we should wean ourselves off the big-bang view that the census will determine all local government spending. If things go wrong, the process becomes incompetent. Even if it can be demonstrated that the census is absolutely right—I do not believe that that can be done—it is impossible to say to a community such as Manchester that it can afford to lose at the levels that my right hon. Friend has described. We need assurances that our points will be examined in a way that provides proper justice to the people of Manchester.

10.6 am

Mr. Graham Stringer (Manchester, Blackley): My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) and my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) have enabled me to make my remarks relatively brief. They have comprehensively covered the inadequacies and inaccuracies of the 2001 census. However, I make it clear to you, Mr. Cook, that when I refer to a Mr. Cook of the ONS—some of my criticisms will be sharp because I am not one of his admirers—I am not undermining your position. I do not want there to be such a misunderstanding.

Since I have become aware of the problems in the 2001 census, I have tried to find out as much as I possibly can about the operation of the ONS and the census. On 28 October 2002, I went to a meeting of the Public Accounts Committee to watch it question Mr. Cook. It was a painful and revealing experience that shed light on why the census does not contain figures on which we can rely. At first, I thought that Mr. Cook just could not count up to 60 million. It is a large figure. However, he also has problems with other figures, statistical projections, administering the organisation and morale. I shall quickly go through the points that the Public Accounts Committee brought to light.

There is a limit of £20,000 on the letting of contracts in the ONS. However, the consultant firm, Vogue, spent nearly £1 million without going through the proper procedures. I remember from the arithmetic that I studied that there is a big difference between £20,000 and £1 million. Even after Mr. Cook initially checked the figures, he failed to detect that one of his officers had let a contract of £500,000, which led to £1 million of extra expenditure, to one of that officer's mates. The official lost a bonus of 4 per cent. but then received a bonus of 8 per cent. Therefore, he did not lose out, and he left the organisation without any penalties imposed on him. That did not reassure me that things were being carried out correctly.

One would expect a national statistician to come up with a correct estimate of the number of census forms that would be returned. He estimated that 70 per cent. of the forms would be returned. In fact, 88 per cent. were returned. Having got that wrong, one might suspect that it would make things easier, but it did not. Instead, the people who should have been checking up on those who had not returned their forms were kept in the office to sort out the forms that had been sent back. He also estimated that there would be 600,000 phone calls. Wrong again, Mr. Len Cook; there were 2.6 million calls, more than half of which went unanswered.

In addition, 50 per cent. of the 70,000 or so staff employed were not paid for a considerable time. Chessington, which was responsible for making the payments, ended up overpaying them by £500,000. Mr. Cook could not get the money back because he could not provide the statistics and information to Chessington to allow him to do that. In the light of that background of comprehensive incompetence in the ONS, it should come as no surprise that the figures do not match our expectation and knowledge of what is happening on the ground.

Mr. Cook estimates that 1 million people did not return the forms, so he is 2 million short. How many people were prosecuted for that? A mere 39. We must consider how effective the incentive was to persuade people to return the forms, although as my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central said, they were not delivered to many people because the normal postal service was not used. The 39 who were prosecuted were honest people. They did not agree with the census and told Mr. Cook that they were not filling in his form. For that, they were prosecuted. The 1 million people who did not fill them in because they wanted to dodge something in the system or were just too lazy to do so were not prosecuted. That is a strange way of ensuring an accurate census.

As I have become more and more interested in the ONS, I have started to collect paper cuttings. Almost daily I see it retract information and I see people complaining about it. The latest complaint is that Mr. Cook has double-counted pension funds. He has counted the transfer of pension funds as new contributions to pensions, which gives a double estimate of people's savings in pensions. That is not a man who is doing a job properly. Professor Coleman is professor of demography at Oxford university and a professional in the sector. He simply cannot credit that 1,000 young men a week—1 million in all—have left the country to go to Ibiza to enjoy discos or whatever.

Mr. Lloyd: All of them from Manchester.

Mr. Stringer: Quite. It just is not credible and no other source of information supports that evidence.

Right hon. and hon. Friends have asked for a correlation between other sources of information. More people are paying council tax than are accounted for in the census for Manchester. Manchester people are very honest, but they are not paying council tax on behalf of imaginary people. There are more pupils, more pensioners and more voters than Mr. Cook accounts for in the census. It is more likely that he has got it wrong because the people who went to collect the forms were frightened of going into certain parts of Manchester, probably unreasonably. They did not know the area. Students who had temporarily left the city and people who were dodging the council tax by not registering on the electoral register did not appear on the census.

[Mr. Stringer]

All the sources from city council underestimate the figures. It is possible that people saw the forms but did not want to fill them in. Recent asylum seekers who have the right to stay here were probably worried about them. The common factors in all areas where the population has been underestimated are large ethnic minority populations, large student populations and, in some cases, poor populations, which has an effect because the second person in the household does not register.

My hon. Friend the Financial Secretary was decent enough to meet Manchester MPs at short notice. I ask her to look thoroughly at the census. I understand that she cannot put herself in the place of the officer of national statistics. I accept that the Government must have an independent source of information with which they do not interfere, but that does not mean that they should not take seriously our concerns that Mr. Cook has got it wrong and has done an extraordinarily bad job. The Government cannot rely on the information in the census when they plan future services. Cities such as Manchester do not like some of the services that they provide to be based on population because they are not related to the number of people in the population. The census would distort that further.

Mr. Cook has managed to make more people disappear from Manchester than General Galtieri ever managed to make disappear from Argentina. Although he has not had the same tragic consequences, there will be other tragic consequences for services if the census is not reviewed. It is the worst census for 200 years.

10.17 am

Paul Goggins (Wythenshawe and Sale, East): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) on obtaining this timely and important debate, and other colleagues on their forceful arguments. No one could argue that Manchester lacks leadership and determination. We are certainly not a city that whinges about what other people do to us, or what happened in the past. The city is increasingly successful. We continue to combine, as we have over the centuries, the quest for economic progress with a commitment to fairness.

Last Saturday, I went to a concert in the Bridgewater hall, which is a world- renowned facility. Next season, I will support my football team in the new 50,000-seater City of Manchester stadium, the centrepiece of the Commonwealth games that grabbed the nation's attention last summer. It also showed that the regions can lead successful national and international events. As my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) said, Manchester's universities are among the finest in Europe. The metrolink system is doing well and is about to be extended to bring world-class public transport to our constituents. While the rest of the country was consulting—or not consulting, as it turns out—on the future of aviation, Manchester airport in my constituency, with two runways and three terminals, continued to deal with its 19 million passengers a year, which will double over the next 30 years.

All those successes and many others that I do not have time to mention have been achieved by a city that punches well above its weight in terms of its population. I will not use the census figures because I concur with my right hon. and hon. Friends on their reliability, but in the mid-year estimates for 2000, Manchester had 440,000 people, Leeds had 726,000 and Birmingham around 1 million. So there are far fewer people in our city than there are in others. As my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) said, many of our citizens are relatively poor. Indeed, about half rely on some form of means-tested benefit.

My right hon. and hon. Friends have argued forcefully that the census is a travesty, with 46,000 fewer people than the 1991 census and 47,000 fewer than the 2000 mid-year estimates. As I go around the city, I see new businesses rising up and new homes being built. So common sense tells us that the census cannot be true. My constituency experience also tells me the same thing.

I hope hon. Members forgive me for taking a little time to share facts about my constituency. When the boundary changed in 1993, about 3,200 people who were previously in the city of Manchester were moved out of it. They did not move away. Someone just drew a line on a different place on the map. Since 1997, however, because of new investment in housing and the growth of owner-occupation, 3,000 people have moved into Wythenshawe. At the same time, some buildings have been demolished and probably about 1,500 people have moved out. That process over the past few years has meant two things; an extra 1,500 people are living in Wythenshawe and about 1,700 fewer people are living in Manchester. There has been a small reduction in the population, which perhaps even the city council could accept. However, the reduction is considerably less than the 11 per cent. suggested by the census.

If my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary is not persuaded by the common-sense observations or the details of my constituency, I hope that she will be swayed by the information provided by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington and other colleagues on the statistic provided by the city council on the missing 10,000 properties on which council tax is being paid. The ONS evaluation report observes:

"there is real evidence that the interviewers found whole properties that were missing from other address lists during their on-the-ground property listing phase".

Let me translate the jargon. That means that properties and people that do not exist in the virtual world of the census do exist in the real world of the city of Manchester. The city's own evidence shows that there are more pensioners, more children and 5,000 more adults are on the electoral register than the census shows. It is not good enough for Mr. Cook to say that all previous surveys have been wrong or that 1,000 people a week are leaving for sunnier climes. The evidence simply is not there.

As we heard, Manchester is not alone. According to the census, Westminster has lost a quarter of its population. Kensington and Chelsea, Cambridge, and Oxford have also lost considerable numbers. Again according to the census, there has been a fall in the population of every one of the 10 districts in Greater Manchester. A third of my constituency covers the borough of Trafford, which is supposed to have lost 10,000 people from its population; about 5 per cent. of the total. Altogether, Greater Manchester is supposed

to have lost more than 100,000 people. Again, that cannot possibly be true according to common sense or the data.

All of that would be interesting were it simply an academic debate, but population totals mean hard cash. Manchester is set to lose millions of pounds over the next decade if we continue to rely on the figures in the census. For the current year, that would have meant a loss of more than £18 million. We are told that there is some protection for next year because of the capping that would limit the loss to £8.2 million, but that is considerable in terms of the amount of resources that would be lost to the city. Who knows what might happen? The protection could disappear and we would have to rely on the statistics for grant distribution for many years to come. It would be a travesty if that were allowed to happen.

What can be done? The Government need to take a long-term view on the census. We need a longer gap between the publication of the census results and the implementation of the statistics for the distribution of grant. That would allow disputes, such as this one, to be resolved. It would also allow other factors such as ethnicity to be included. We need greater scrutiny of the process of the census; the methodology, the data sets and the conclusions. There has to be fuller public examination.

We also need a formal disputes procedure. That would deal with all the rowing between the city and Mr. Cook about what information the city can and cannot have. We should establish an independent system of assessing alternative sets of data when they are so at variance with what the census has uncovered. In the medium term, we need greater scrutiny of the ONS. The integrity of statistics is vital in the development of public policy, whether that is on unemployment, crime, poverty, homelessness or population trends as a whole. It is essential that the statistics are reliable. Government and Parliament need to do everything that they can to scrutinise the statistics.

We need more clarity on the rules on data sharing. We heard about Manchester's efforts to obtain data from the ONS. Either the supply has been slow or the ONS has refused outright to provide information on the grounds that it would breach confidentiality. Let me give one example of that. The city asked for data on general practitioner lists, but it has not been given. I do not know whether the membership of the national health service security and confidentiality advisory group is an official secret, but its members should be told that we are not after information on individual patients. We think that we have a right to know the total figures and expect to receive them. I fully accept that the registrar general cannot disclose personal information because it is an offence to do so, but the code of practice on access to Government makes it clear than the ONS and others should "respond openly" to requests for information.

On immediate action, I suggest that my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary does three things. First, she should inform the Deputy Prime Minister of the serious concerns about the accuracy of the 2001 census. She should advise him to make interim arrangements for next year's revenue support grant settlement. It is unacceptable that those with a variation of more than 10 per cent. in their populations should be expected to have to live with the new figures without a thorough evaluation of what has happened.

Secondly, a thorough review of the 2001 census should be undertaken and all alternative data carefully scrutinised. Thirdly, my hon. Friend should do everything she can to ensure that Manchester has access to all the information that it has requested. If she is prepared to do those things, she will begin to restore faith in the integrity of statistics and ensure that the city of Manchester gets the resources it needs to run the services required in what is still a great city.

10.28 am

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): May I add my condolences to the family of Stephen Oake, the constable who died tragically in the course of duty yesterday? I am sure other hon. Members will want to associate themselves with that.

The Financial Secretary may not know that my constituency is called Hazel Grove and is part of the metropolitan borough of Stockport, which is adjacent to Manchester. I am sure Manchester Members would agree that people from Stockport do not automatically have the same view of the world as people in their city. There tends to be a rivalry between us which I hope is always friendly. On this particular occasion, however, I want to make it clear that I strongly support the points made by Manchester Members.

I am sure that the Financial Secretary will agree that the right hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) gave a measured, thoughtful and thorough presentation of an almost incomprehensible set of figures. I am sure that the hon. Lady will respond in an equally measured and thoughtful way; she is noted for that. Furthermore, I hope that she will not be content with speaking to a bland ministerial brief but that she will come through with positive suggestions and an acknowledgement of the need for changes in the current approach.

The right hon. Member for Manchester, Withington made clear the statistical differences between previous estimates and the numbers in the census. He drew attention to one or two obvious gaps. I want to build on one point that he touched on. He noted that the initial explanation for the discrepancy was that a large number of young men had gone overseas. It is true that large numbers of young men and women go away on gap years, perhaps remaining overseas for some time. However, in Stockport, which is adjacent to Manchester, a high number of young people stay on at school and go on to university and many of them take a gap year. It would thus be common sense to expect that a higher proportion of young men and women from an area such as mine in Stockport, with its middle-class and higher education background, its mobility and resources, would go overseas and stay there than from inner-city Manchester. Given the differences between Manchester and Stockport, if it is valid that 40,000 young people from Manchester opted to go overseas, where are all the young people from Stockport who should have done so? Some of the figures that have been chucked into the debate by people who are trying to justify the census figures need serious academic criticism.

[Mr. Andrew Stunell]

The right hon. Gentleman said that there was a problem with the release of data. Will the Financial Secretary confirm that she will expedite the release of information about the total number of patients on GP lists? The right hon. Gentleman mentioned that postcode samples are not being carried out. The Financial Secretary now has the opportunity to tell us that she will expedite that matter.

The right hon. Gentleman said that there were 10,000 more council tax payers than the number of enumerated households. The hon. Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Stringer) pointed out that although his constituents were honest, even they were hardly likely to pay their council tax twice, or as phantom residents. In fact, most people who read the *Manchester Evening News* might say that the problem is underpayment rather than overpayment of council tax.

When we consider issues such as data checking and quality control, we have to acknowledge that the argument is on the side of the Manchester Members who have spoken in this debate, rather than on that of the ONS. The number of child benefit cases exceeds the total shown on the census, as does the number of people receiving pensions. It might be argued that as those benefits must be claimed, there may be fictional claimants who would not show up on the census. However, the figures on council tax payers must give the knockout blow to that argument.

The number of people on the electoral roll exceeds the number in the census, yet ever since the days of the poll tax we have heard the story that, especially in inner-city areas, there has been serious under-recording on electoral rolls. For the past 10 years and more, many of us have bemoaned that fact; yet Manchester, which has many inner-city characteristics, turns out to have 4,000 to 5,000 more people on its electoral roll than were recorded in the census. That does not make sense.

There is undoubtedly an enormous student population in the Greater Manchester area, especially concentrated in the city itself. Obtaining accurate records from students is bad enough for their tutors; I do not suppose it is any better for census enumerators.

All those things have dire financial consequences. The problems are not exclusive to Manchester, or to the university and other towns that were mentioned earlier. May I remind the Financial Secretary of the purpose of the census? It is not simply a neat academic exercise that continues a series of historical studies stretching back 200 years. It was not designed to enable genealogists to work out who was descended from whom and who moved from where. It was originally designed so that Governments could measure and design public services that were appropriate for communities and arrange for their delivery. The census was not designed for some other purpose, which has now thrown up a bizarre side effect. The core point of the census is to enable the Government to allocate resources and decide on appropriate services. On this occasion, it has clearly failed to do that job.

I have some questions for the Financial Secretary. If she cannot answer them now, I hope that she will be able to deal with them later. First, is she satisfied that the process of quality control—the check-off against the raw census figures—is adequate? Plenty of evidence has been produced today to show that even where there is quality control, it is either ignored or fails to deliver the necessary checks and balances.

Secondly, does the Financial Secretary accept that the rush to produce results has been at the expense of accuracy and checking? Does she agree with the hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale, East (Paul Goggins) that it might have been better to hold back from using the data until there had been a proper opportunity to check the discrepancies? Can the Government answer for the discrepancies that were found on child benefit, pensioners and school rolls?

Incidentally, the sum of school rolls in Manchester does not include all children of school age in Manchester, as those of us in Stockport know well. Plenty of children from Manchester go across the border to Stockport or to Trafford. If the sum of the school rolls is greater than the sum of children, we can be sure that the total number of children in Manchester is even greater.

Finally, will the Financial Secretary order the release of the additional data on GP lists, commission work on postcode samples and cut through the smokescreen of data protection? Will she do all that she can to restore faith in the census as a sound basis for describing the demographics of our complex society? It is nowhere more complex than in the mosaic of different communities in Manchester and Greater Manchester.

10.39 am

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): I, too, express my condolences to the family of Stephen Oake.

I congratulate the right hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) on securing this important debate, which, as we all know, has a wider application, beyond Manchester. We are expecting the Financial Secretary to tell us how the Government propose to resolve the problems caused by self-evident errors in the 2001 census figures. The Government's current position—as I think *The Times* reported on 9 January—is to dismiss pleas from councils for extra cash to cover multi-million pound funding shortfalls triggered by the census figures unless the mistakes are admitted by Len Cook, the national statistician. The Government have also said that they will not override the census figures, despite all the evidence and a vigorous campaign by individuals such as the two chief executives of Manchester.

As we have heard, the population discrepancy for Manchester is more than 10 per cent.—47,000 people—which translates into what is likely to be a recurrent funding shortfall of about £18 million a year until the next census in 10 years. In six other authorities there were even greater proportional discrepancies between the census figures and the 2000 estimates. The largest discrepancy was in Westminster, at 25.9 per cent., but it was also more substantial than Manchester in Forest Heath, Kensington and Chelsea, Cambridge, Richmond upon Thames and the City of London. Unless the problem can be resolved, the annual loss for Westminster is £63 million per annum. In Birmingham, the census discrepancies were fewer, but it faces losses in Government grants of £40 million per annum and could suffer a reduction in its European Union regeneration funding.

Prima facie, the inaccurate census results seem to have occurred where returns were poor. As has been well aired, those results matter to citizens because of their importance not only in the recurring allocation of local authority grants but in the funding of primary care trusts. That point has not been adequately explored. I do not know how much it matters, but it would be logical to assume that in Manchester 46,000 patients will not be funded for their GP or hospital needs unless a correction is made.

The whole matter is in the same territory as the Government's control mantras and their somewhat discredited targeting process. What sounds fine in principle—the requirement for evidence for central Government policy in order to direct funding—is in practice proving counter-productive for deprived inner-city areas when based on census figures that are, prima facie, incorrect. As Members have already argued, transient populations are reluctant, for a variety of reasons, to complete complex official forms. People are daunted by a census form that has grown from five questions in 1801 to 40 questions at present; not all of which are necessary, especially as regards the important funding decisions for which the census is used.

The central criticism of the ONS and of Len Cook, its head, is that they failed to adjust the figures to reach a sensible, overall estimate of population where census participation seems to have been adequate and where the census results contradict reliable and established property-based data. In Westminster, the response was only 74 per cent; in Manchester, as we have heard, there are more council tax payers, more voters, more children, more pensioners and more children at school than the census figures show. I cannot understand why the ONS has not sorted out the problems in Manchester where the prima facie evidence shows that the figures were incorrect.

Attempts have been made to restructure the ONS and to improve its independence and reliability. However, as we all know, there have been disturbing spats with the Statistics Commission, which was set up to monitor the work of the ONS. Decisions have been questioned on the classification of receipts from the third-generation mobile telephony licences, on the status of Network Rail and, especially, on data relating to pension saving.

The ONS could have increased the accuracy of the status. There should have been more door knocking and the ONS should have been willing to examine substantiated evidence of mistakes when it was presented with unexpectedly large changes in population. The ONS could have made greater use of new survey techniques and could have adopted administrative records that have proved accurate in the past, especially for pinpointing data in inner-city areas.

As we have heard, the ONS figures for Manchester do not match property-based data. One would have thought that that problem was capable of speedy resolution and reconciliation but the ONS appears to have dragged its feet. In that context, I challenge the Financial Secretary's recent response to my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman) that the 2001 census had undergone vigorous testing and quality checking in both fieldwork and processing. The evidence that we have heard today suggests that that was not the case. However, I am glad that the Financial Secretary has advised us that the Treasury is working with local authorities that experienced unexpectedly large and, prima facie, unlikely population shifts to find explanations. I look forward to hearing the results of that exercise.

After some unsatisfactory correspondence with the ONS, Westminster has started judicial review proceedings against Len Cook for alleged non-discharge of his duties under the Census Act 1920. The council is also considering an application to the Chancellor, under section 6 of the Act, to rerun the census in Westminster. If Westminster is successful but the issue remains unresolved for Manchester, I am sure that Manchester would follow suit; so rather than wasting more time and effort, the pressure is on the Government to sort out the problem.

Manchester faces a further problem because the council pledged to keep its council tax increase modest—about 2.5 per cent.—yet, on its own figures, its budget needs to increase by more than 10 per cent. to offer the same level of services as last year. It is not satisfactory or sufficient for the Government to stall by arguing that the local government grants for 2003–04 will provide a one-year floor of a 3.5 per cent. increase. The Government have acknowledged that, mostly due to their own actions, there will be significant cost increases throughout the country of about 7 per cent. a year, so the floor may not even cover those increases.

The Government should accept the limitations of the census data when allocating funds for a wide range of policies. Manchester will lose at least £18 million this year and possibly even more each year for the next decade unless the process is corrected. Furthermore, as I stressed, its primary care trusts will be substantially short-changed.

I hope that we shall now hear from the Financial Secretary how these unfortunate and unnecessary problems are to be resolved.

10.48 am

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly): May I begin by saying how pleased I am to be serving yet again under your chairmanship, Mr. Cook?

I, too, add my condolences to the family of Stephen Oake.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) on securing this important debate. I am, of course, aware of the economic significance of Manchester; indeed, my constituency, Bolton, West, is within the boundaries of Greater Manchester. I also understand the significance of the census results for the allocation of resources, although the Treasury is not directly responsible for that allocation and I would expect hon. Members not to hold me answerable today for the way in which the census results are used by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

I am also aware of the interest that hon. Members have taken in these issues. I met a delegation of Manchester MPs, including those present in this Chamber, and MPs from other local authorities that have been affected.

Before turning to the detail of the Manchester census, I affirm that we are confident that the census figures for England and Wales, released on 30 September last year,

[Ruth Kelly]

provide the best ever estimate of the population nationally and in each local authority. I wholly reject the charge of gross incompetence that has been made against the Office for National Statistics.

Of course, serious concerns have been expressed by local authorities whose census results differ in particular from the previous year's mid-year estimates. The vast majority of local authorities, however, are satisfied with the census results. Any Government must have authoritative figures that establish the size, make-up and geographic distribution of their people to provide a benchmark population derived on a coherent basis across the country. That benchmark has been established according to agreed statistical methodologies and has been subject to rigorous scrutiny, not just by the Government but by outside professionals and academics. In the United Kingdom, the accepted definitive benchmark for the population is the 10-yearly census.

Carrying out a census of the population is a significant task—it is the largest civilian exercise undertaken by any Government and involves a huge amount of planning, not simply in data collection but in the statistical methodologies used to determine outputs. The difficulty facing statisticians is that no census in the world ever achieves a 100 per cent. response rate. If such a result could be achieved, conducting a census would be relatively easy, but the world does not work like that. The 2001 census was designed to achieve the most accurate result using the best methods available. It was designed from the outset to take full account of what users of statistics really want—figures representing everyone. As a result, the 2001 census is the first in this country to represent the entire population.

That representation was achieved through a new and rigorous statistical strategy known as the one-number census. Census response in England and Wales—the proportion of people returning a valid form—was 94 per cent. The 6 per cent. of people estimated to have been missed by the census have been added to the counts using that statistical process which, prior to its adoption, had been the subject of extensive consultation.

One of the key elements of the one-number census is an independent follow-up survey. The census coverage survey involved an intensive face-to-face survey of a sample population of 300,000—by far the largest independent check on a census ever carried out. By combining the results of the census and the census coverage survey it was possible in 2001 to estimate the total resident population to a high level of precision, plus or minus 0.2 per cent.

Mr. Stringer: Is my hon. Friend prepared to provide the information on which those assertions are based? My understanding is that in Manchester the checks were done in areas such as the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington where there were very few problems, but not in areas where there were difficulties, such as my constituency or that of my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central. Will the Minister check that?

Ruth Kelly: Of course I will. That is one of the issues that has come up in the attempt to reconcile administrative data with the census figures while respecting confidentiality—an issue that I shall return to if I have time.

I shall not dwell on the survey's statistical basis—I know that hon. Members want to hear more about the way in which the census was conducted in Manchester—save to say that in England and Wales there was an extensive quality assurance process for comparative data sets. I shall address some of the points made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington, such as the preparedness and speed with which the ONS responded to requests for data.

The first letter from Manchester city council was received by Len Cook, the head of the ONS, on 7 October. He responded on 11 October, and meetings between him and council representatives took place on 4 November and 6 December, and there were further working meetings and correspondence. Available information was supplied at each stage of the process. The only outstanding information that has not yet been supplied, but which has been requested, is on NHS patient data, as genuine issues of confidentiality are involved. My office has tried to discover the position on that data set, and has been assured that the data will be released soon. I am hopeful that they will be released today, but I assure hon. Members that there have been serious confidentiality considerations that could not be treated lightly and had to be taken into account before the data were released. However, the ONS has assured me that it will be released as soon as it has received it.

Turning to the administrative data, it appears odd that many of the figures used by Manchester city council for population estimates do not at first sight tally with the census results, but there are serious problems with much of the administrative data. Many of the data sets are prone to data inflation—when people move house, for instance, they do not automatically remove their names from a register. That is particularly true of GP registration lists, the numbers on which are commonly much higher than the underlying population estimate in many local authorities.

Electoral registers were not used by the ONS as comparative data sets in the one-number census because of well-documented data deficiencies. For example, students may register both at their term-time and vacation addresses, but the published census figures count them only at their term-time address. People with two homes may register at both addresses—the census only counts people at the address where they spend the majority of their time. There are problems then, and Manchester is certainly not the only local authority whose electoral register exceeds the estimate of the underlying population base.

Manchester city council and hon. Members have raised with me and the ONS the issue of whether the property data sets held by the city council and the ONS could be reconciled. The ONS is considering that, and is prepared to undertake such an exercise. However, that would not be simple. A significant proportion of the difference between the two figures can be accounted for. For example, much of the discrepancy between the 177,000 properties on the Manchester list and the 168,000 on the census list can be explained by communal residences being counted as individual households by Manchester but as communal residences by the census.

I am advised that if the communal residences that Manchester, according to ONS, may have counted as individual households housed an average of 38 people, that would account for far more than the 6,000 difference between the two sets of figures. Reconciling the lists is not straightforward and would involve an extensive process of checks taking several months that would have to be agreed by both parties. The ONS, however, has agreed to co-operate as much as possible in that process.

Another issue that has been raised is the release of postcode data. Again, the ONS is prepared to look at that, but I am advised that some postcodes include only one address, so the issue of data confidentiality arises. In such cases, postcode data could not be released on a straightforward basis.

Turning to the follow-up to the process, it is clear that the ONS mid-year population estimates have in many areas overestimated both the size and growth of the population for the past few areas. The national statistician considers that the reason for that is not so much the addition and subtraction of figures for births and deaths but migration—both external migration between countries and internal migration between local authority areas. He has already set up a fundamental national statistics quality review into the international migration figures, which is expected to report in the second quarter of this year. In addition, we need a more far-reaching review of cross-Government requirements of population figures to support Government objectives. The national statistician has discussed with the permanent secretary and his colleagues the need for strong action to find solutions.

11.00 am

Sitting suspended till Two o'clock.

Rural and Island Transport

2 pm

Andrew George (St. Ives): I am pleased to have secured this debate, and having had one on exactly the same subject on 8 January 2002, I am pleased, too, that so many people have turned up to what is now my annual debate. It is good to have an opportunity to assess the Government's progress against the measures that I set for them last year. The Government set targets for themselves, but I set mine for the Minister.

I could use valuable time in this 90-minute debate congratulating and thanking the Minister for investment in rural transport, but I shall not do that because I want to raise difficult issues that need to be addressed. I am not blaming the Minister, but simply using this opportunity to draw matters to his attention in the hope that he will use his good offices to assist us in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, which are the two areas on which I shall concentrate. The Minister could equally take up valuable time telling me that I should have congratulated him on the investment, initiatives, funds and subsidy grants, but I am sure that he will want to concentrate on addressing the points that I raise. I know that he considers such matters in a measured way and understands the challenges of transport to Plymouth and onward to Cornwall.

I intend to raise three issues. The first is bus services in Cornwall, where there are specific challenges. Such challenges vary throughout the country and the commercial and market environment in which bus services operate in Cornwall is unique because the geography of Cornwall is unique. Some solutions for other parts of the country may not apply there. I also want to speak about rail services into Cornwall and then to raise some of the issues I raised last time concerning important lifeline services to my constituents on the Isles of Scilly, who have specific concerns.

I can talk only about Cornwall when it comes to buses; although I know a little about bus services in other parts of the country, there is a particularly challenging environment in Cornwall. Cornwall is not just a long, thin peninsula with many small towns and no large urban centre. There are a number of peninsulas and many services run not between large market towns but down the peninsulas to small villages. That makes it extremely challenging to run services.

I appreciate—as does the county council, which congratulates the Government—the rural bus subsidy grant and the rural bus challenge bid process, which enable the county council to seek further assistance to bolster services in Cornwall. However, the history of bus services in Cornwall shows that there are many challenges. Some 90 or so 24-year-old double-decker buses still run through Cornwall's lanes. There are but another 30 of those buses in the Government's south-west zone, so there are three times as many of those buses in Cornwall as there are in the rest of the zone. That demonstrates that the legacy of the system that used to operate presents a number of challenges.

In addition, there are very few profit-making routes in Cornwall. The main operator of services in Devon and Cornwall is First Western National, and I understand that ours is the one region in which services run at a loss. It is inevitable that the operator's reward is that it gets

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not new buses but older rolling stock. There is also a wider problem related to providing drivers. First Western National and other service providers have excellent drivers. Drivers are terribly poorly paid, considering the multi-skilled job that they have to perform. After all, sometimes they have to deal with issues of public order; they have to take fares from passengers in a way that does not happen for rail services. As a result of the difficulty of securing necessary drivers, First Western National has failed to meet its timetable obligations on several routes over the past year. Indeed, the situation has become worse over the past year and many of my constituents have complained.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): My hon. Friend will be well aware that the crisis in the group is hitting very hard in the rural areas of my constituency, where the situation is worse even than it is in his constituency. Does he accept that that is a direct result of the very long period over which a virtual monopoly has developed? The group has been allocated more and more subsidised routes and school contracts—there is an additional crisis in that area—and some of the smaller, family-run operators have been driven out. That means that, when the big group pulls out, there is very little flexibility for anyone else to come in. It is the supermarket situation on wheels, and that is extremely dangerous. Does my hon. Friend accept that the situation is a direct result of the Conservative deregulation legislation of the early 1980s?

Andrew George: I agree entirely and I am well aware of the particular challenges and problems of running services in north Cornwall. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to draw attention to the failure to provide adequate services in that area, just as my constituents in west Cornwall have complained about buses not turning up. The regulatory environment in which providers operate arose from the Transport Act 1985. Liberal Democrat and Labour Members protested strongly about the deregulation of bus services, warning that it would create the sort of problems that we are experiencing.

While buses are failing to operate to timetable, there are also difficulties and challenges in meeting the six-minute window obligation. Only 90 per cent. of buses arrive within the six-minute window, which allows buses to be between one minute early and five minutes late against their schedule. When I complained about services in Cornwall and the failure of buses to turn up in some remote villages, the response was that the operators had met 99.5 per cent. of timetable service obligations. If that happened in metropolitan areas, one would not notice the difference. My point, which I have made to the company and the regulators of the service, is that services to remote villages, which may have only two or three buses a day if they are lucky, suffer most. There is not a failure across the whole service, but when services to remote villages fail, it has a substantial impact not only on individual users, but on the confidence of users, and that is clearly unacceptable. The failure to meet those obligations resulted in the transport commissioner fining First Western National £35,000. Although I support what the company is trying to do and recognise the challenge that it faces, I was disappointed that it went to a transport tribunal and successfully overturned the fine. If sanctions are to be imposed to ensure that obligations are met, it is important that they stick.

There have been a number of proposals, and I congratulate First Western National on undertaking a review with the TAS partnership. On 16 December, it published a new proposal, which will result in its contracting its bus services to the more profitable routes and possibly withdrawing from the less profitable routes.

Ms Candy Atherton (Falmouth and Camborne): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that starting consultation on 16 December, near to Christmas, was not the most participatory way in which to run the exercise?

Andrew George: I agree with the hon. Lady, who has helped me to make my next point. The deadline for responses to the consultation was 6 January. Not only was the consultation launched as people were preparing for their Christmas festivities, but they had to respond by twelfth night, which was not the best scenario. Many people, including me, complained about the limited time in which they could write, respond and object to the document. The company has responded by being more flexible, and the county council has likewise recognised that it needs to give people more time to consider the proposals. Having said that, the county council has to prepare itself for implementation of the programme, which will result in First Western National operating between 80 and 85 per cent. of its original obligation.

The county council takes the view, with which I have some sympathy, that it is far better for a struggling company to operate 80 to 85 per cent. of services than struggle with its original programme. I agree with that, provided that the county council's tendering process successfully finds the kind of companies that my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) has identified. If local, family companies can put in tenders that are acceptable to the county council, they are the companies to which we will turn to meet the service obligations on those scheduled routes. That process has already commenced, and by early February the county council will know whether the tendering process has resulted in an acceptable alternative to First Western National. It will be interesting to see whether First Western National tenders new, more expensive bids for providing services. That would clearly result not only in raised eyebrows across Cornwall but in considerable protests. There are some important challenges ahead.

On the routes that are being withdrawn—those in my constituency serve remote villages such as Zennor and Gwithian—constituents have written to me saying that they depend on those services. Indeed, in some cases people's businesses depend on those services. A hotelier from Zennor, for example, has written to me and explained that many of the guests arrive at his hotel by public transport, which means that the withdrawal will dent his business. Mr. Taylor, who is the secretary of the Gwithian residents association, has protested most strongly against the proposed withdrawal of services from Gwithian. The current services are essential to many people living in the village. They may be few but the bus service is very important to them, providing an essential service to Camborne.

I do not want a witch hunt in order to find culprits for what has been, in many cases, a failure of services during the past year, even though there are worries about the way in which the service will develop in the future. We could easily end up blaming the company, the county council or someone else. That is not what we want. The challenge exists, however, and we must raise our standards to respond to it. I commend both the company and the county council and encourage them to work closely in future to address some of the challenges ahead.

One option for the future in the far west of Cornwall is a rural bus challenge bid for a demand-responsive service in west Penwith. I understand that the decision on that will be made in early February, along with all others. That is a particularly exciting bid. Four such services operate in Cornwall, including in north Cornwall, which are successful, as far as I am aware. Will the Minister look favourably on that bid and consider it carefully?

I spoke to the Minister and his staff before the debate to make them aware of my next point. Last summer, I asked the Minister questions about the future of community buses. About 13 of them run in the smaller villages throughout Cornwall, and I worked for a community development charity when the rural transport development fund was used to purchase them. They all run extremely well, providing an essential and scheduled service.

The Government have undertaken consultation on the continuation of the fuel duty rebate—I think that it is now called something else—available for community buses. It would be helpful to have clarification on what is happening with the entitlement to fuel duty rebate, especially for community buses that need to offer a flexible, almost demand-responsive, service on scheduled routes from village communities to the nearby recreational and shopping centres.

Representations have been made to me about regulations that mean that non-profit-making community groups are not entitled to pay their drivers. That has caused significant difficulties in that some community buses have not been able to operate as extensively as the operators would like. Voluntary car schemes are allowed to pay their drivers; although they do not receive a salary, they receive a return rate that is, strictly speaking, more than the car's running costs. Many such schemes have little difficulty finding drivers, but it is difficult for community bus schemes to offer enough financial inducement to attract drivers. Will the Minister address that point if he has time?

I mentioned train services in my previous debate, and I know that other hon. Members will want to mention them. During the five years of Labour Government, reliability has, if anything, got worse. I know that there have been particular challenges during the past couple of years but the Minister will have seen the figures. My hon. Friend the Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor) recently analysed figures showing the reliability of all operators' services to Cornwall and found that passengers suffered from 120 per cent. more delays and almost 50 per cent. more cancellations in 2002 than in 1997. That has dented people's confidence in services running to Cornwall.

First Great Western's response is that it plans to introduce a 200 mph service to Plymouth, but it would be far better for the company to walk before it can run. I do not care whether services take three, four, five or six hours to get to London, but what business users, other passengers and I, as a service user, want to know is that trains are going to arrive at the expected time. That should be the starting point of any changes to the service.

I do not want to detain the Chamber unnecessarily because I know other hon. Members want to speak. The Minister will be aware of the issue of lifeline services to the Isles of Scilly because I have raised it with him personally. Last year, I made the point that the Isles of Scilly receive no public subsidy for the helicopter, fixed-wing aircraft or ferry services that connect them with the mainland, which is 30 miles from St. Mary's. I gave figures that I will not repeat for subsidies now available through the Scottish Executive, which were previously available through the Treasury, to Caledonian McBride—

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): MacBrayne.

Andrew George: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Subsidies were provided to Caledonian MacBrayne for services to the off islands in Scotland. That has meant lifeline service ticket costs for Scottish users significantly below those charged to those living in the Isles of Scilly.

Mr. Burnett: I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. I agree that ferries are a vital ingredient of a sustainable rural and island transport policy. However, those ferries have to be built. The tendering process for the Torpoint ferries is now underway and Appledore shipyards in my constituency is part of that process. Does my hon. Friend agree that Appledore Shipbuilders—the last commercial shipyard left in England—has a record second to none, with an outstanding work force, product satisfaction and the finest quality ships built on time, at a fixed value-for-money price?

Andrew George: My hon. Friend sets me a challenge. He knows his constituency well, and he knows the quality and efficiency of the work in the Appledore shipyards. I do not doubt that he is correct, and I wish that company well in its future tenders, whether for the Torpoint ferry or other contracts.

The Minister may have views on the Isles of Scilly because he comes from a maritime constituency with shipping interests. One never knows but the Appledore shipyards may tender for the Scillonian contract as well.

I spoke about services to the Isles of Scilly last year, and the Minister rightly said that further studies should be undertaken on the options available to the Isles of Scilly concerning air and ferry services. Those were completed in April, and the Government said that they could not consider the issues under objective 1 funding, or match funding, unless the council of the Isles of Scilly produced a transport strategy. Councillors have run off and produced a transport strategy, which was published last month.

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Unsurprisingly, that strategy has several options, which include the necessity of replacing the Scillonian III. It is quite clear to anyone considering the matter—and I know that the Government have done so—that the Isles of Scilly Steamship Company Ltd. does not have the revenue stream to fund the replacement service between the mainland and the Isles of Scilly that modern users would expect.

Cornwall has a window of opportunity under objective 1 to put the matter right and make the investment, but match funding would have to be available. I urge the Minister to consider the issue carefully and not set the Isles of Scilly further hurdles to jump. Despite the studies, consultations and strategies that have been undertaken, the issue has not gone away. It still needs to be addressed, and I would be grateful if the Minister addressed it.

I appreciate that issues such as buses, rail and, certainly, transport links to the Isles of Scilly are challenges. I did not expect the Minister to come to the Chamber this afternoon with cheque book in hand or answers ready made, although of course my constituents will be deeply disappointed that he has not. However, I hope that he will meet me to discuss bus services, and perhaps he will come to the beautiful Isles of Scilly to meet the council and the operators of the service to discuss the transport links, so that the significant challenges faced by the community may be properly addressed. I thank hon. Members for listening to my case.

Mr. Frank Cook (in the Chair): I remind hon. Members that the standing convention in Westminster Hall is to commence the first of the three winding-up speeches 30 minutes before conclusion. I ask those participating to bear it in mind that we have only 34 minutes left and to keep their comments as pertinent and as brief as possible, especially when making or accepting interventions, which undoubtedly prolong the agony.

2.27 pm

Ms Candy Atherton (Falmouth and Camborne): I congratulate the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George), with whom I share west Cornwall, on securing the debate. I have been applying for an Adjournment debate on the issue for some months. Indeed, I felt rather like the unlucky lottery loser—every time I put my name down I knew that I would not be the one. It has been very frustrating. This is an opportunity not to be missed, so much so that when I met the Prime Minister last week, the top item on my agenda was transport issues.

I shall be honest and admit that transport in Cornwall is somewhat of a curate's egg. There are some very good parts, with which I am proud to be associated and with which the Government have been involved, but there is also a post-privatisation hotch-potch that has caused problems. More must be done.

The first issue that I want to raise is air links. The south-west has the lowest number of flights in the United Kingdom, not because the people in the south-west do not want to fly but because they lack the opportunity to do so. It is not helpful for people who live in a rural area to know that they can get from Gatwick to New York more quickly than they can get from Falmouth to Gatwick on public transport.

Ryanair's popular daily service into Cornwall has proved that there is a real demand for a range of air links. Nevertheless, British Airways announced that as part of its restructuring it is selling off its link, which is primarily used by the business community. The service is profitable and so popular that often one cannot get on it. I have no doubt that the link will be bought but, in the meantime, the decision sends out negative signals about access to rural communities to people who may want to conduct business in Cornwall.

Let me give some examples of how Cornwall will be affected if the nightmare scenario occurs and we lose the link. The 2001 study for the then Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions concluded that losing the Newquay-Plymouth-Gatwick link would mean annual passenger disbenefits—that means costs—of £8.4 million if people were forced to use surface transport such as road or rail. It would mean 3,000 job losses in the wider economy of Devon and Cornwall. That represents a huge number of people in a predominantly rural economy such as ours in Cornwall.

People say to me, "Ah, but now we've got Ryanair." That does not provide the business service that people who fly on international routes need if they are to conduct business in the area. I tell the Minister that our party said in 1997 that we would use European Union regulations to protect regional flights. France uses public service orders to ensure that peripheral regions are connected. There is a campaign in Devon and Cornwall—and countrywide, I have to say—to earmark a third Heathrow runway for regional flights, and I am inclined to support that. Government consultation is currently going on, although I understand that the Government are saying that EU regulations may not allow for the protection of existing slots because that could be seen as state aid.

The pressure on the slots is high and they are subject to heavy and extensive lobbying. However, if an airline ceases to use a regional slot, it should surely be ring-fenced for other regional slots and not given to international, and mostly trans-Atlantic, flights. There is also a campaign for regions to buy the slots. That is currently against EU regulations but I understand that the European Commission is minded to examine the matter. Will the Government and the Minister look into it?

We now come to roads. Goss moor is a high priority to my constituents. Anyone who has tried to get in or out of the county will know the nightmare that Goss moor can be. In the summer, it seems impossible to get through because of tourists coming into the county, although we welcome them, of course. In the winter, we dig up the road to repair it so that tourists can use it in the summer. The blockages cause everyone misery and I am delighted that we are moving forward.

A fantastic nature reserve, called, I believe, the Cornish everglades, will be created when the new dual carriageway is finished. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members may laugh, but that is what will be created. The needs of the Cornish economy will be well served when the new road progresses. It is a great success of which the Government can rightly be proud. The Highways

Agency is due to publish its plans for the A30 at Goss moor this year—followed by the inevitable public inquiry. I suspect that a protest by Swampy will follow, although technical engineers reliably inform me that he will immediately sink into the mire.

Mr. Tyler: As the hon. Lady knows, the section of the road is in my constituency. I would not want her to give the impression that a public inquiry is inevitable. Under the previous Conservative Government, as she will recall, there was considerable consultation about the stretch of road. Sadly, that Government stopped work on it as part of the road investment cuts that occurred at the end of their period of office. We could make rapid progress because there is broad support for improvements to the A30, and I endorse what the hon. Lady said about it. I also endorse what she said about air links, and the Minister knows that we had a useful exchange about that.

Ms Atherton: I am glad that we can agree about something. I hope that there will not be a public inquiry because I know that 99 per cent. of my constituents are 110 per cent. behind the scheme and pray daily for the opening of the road, as do I.

This year's transport settlement was excellent for Cornwall. The local transport capital settlement means that it will receive £18.5 million next year, and £150 million has been spent on improvements to the A30.

The other burning issue for Cornwall is across the border in our neighbour, Devon, on the A303 east of Illminster. I am sure that the Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw), has an interest in that. I tell the Minister that we need a resolution to the Blackdown hills issue as soon as possible. There is great news about the improvements to the A303 that were announced before Christmas, but not having a decision on the Blackdown hills is a real problem and a disbenefit to the region.

Now we come to railways—oh dear. Virgin Trains has announced cuts to south-west links, and especially evening trains between Plymouth and Bristol. I am sure that the Minister is more than unhappy about that. It is also halving the number of trains stopping at Gloucester. That is a negative. I know that it is a matter for Virgin, but any pressure that the Minister could bring to bear would help.

When I met the Strategic Rail Authority and Railtrack in October, there seemed to be progress—this is the good news—on the Probus to Burngullow dualling, which is our main link through the county.

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): Is the hon. Lady aware that Virgin has not only cut the service but kept the published timetable in place? People will go to catch a train, because it is in the published timetable, but the train will not be there.

Ms Atherton: Branson should be ashamed of himself for doing that, and the *Western Morning News* can quote me on that.

However, there are some positives, and the dualling of Probus to Burngullow is critical for trains coming to my end of Cornwall. As I said, before Christmas I met Railtrack, which has a circular rail map of investment: the further from the centre a place is, the less likely it is to get its rail improvements. For those nearer the middle, the investment may just happen, so naturally I looked at the outer rim for the Cornwall improvements. However, I had to look further and further into the centre because Probus to Burngullow is a central priority for what is now Network Rail, which is good. I congratulate the county council on leading on that work and on the branch line between Truro and Falmouth. The Minister will be pleased to know that we now have a Sunday service, which we have not had before.

None the less, we want to double the number of trains. This September the combined universities project is taking its first students in Penryn. Thousands of students—and more each year—will need access, and we do not want them to travel by car. We want them to be on trains, so we need to double the number of trains. There is real potential, and I hope that Network Rail will get on with the work led by the county council.

Reducing journey times to London is critical, and rail must complement road and air travel, rather than be an alternative to them. We have had the farce about voyager trains and sea water at Dawlish—the Monty Python team could not have invented it, and nor should they. Will the Minister put more pressure on Virgin to sort out the problem? First Great Western's plans for the future include increasing to eight the number of trains a day to Cornwall. It also plans to cut journey times between Penzance and London by 12 minutes in the next two years. Oh dear me—12 minutes hardly makes us feel that the company is getting to grips with the problems, does it?

To highlight the issue, I received a letter yesterday morning from a constituent, Catherine Hayes-Davies. She went to London before Christmas and was half an hour late arriving. She writes:

"However, the return journey was a different matter. The 18.03 service was cancelled, although no announcement was made, and no information to that effect appeared on the display boards. The next train was posted as the 18.17 to Penzance, platform 8. When I arrived at the platform and reached C carriage I was unable to board the train for the crush of people already inside. About 10–12 of us were standing on the platform, trying to board, and this pattern was being repeated all down the train. Even the 1st class was packed with people standing all down the carriage and at all access doors. At about 18.30 an official—presumably a guard, attempted to close the carriage door. When my group refused to stand back—we all had reserved seats, valid tickets and were going to stations in Cornwall—we were threatened with the police. The others were, like myself, all senior citizens, so maybe it was our age that prevailed with the official."

My constituent was eventually able to get on to the train, which finally arrived two hours late. That highlights the problem.

I am aware of time and will talk only briefly about the subject of buses, which is high on the agenda in my constituency postbag. The Government have undoubtedly done great things in Cornwall with buses, including the new Bissoe Valley scheme, which has for the first time provided new bus services and a calling system to get the buses to come to individuals. That is a totally new experience for some of my constituents and is warmly to be welcomed.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the appalling consultation that took place over Christmas. Some 57 school routes and 27 bus routes are under threat in the

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county. People are very concerned. I note that my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey) is here. Excellent partnerships exist with the county councils in Avon and Devon. It has been suggested that the partnership in Cornwall is not all that it could be. I ask the Minister to look into that. Finally, transport issues in Cornwall affect not only the hon. Member for St. Ives and his constituents, but my constituents in Falmouth and Camborne. As one of the Cornish MPs present, I should like to be included in the meeting to discuss transport links with Cornwall if it is decided to have one.

2.40 pm

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): I apologise to the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) for arriving in the middle of his speech. As hon. Members will know, my constituency is the only constituency in England that cannot be reached on foot from Westminster, however important it is to try. We were therefore particularly disappointed that the Minister's announcement at the end of last month did not mention ferries or offshore shipping, although we welcome the money that has been provided for the Ryde interchange. I do not propose to repeat all the points that I made in the debate last year on this subject.

I should like to update the House on the progress of the work following the cross-Solent study which reported in March 2001. The study was designed to investigate how assistance can be given for people crossing the Solent for health reasons or for education, training or job seeking, and has so far generated two schemes. The first is a trial scheme under single regeneration budget 6 to help unemployed people and jobseekers who are looking for work on the mainland. That scheme will benefit residents of the six wards in Ryde, which is only one eighth of the population of my constituency. The second scheme involves health and hospital transport, and it is being put together by the primary care trust. It is nearly ready to implement, and I am pleased to have been able to assist through my office.

Regrettably, no progress has yet been made on cross-Solent travel for the purposes of education, although I am informed that the Learning and Skills Council is now willing to fund transport if local courses are not viable. Many of my constituents share my disappointment that, 22 months after the report was received, the schemes are still awaiting implementation. It is also disappointing that those schemes will benefit only a small proportion of my constituents. They have to be unemployed, seeking work, live in Ryde or need to cross the Solent for purposes of health.

Cross-Solent costs are expensive. Young people and other travellers need to cross the Solent less expensively in both directions. We obviously want to improve our tourist trade. We find it difficult to understand why the Government are so energetic at promoting new airports in the south-east to encourage tourists to go to Malaga, the West Indies and goodness knows where, when they are not encouraging work to reduce the cost of crossing the Solent. The county council is legally empowered to subsidise cross-Solent fares, just as it currently subsidises bus fares, but despite a 13 per cent. rate increase last year and despite the Government's settlement this year, it cannot afford to do so. The council tells me:

"We have . . . discussed the issue with Government Office for the South East and . . . can confirm that GOSE officials briefed the Minister on this issue prior to his recent visit to the Island."

I presume that that means the Minister for Local Government and the Regions. The council adds that it is

"keen to explore other possible funding opportunities and hope to raise this issue when we meet GOSE officers later this month."

That shows the level of urgency with which this matter is being dealt, although it is not the level of urgency that I or my constituents would like. These issues have been raised not only with me but with my predecessor and my predecessor's predecessor. It would help if Isle of Wight council had a policy on cross-Solent fares. For years my constituents have wanted reductions in ferry fares but, as far as I am aware, the council has yet to put any concrete proposals to Ministers. In any response that Ministers give to the council, I hope that they will encourage it to present concrete proposals.

Finally, I wish to discuss car parking. That may seem a terribly parochial issue to raise but, at the beginning of the previous Parliament, Ministers said that they wanted car parking in towns to be reduced. They wanted a reduction in commuter parking and in parking for shopping purposes. That will be unrealistic in rural areas until there is a highly effective bus service. I am glad that the Secretary of State has reversed, or at least watered down, his aspirations to reduce traffic. I hope that he will also water down his aspirations to get rid of car parking in towns—aspirations that my local authority is quoting as a justification for allowing houses to be built without adequate parking. That has led to the clogging up of the streets of Cowes, which is one of our key ports for people commuting to work on the mainland. The council has sold off car parks in Cowes and Newport because it says that the Government do not want local car parking to be provided and want an end to such car parking. I hope that the Minister will clarify the position for the benefit of the council and, more importantly, for the benefit of my constituents.

2.47 pm

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I shall try to keep my remarks as brief as those of the previous speaker. I wish to join those who have criticised Virgin's decision. I will say a bit more about that later. The decision has caused difficulties in the whole of the south-west and, I presume, beyond. We need to say to the Minister, loud and clear, that negotiations with that company are required at the highest level.

I want to start with buses. I am always pleased to come to a debate that has been initiated by the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George). This debate may seem like a rerun, because the people who speak will be more or less the people who spoke last time. However, there is no reason why we should not have an annual event to consider this important issue.

Many points have been made on the principles of how to improve bus transport. In my constituency in Gloucestershire, we have been able to make use of some of the Government's initiatives. However, there are a few caveats, and there have been problems with the

parish transport grant. I am aware that that comment will provoke sensitivities, and I know that that grant is not the sole responsibility of my hon. Friend and that he has to work with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Some capacity building is required to make parish councils realise that they have to work with other parish councils to come up with suitable plans. I hope that we will be able to analyse what has happened so far. It may sound ridiculous to say so, but we cannot give the money away. I have been trying to encourage many of my parish councils to come forward, but there is a nervousness because of the usual worries about where revenue streams will come from in future.

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): Does my hon. Friend acknowledge the ongoing problems with the co-ordination of bus services because of the impact of competition on authorities? Sometimes, competitor bus services cannot co-operate on joint ticketing and joint timetables. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is important to get rid of such bureaucracy so that our constituents in rural and urban areas get the best co-ordinated, most appropriate bus services?

Mr. Drew: I was going to make those points, so I thank my hon. Friend for saving me the effort. There have been calls to establish a strategic bus partnership similar to the Strategic Rail Authority. It need not be a national organisation, but could be organised at a regional or sub-regional level. We need to recognise what is happening to bus services. They were fragmented under deregulation, so it is difficult to co-ordinate initiatives and the money made available by the Government. I hope that the Minister will try to find ways in which we can do some valuable work through greater co-ordination between local authorities, the bus industry and bus users.

We have a promising bus service initiative called village link, which is an interactive run-around. It is responsive to passengers' needs, which leads to a series of problems. By the nature of things, people have to be organised enough to know when to book the bus in order to get on it. Systems of communication need to be examined more effectively.

Problems with reliability and information bedevil rural bus services. We should solve the two problems together. I am not saying that we should have the same interactive kit that is on London buses at every rural bus stop, but it could be installed at the main bus stops. If people know that there is only a 10-minute wait for the next bus, they will wait. At the moment the problem is that they could be waiting 10 minutes or two hours—or three days in some places, although that is a different kettle of fish. We cannot overcome such problems immediately.

There are some good initiatives in my area. Dursley and Cam plan to run an interactive bus and draw down the money that I mentioned. We must not forget the voluntary sector—there is a ring and ride in my area. We do not fund such services adequately or make enough use of them. The statutory services often dump on the voluntary services. In the unsavoury past, when the ambulance service was under pressure, the health transport people assumed that the voluntary bus service would pick people up and take them to hospital. That is not acceptable. We need to fund and use voluntary services more appropriately. We must also ensure that they work properly within the statutory sector.

On the subject of trains, I have already made a plaintive plea about Virgin Trains. Virgin has dropped plans to run the Paddington to Birmingham service via Gloucester and Cheltenham, which has caused a new problem. Hindsight is always a wonderful thing, but Virgin was going to run that service without any subsidy at all. It has pulled out because it cannot get space at Paddington. We must now find another operator to take on the service, and it looks likely that Wessex Trains will be able to do so, but it is seeking a subsidy of £250,000 from the Strategic Rail Authority. Will my hon. Friend the Minister consider that case? We cannot afford to lose those trains, for all the reasons identified earlier.

Such problems give the railways a bad reputation. Anybody who has travelled by train to Paddington over the past couple of months will know that the station has had what can only be described as a nervous breakdown. The station coped commendably well with all the problems that came on the back of the Paddington rail crash, but more recently there have been new problems with flooding and signal breakdown. Those problems are regular rather than occasional occurrences, and we must do something about them. It would be wrong to blame the operators, because these are infrastructure problems. The signalling must be renewed.

I make my usual plea for the redoubling of the line between Kemble and Swindon, through the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown). Now that the fourth platform is open at Swindon there are extra trains going through, and we must avoid a bottleneck further along the line.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will put pressure on the SRA, which is considering the matter. There is money available, but I gather that the scheme must be evaluated. I am grateful to my friend Clive Morforth, who always brings rail problems to me. It is people like him who make us appreciate that trains are needed.

I come now to a different subject. I join the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr. Burnett) in his plea for Appledore Shipbuilders. I met representatives of one of the shipping companies in my constituency, which contains a big port called Sharpness. That company would join in any appeal for more British build and more repair. It would also ask that we recognise that the commissioning of transport in this country through shipping is greatly in need of—I will not say renationalising—a bit of patriotic fervour, because all the competitors seem to be able to overcome state aid, whereas we do not.

Mr. Burnett: I am delighted to hear of the hon. Gentleman's support for Appledore Shipbuilders. He has hit on the crucial point that competition must be fair and, in order to be fair, there must be the same ground rules. Does he agree that it is grossly unfair when United Kingdom shipbuilders and other companies are competing against overseas companies for orders? It is

[Mr. Burnett]

unfair that those overseas companies receive huge subsidies, particularly in steel, which they can obtain at a reduced price.

Mr. Drew: I have never been a great fan of the state aid rules under the EU, but I wish that we would interpret them in the same way as the Germans and the Dutch.

2.56 pm

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) on securing the annual debate on rural and island transport. I also welcome the Minister to Westminster Hall. I have often referred to him as the Minister with special responsibility for Westminster Hall. Last week, we tried to have a debate on marine pollution without him, but it did not really work, however hard the Minister for Rural Affairs tried, so I am delighted to see him back today.

I was slightly fazed to see the preponderance of hon. Members from the south-west of England and, indeed, Cornwall, as my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives reminds me. While remaining in the United Kingdom, it is impossible to get further away from my constituency than to visit my hon. Friend's end of the country. I draw attention to the number of hon. Members who have spoken about trains. My constituency has not a single yard of train track in it, so I do not consider that I am particularly well qualified to pick up on some of the points that have been made. However, it did strike me that the basic issues of planning and investment, co-ordination and integration are much the same wherever we go and whatever places are involved.

My hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives started his contribution with remarks about buses, and his was a familiar story in many parts of the country. He was speaking about old stock running on unprofitable routes in rural areas. The point was first made by my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) and picked up later by the hon. Members for Stroud (Mr. Drew) and for South Swindon (Ms Drown), who said that such problems stem from bus deregulation in 1985. That is absolutely true.

Rural Britain is reaping a bitter harvest of deregulation. Although I accept that that was something that no doubt the Minister at the time would have opposed, the underlying problems caused by deregulation will not be fixed and will not get better on their own. I accept that the Government have undertaken several useful initiatives, but unless and until the underlying problems of integration and—dare I say it, not being a big advocate of big government myself—regulation are addressed, anything else that is done will just be tinkering.

My hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives referred to the difficulties caused in the Isles of Scilly. I was astonished to hear that there would not be automatic investment in new ferry infrastructure there. If there is, ferries will no doubt be built at the splendid boatyard that my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr. Burnett) advertised magnificently. I hope that the Minister will afford the islands in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives the same opportunities that are given to those north of the border. Generous though those opportunities may be by comparison, they are only the very basic opportunities that Government should provide.

The hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton) made a cri de coeur—one that is close to my own heart—for public service obligation orders. I noticed that the Minister just managed not to wince as those words tripped off my lips. The hon. Lady rightly identified the importance of air links to rural and island communities for business and tourism. I sympathise with what she says about the withdrawal of British Airways. What happens to the slots in Gatwick and Heathrow for regional air services once they have been withdrawn? That is a familiar problem for those in the highlands and islands—British Airways used to operate a service from Inverness to Heathrow, but it was withdrawn. We only have the Inverness to Gatwick service left. If the Minister has anything new to say about a public service obligation on the Inverness to Gatwick route, I shall be equally interested to hear that.

Through ticketing and transferring from another operator on to a British Airways flight taking people elsewhere in the country causes problems for business. There are difficulties for tourism also. Advertising and marketing are not as readily available to smaller companies as they are to companies such as British Airways. I share the hon. Lady's frustrations, which other hon. Members have also outlined, at the implementation of EU regulations.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman will comment on landing charges at airports. Landing charges would be incongruent to smaller airlines that might come into many of the regional airports, particularly Inverness, to fill the gap left by British Airways.

Mr. Carmichael: Landing charges, in particular on the route operated by Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd. to which the hon. Gentleman refers, is an issue on which I could probably fill another 90-minute Adjournment debate. Although I sympathise with the issues that he raises, I shall resist the temptation to address them at length today.

The hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne made the most eloquent remark of the day when she said, "Now we come to railways—oh dear." That really says it all.

The hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) made a commendably succinct speech. He is one of a select group of three of us in the House who have island constituencies. I hope that the Minister will address his points. He made the link between transport and jobs and training. Likewise, the hon. Member for Stroud spoke of the need to co-ordinate bus authorities. He made an interesting point about interactive bus stops and highlighted the importance of the voluntary sector. I endorse that point. We have a dial-a-bus that seems to struggle from one financial crisis to another. None the less, it is a service that is appreciated by many in my constituency.

I wish to air one other area of transport policy, although I appreciate that the Minister does not have direct responsibility for it. It is a matter worth

recognising. Public transport does not really exist in many remote parts of the country. On the west of Shetland—a remoter part of my constituency—it is next to impossible to run conventional public transport because of the sparsity of the population. I suspect that with the best will in the world that will always be the case. For that reason, many people rely on the private car. That causes real difficulties. I anticipate, considering world events, that oil prices will rise, and that will have a knock-on effect at petrol pumps all over the country.

My constituents routinely pay between 10p and 20p a litre more for petrol than people on the mainland. If the price rises, they will be hit disproportionately because as well as higher prices they must pay fuel duty and value added tax. If the price is higher to start with, we end up paying even more. Many of my constituents are on low or fixed incomes and live in the remoter parts of island communities, and it is particularly regressive that they should get hammered in this way. I suggest to the Minister that this, along with so many other aspects of transport policy, is an issue of social inclusion.

I do not know who is to blame. The retailers blame the wholesalers, and the wholesalers blame the distributors, who in turn blame the retailers. It goes round in a vicious circle. The Petrol Retailers Association made several suggestions to me that it might be possible to franchise the selling of petrol. Recently, the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs suggested that the vehicle excise duty rate could be varied in some areas to compensate. I hope that that suggestion gets a fair hearing from the Treasury.

We have heard from different Members from different areas about a variety of problems, but the fundamental issues are the same. I wish the Minister well in dealing with them, but judging by performance to date there remains a great deal to do.

3.6 pm

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): I congratulate the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) on securing the debate, and I congratulate all those who participated in it. I assure the Chamber of my continuing interest in transport: my husband works for an American airline company, which, I regret to say, does not have immediate plans to fly from Cornwall to the States. I also have interests in the Royal Automobile Club, Railtrack, Eurotunnel, British Airways, British Aerospace, and First Group plc. I hope that that qualifies me to speak today.

The personalities on the Front Bench may have changed since last year's debate on this topic, but the content does not appear to have changed greatly. Contrary to those who expressed surprise at the preponderant presence of Members from the south-west and Cornwall, I am delighted to note the number of Celts and Scots represented today. Perhaps that could form the new alliance in the House.

The main theme in the contribution of the hon. Member for St. Ives was parity of investment in public transport services. That is one of the themes that he explored last year, particularly as regards recognition of a public service obligation through possible public subsidies for air and sea services, such as those provided in Scotland. He did not rehearse the point that he made last year on the objective 1 funds that Cornwall could use. Has progress been made on that? Representing as I do a constituency in north Yorkshire, I know that we look with some envy at objective 1 funds. We also look with envy at the Barnett formula, from which most of the possible subsidies to the ferry service in Scotland are paid—and the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) referred to that. I will return to the public service obligation on ferry and air services later.

Like many Members present, I represent a deeply rural community, containing four market towns and a large part of the outskirts of York. We know that the price of fuel has soared under Labour, and that has affected all forms of transport, particularly bus users and motorists. It is of most pressing concern to the road haulage industry. We took soundings from our contacts in Cornwall, and their points reflected the content of this debate. The service is of poor quality, rail journey times must be improved and roads, particularly the A30, could do with being dualled. The delays at Goss moor were heavily underlined by contacts there.

It was also put forcefully to me that the transport difficulties mean that crops, fish and other products from Cornwall cannot get to the markets quickly enough. However, rather than a handout, people want sufficiently modern transport links. Funding a replacement for the Scillonian ferry was certainly of great interest to them. I will return to my personal campaign to improve short sea and coastal shipping. That may be a way forward, and the Minister might like to support it.

Fuel tax increased by 6 per cent. in the Government's first three Budgets. Indeed, in the third Budget, the increase for diesel was 12 per cent., giving the United Kingdom the highest fuel prices in Europe. Our priority must therefore be to improve public transport. It is interesting that the Liberal Democrats in general, and the hon. Member for St. Ives today, place great emphasis on improving public transport, yet in certain areas, where the obvious way forward is public-private partnerships, they notably oppose them.

Labour pledged in its 10-year transport plan to increase the number of passenger journeys by bus by 10 per cent. in England by 2010. Contrary to what other hon. Members have said, I think it important to note that bus usage has increased since privatisation, particularly in urban areas, although it has materially declined in rural areas under this Government. They must say what the reasons are for that. In 2001 in particular, bus use declined in every area apart from London, Birmingham and eastern England. My question for the Minister is why.

It is commonly believed, and I firmly believe, that Labour is letting rural communities down. The £50 million that I gather the Government provided for rural bus services is a paltry sum compared to the huge amounts taken from rural motorists in fuel tax. For many in rural areas, a car is a necessity, not a luxury. According to figures provided by the House of Commons, some 37 per cent. of households in rural areas have two cars, whereas 40 per cent. of households in London and inner-city areas have no cars. That shows the dependence on the motor car in rural areas.

Only 20 per cent. of the money going to rural bus services can support existing services; the rest must go to create new bus services. I think that all those of us who

[Miss Anne McIntosh]

represent rural areas recognise that rural bus services have been cut. Like many colleagues, I have had to write strong letters to the bus companies and the local authorities depending on sparsely—

Ms Drown: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Miss McIntosh: In view of the time, I am afraid that I will not be able to accommodate the hon. Lady on this occasion. I place on the record how disappointing we find it that bus services have been cancelled as a result of what could be seen as a lack of Government funds meeting the right targets.

Labour now appears to want to abolish the fuel duty rebate. It was the Conservatives who first proposed extending the fuel tax rebate to community transport in 1999, so we were delighted to see Labour belatedly adopt that policy in its 10-year transport plan—we can claim that as a Conservative achievement. In view of the Government's consultation, we should now like to know what the Government's proposals are for the future of the fuel duty rebate.

On rail investment, the 10-year transport plan promised that old standard rolling stock would be withdrawn by the end of 2004. Will the Government confirm that the 10-year transport plan targets for that will be met? We are also concerned whether existing track-side electricity supply will be powerful enough to run the proposed longer 12 to 15-carriage trains. The hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) raised the question of the reduced level of Virgin train services. What assessment have the Minister and the Government made of the impact of that reduction in services to the south-west and Cornwall on the local economy and employment prospects?

I should like to put on the record the fact that the reliability of train services has decreased. In 1997, one in 10 trains ran on time, but by 2002 the figure was one in five. The number of complaints from rail passengers recorded by the Rail Passengers Council last year rose by 146 per cent., so clearly all is not well on the railways.

We would like more freight to be moved by rail. We recognise the role that rail freight facility grants have played—the take-up of those grants for last year alone was £30 million. Will the Minister reassure me—and those who have put their concerns to me—that the rail freight facility grants will continue?

Will the Minister respond to the statement by the senior Government adviser, Richard Bowker, the Chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority, that the £33.5 billion of public money earmarked for the railways over the next 10 years is running out, and that the expansion of projects that have already been identified has been put on hold?

Will the Minister support my personal campaign to increase the quantity of goods transported in and around the UK on water? Does he share my regret that both the amount and volume of goods carried by coastal shipping decreased dramatically over the past five years, and that fewer of those goods are now carried by UK-flagged ships? Some 10 years ago, 46 per cent. of all freight carried on coastal shipping was carried by UK-flagged ships: that figure has now decreased to 16 per cent.

My final question to the Minister concerns public service obligations. In this Chamber, some two or three months ago, we had a discussion on whether the Government would create such public service obligations for air services between Inverness and London. The Minister has been asked today whether he will consider creating public service obligations for air and ferry services between Penzance and the Isles of Scilly. If he is prepared to consider that, could he tell us what the public sector spending obligations would be, and how they would be met?

3.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): I congratulate the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) on securing the debate, some 12 months after he secured a similar debate. I notice that the players in the debate today are similar to those who were here before—I see some familiar faces.

The hon. Member for St. Ives said that it was a year since the previous debate, and that much had changed. I will tell him of three things that have changed, among many others. Local transport-planned funding in Cornwall has increased substantially. We have announced the cross-moor improvements, which I know will be welcome in his constituency, and the Dobwalls bypass, which is vital to his constituency and to Cornwall.

I was reading in my local newspapers last night—the *Plymouth Evening Herald* and the *Western Morning News*—both of which are excellent, that the Government were going to be pressed by eight Liberal Democrat Members from across Devon and Cornwall. It is unfortunate that only two of them have stayed to hear the summing-up. Perhaps that shows that one must be cautious when putting out a press release. If someone were being unkind, they might say that that information was a little like a Liberal Democrat publication of their "Focus" leaflets—about 25 per cent. accurate.

The hon. Member for St. Ives also congratulated the Government on the great improvements in rural public transport, and I thank him for his comments. I will respond later to some of the specific points that he raised, but before that I will respond to points made by other hon. Members. We will do as we did before, and respond in writing on any matter that is not covered this afternoon.

My hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton), who was present in the previous debate, raised the importance of air links. There is no doubt about the importance of air links to the peripheral areas of the country—in particular, the service to her area of Newquay. We had a useful and interesting cross-party meeting yesterday at which we discussed the matter. I hope that the temporary uncertainty will be resolved.

I remember lobbying on this issue some 10 years ago with the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) and the then hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton. If my hon. Friend wants to head a delegation to see me on some of these matters, perhaps with the hon. Member for St. Ives—I know how well they co-operate on important issues concerning Cornwall—I should be happy to see her.

I share my hon. Friend's concern about the time of rail journeys. Penzance to Paddington is an exceedingly long journey, but reliability and predictability are important to passengers as well as the time a journey takes. People want to know that a four-hour journey does indeed take four, not five, hours. That is more important than slicing a few minutes off the journey time. It is unpredictability that people do not like.

The hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner), who serves a true island community, asked about car parking and planning. PPG13 sets out our policy on car parking. We want planning authorities to set out sensible local parking policies in rural areas. We have to find a balance between ensuring that traffic does not undermine and reduce the attractiveness of an area, and providing places for people to park, particularly where there is inadequate public transport. The hon. Gentleman needs to take up the issue with his local authority, as I am sure he has done. If he feels that our policy is not being implemented, I am sure he will come back to me or to the Deputy Prime Minister's Department.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew), who took part in the debate last year, made some good points, particularly about greater co-ordination between local authorities and bus providers. He would be interested to know that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State is now involved with the bus forum, which is bringing together all the players to co-ordinate many of the issues that my hon. Friend was talking about. I agree that they have been too dissipated and we need to bring those issues together.

My hon. Friend also referred to the weaknesses of deregulation under the Transport Act 1985. I can only agree with him. It was implemented by the party of the hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh). I take it from her remarks that she is critical of what happened at the time. The hon. Lady shakes her head. She is not critical of what happened at the time, despite saying that it destroyed the bus services in her area, which is interesting. The Transport Act 2000 addressed some of those issues, certainly in England, by introducing powers for quality bus partnerships and contracts. My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud should look at how they operate in his area to see whether improvements can be made.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) is now sitting on the Front Bench for the Liberal Democrats. He was on the Back Benches last time. We have here hon. Members representing the two extremities of the United Kingdom, from the top of the Shetlands to the southern tip of the country at St. Ives. I do not want to bring party politics into the debate. I am not one to do that, as you know, Mr. Cook. The hon. Gentleman accepted that much had been done and then said that there was much to be done, which I accept. I wonder what he would have said if we had here one of the other Liberal Democrat Members from the south-west—perhaps the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws), who has been given the task by the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor), the Treasury spokesman for the party, who was obviously given the job by his party leader, of finding £2 billion of spending cuts. I wonder whether the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland has thought that through; if there is £2 billion in spending cuts, some of which will fall on transport, perhaps he should take us into his confidence a little and tell us whether that will affect any of the issues he has raised.

I cannot let go the many little gems in the hon. Member for Vale of York's contribution. I shall pick up one or two. She talked about short sea shipping. That is an issue we are very involved with and we can see great potential for the sea around our shores taking some traffic off the roads. The hon. Lady will know that we have provided freight facilities grants to enable freight to be carried on inland waterways, too, and off the road.

The hon. Lady referred to the decline of bus use but, for goodness' sake, it was her own party that brought in such legislation. I emphasise that this Government introduced some of the rural and urban bus challenge funding that has brought new money and services to many communities. We did not hear anything about that in her speech.

The hon. Lady referred to the United Kingdom flag and the number of ships plying the sea around the country. However, under this Government, we have seen a massive increase of tonnage under the UK flag. She shakes her head, but it has doubled over the past five years. Her party did nothing about it. We saw ships drift from our flag, but now we have seen a massive increase in their return. I know that the Liberal Democrats will have to find some cuts, but the hon. Lady's party has promised the people of this country a 20 per cent. cut in the budget. We shall be reminding her constantly where those cuts will fall. How will the cut be achieved? Which services will be cut? Which services will be reduced?

Miss McIntosh: The hon. Gentleman is putting words into my mouth. There will be cuts not to services, but to bureaucracy and red tape. There is a good illustration in the magazine of the National Union of Marine, Aviation and Shipping Transport Officers this month showing how much transport carried by UK flag ships has decreased under his stewardship as the Minister with responsibility for shipping. Has he had a chance to read it?

Mr. Jamieson: Yes. I have regular contact with NUMAST and it recognises that the number of ships on the UK flag has increased substantially. I should be interested to know where such cuts in bureaucracy will be made to give a 20 per cent. increase. Why did such matters never happen during those 18 years? It sounds like a policy that one has the luxury of talking about in opposition, but that could never form part of a Government's policy.

I say to the hon. Member for St. Ives that the Government recognise the importance of better transport and economic social regeneration in rural areas, especially in his constituency. It is a long way from anywhere. It is a little like the Shetlands. It is a difficult place to access and in which to set up new businesses and industry. Transport plays a vital role in such matters. The hon. Gentleman has recognised the fact that we obtained objective 1 funding for Cornwall. Some years ago, my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne met the Prime Minister and talked through the matter. I am delighted that my right hon. Friend argued the case strongly for Cornwall and the United Kingdom. It was largely the intervention of

[Mr. Jamieson]

my hon. Friend and the Prime Minister that achieved the funding. I note that the hon. Member for St. Ives is nodding in agreement.

Andrew George: The Minister's response has not reflected the consensual approach that I thought I was taking. There was a certain rewriting of history in his latter remarks. Does he accept the fact—whether or not it be cross-party—that we are deeply worried about transport? Will he keep a close monitoring brief on the current bus service problems in Cornwall? Will he meet me to deal with links between the mainland and the Isles of Scilly?

Mr. Jamieson: Yes, I will. There is too little time left to deal with the latter point now. It is of such importance, so it would be better if we met with interested parties to discuss it. I accept his worries about the review of the bus services in Cornwall that is being carried out by First Group. I understand that it has stated publicly that its proposed new network will improve the quality and quantity of bus services. It will be up to Cornwall county council to hold First Group to its word and ensure that proper notice is given to people of any changes that take place. I understand that Cornwall will not be able to assess the budget implications of a re-tendering process or the result of the review until the beginning of February.

Cornwall has been particularly successful in bidding for money for buses. The hon. Gentleman made a point about us making an announcement on some of the rural bus challenge funding in about a fortnight. I will not make an announcement today, but certainly, the matter will be one our priorities.

There are points to which I have not replied, but I am willing to take them up with hon. Members in correspondence.

North Bristol Airport

3.30 pm

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): Perhaps I may begin by sympathising with the Minister, who, I assume, will carry on and show himself to be a man of many talents by dealing with a different topic.

In many ways, the proposed north Bristol airport at Pilning is the dog that did not bark. With all the row and fuss about proposed new airports at Cliffe and Rugby, the possibility of one in north Bristol has somehow not managed to hit the headlines. Indeed, I was rather taken by surprise when the Secretary of State for Transport made a statement to the House last July about the consultation. He went through each of the regional papers and the possibility of a north Bristol airport was not even mentioned. That is not a criticism, just an observation. The airport was not deemed sufficiently important or likely to warrant mention in the oral statement. The possibility of a new airport at north Bristol was first mentioned on page 148 of the consultation document.

I should like a steer from the Minister on how serious a possibility that airport is. I have raised the matter with a number of people in my part of south Gloucestershire, and there have been two reactions. Some local residents, many of whom have written in response to the consultation document, have said that it would be a completely unsuitable place for an airport. As the Minister might expect, I shall suggest one or two reasons why they might be right. However, the other people to whom I have spoken have said, "Don't waste our time. It's so implausible. This was obviously just thrown in as an afterthought. It's a decoy for expansion somewhere else."

The Minister looks sceptical. I am glad to have this opportunity to ask him to put on the record the Government's approach to a north Bristol airport. Is the scheme a runner? Is it pie in the sky, or do the residents of Pilning and Severnside need to think seriously about it? In addition to the proposed north Bristol airport mentioned in the consultation document, a different group this week has proposed a Severnside airport on the other side of the Severn estuary and is putting plans before the Government. It would be helpful to have a steer from the Minister about what the response will be. I do not expect him to pre-empt a long consultation process, but the people I represent will be disappointed if he does not say something about how realistic some of those schemes are. Is the north Bristol airport a slim possibility, or are the Government taking the scheme very seriously? I hope he will at least tell us that.

Last year, the Secretary of State for Transport announced:

> "The Government will next year publish a White Paper on air travel. As part of that, we will set out our concluded views on how much additional airport capacity is needed and where it should be sited."—[*Official Report*, 23 July 2002; Vol. 389, c. 847.]

It is fairly clear that when the White Paper comes out—and I appreciate that it has been delayed—it will be about not just "How much?" but "Where?" I gather that the most recent suggested date for the White Paper is autumn or perhaps slightly later. I am sure that the Minister will comment on that. It might be expected

that, when it comes out, the residents of Pilning and the greater area will be put out of their misery one way or another. I am pleased to see the Minister nodding at that suggestion; that is encouraging.

In the short time available, I do not propose to discuss the background to the entire consultation, or the modelling and projections. I should like to give the Minister a quick tour of Pilning and some idea as to why it might not be the right place to put an international airport. First, the runways might run from north to south through Pilning. As they fly in from the north, passengers will have a scenic view of Berkley power station. Further on, they will be able to have a nice look at Oldbury nuclear power station. So, just a few miles from the proposed site, they will pass one closed power station and one active nuclear power plant. Could the Minister clarify the current rules on flying over nuclear power stations? There is obviously heightened sensitivity because of 11 September, but what general constraints are there on flying over nuclear power plants? In this case, aeroplanes coming from the north would go near a nuclear power station. We all occasionally hear of tragic accidents in which aeroplanes come down just short of airports, and one gets very nervous when nuclear power plants are involved. One, therefore, worries about proposals to build an airport next to a nuclear power plant.

If the planes came from the south, they would pass the major chemical plants at Avonmouth and Severnside. Underground oil and gas stores and the gas-fired power station at Hallen are also very close to the proposed site. Again, those are not places over which we would want planes to fly.

Perhaps the idea is that the planes will fly east to west. However, they would then have to fly over the densely populated areas of north Bristol, such as Bradley Stoke, and perhaps over the new north field at Filton airport, which is used by BAE Systems. Some 2,000 houses are yet to be built there. One starts to wonder whether the proposed site is the best place for an airport.

Pilning, which is at the centre of all this, is a fairly small village with many rural characteristics. There are excellent views across the estuary, and the area is flat and level. I have never seen an otter there, but I am reliably informed—I have learned a lot about the habitat around Pilning in the past few months—that it is quite the place to be for an otter. I assure the Minister that we are also working on great crested newts. Seriously, however, part of the area is a site of special scientific interest, and areas of nature conservancy would have to be taken into consideration.

That green-belt site nestles among power plants, chemical works and heavily populated inland areas. Across the area, there are high-voltage, high-tension power cables that take power across the Severn estuary to Wales. Talking of going across to Wales, I can add that the old Severn bridge and the new second Severn crossing are within spitting distance of the proposed site. From my conversations with the authorities at Bristol's existing airport, I understand that the proximity of the bridges and of some of the higher inland areas may present real problems with using the site at Pilning.

The document says that there are considerable environmental implications of using such a greenfield site, because the damage could be considerable. The area is also prone to flooding, so there are reservations about proposals to build thousands of houses there. Again, is that the sort of area in which we want to build an airport?

Building an airport at Pilning would result in massive urbanisation of a rural area. The consultation document refers to a car park that would hold 25,000 to 35,000 cars, so the area would never look the same again. The document also mentions 15,000 jobs. During Prime Minister's Question Time, I was interested to hear the hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) demand an airport for her area because of the regeneration that it would bring. However, page 140 of the consultation document states:

"in areas of low unemployment"—

such as south Gloucestershire—

"workers filling new vacancies are likely to be drawn from further afield and therefore additional housing may be needed."

Essentially, Pilning airport would not be about jobs for local people, but about massive urbanisation, massive house-building and a massive inward migration of labour. Claimant unemployment is 1 per cent. to 1.5 per cent. in my constituency, and the project would not bring much benefit to people in the area. Rather, it would cause a huge inward movement and urbanisation.

The flipside of Pilning airport is the end of Bristol airport. It is clear from the consultation document that Pilning will be viable only if Bristol airport shuts—I see that the Minister is nodding at that. Bristol airport is south of Bristol and much closer to areas that are in need of regeneration, such as south Bristol and Weston-super-Mare. Shutting that airport and bringing more jobs to overheated parts of south Gloucestershire cannot be right in terms of the Government's regeneration strategy.

We have two options. We could take the single runway option, which would offer limited extra capacity. Indeed, much more capacity could be created by expanding operations at Bristol and Cardiff and making greater use of other regional airports, with which the Minister will be familiar. The alternative is a multi-runway airport in the longer term, which, as the consultation document admits, would have vast environmental implications for a green-belt site.

On the viability of the site, page 153 of the document concedes:

"We would therefore expect a new site north of Bristol to be financially viable only if no new runway capacity is provided in the South East or the Midlands and if the existing site"

at Bristol "is closed." The Minister will not be surprised to learn that Bristol International airport is not a great fan of a new north Bristol airport. The private company that owns, runs and has put millions of pounds into upgrading Bristol airport—it has moved on a great deal in recent years—is not simply going to sit back and watch.

I have a genuine question for the Minister because I do not understand the proposed mechanism. Let us suppose that the Government give the go-ahead and say that north Bristol, or Pilning, is the right place for a new international airport and the way in which we can meet our 20-year or 30-year strategic objectives. What will happen to Bristol airport? Will the company just go on

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running that airport until the new one comes on stream and it realises that it is losing money, shuts and goes away? Or will the company be invited to run the new site and shut its existing operation, in which case what will be done about the millions of pounds that have been put into that? I simply do not understand. If north Bristol airport will work only in the absence of south Bristol airport, by what process will we get from one to the other? Can the Minister clarify that?

I hope that he will mention the Severnside proposal that has been raised only this week. That would be on the other side of the estuary but would also have implications for the viability of Bristol airport. When I have consulted local residents, the possibility of using underused military sites has been mooted. I am not trying to use that idea to put an airport in someone else's back garden, but how well have the Government considered that proposal?

I have read previous debates that have taken place on the consultation during recent months and the Minister's comments in them. Quite understandably, to any Back-Bench constituency MP who says, "Don't put the airport near me", he has replied, "Well, where would you put it?" It is a perfectly reasonable question. I point out, however, that it is not only me as the hon. Member for Northavon who is saying that Pilning is not the right place for a new airport; the regional development agency has backed the expansion of Bristol and Cardiff airports rather than the building of a new north Bristol airport. South Gloucestershire council has set out a structure plan and a local plan, which north Bristol airport would violate, and has objected. My point is not just a local constituency one. In my judgment, there is potential for further expansion at Bristol and Cardiff airports. We could do much more on accessibility and transport, to make it easier to get to Bristol airport. More could be done with other south-west airports.

The consultation document makes the case for Pilning almost half-heartedly. It feels like an afterthought. There is no detailed assessment of it. For that reason, some people have asked why their time is being wasted even talking about the idea. Yet the Government consultation document is raising a village in my constituency as a possible airport site. My constituents want to know whether that is in the running or not. That is the key question.

To draw all my threads together, I believe that existing south-west airport sites have the capacity for expansion, especially if the transport infrastructure is improved. However, if another single site is sought, we should not choose a place that is a few miles from a nuclear power plant to the north and a few miles from chemical plants to the south, is in an area that high-power, high-voltage electricity runs across, is in the green belt and environmentally sensitive, has underground oil stores and gas plants on the doorstep, and is near areas of vast population, over which aeroplanes might end up flying. Pilning is a lovely place to live, but the worst possible place for an airport.

3.43 pm

Mr. Jamieson: This is my third scheduled debate in this Chamber today. I should perhaps congratulate myself on securing all those debates but instead, I congratulate the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) on securing a debate on an issue that is of concern to his constituents. There have been similar concerns in other constituencies since the consultation document on air services throughout the country was issued.

I am very pleased to see that my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Dr. Naysmith) is here, keeping a careful eye, as always, on matters that relate to Bristol. My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) also takes an interest in such matters.

The hon. Member for Northavon asked me whether I could give him a steer on the probability of a new airport. I am afraid that that question was a triumph of optimism. He will understand that I cannot comment on the merits of any one scheme because we are in a consultation period. The consultation is genuine; we are listening to people's views and weighing them up.

The hon. Gentleman asked how realistic the north Bristol airport proposals are. He is an academic, so he will know that one should carefully weigh matters up after listening to the various arguments, and that is what we are doing. The Department is receiving information all the time, and we will have to weigh it up most carefully in the coming months, before publication of the White Paper.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether we will take seriously representations that are made. I assure him that we will. We are scrutinising all comments that are coming in; the process has started and will continue until the entire consultation is over.

I can give the hon. Gentleman a more positive answer on the White Paper. He asked whether it would address how much extra capacity is needed. He also asked whether we will address where any development will take place, and the answer is that we will, because it is clear—especially with the elongation of the process following the Gatwick appeal—that some properties are blighted. The more rapidly such decisions can be made—commensurate with proper consideration—the more helpful it is to those people in many parts of the country who are blighted. We have empathy for those people, which is why we do not want the process to last any longer than is absolutely necessary for proper scrutiny of the comments that are made.

The hon. Gentleman raised an important point about what would happen to Bristol airport if the new scheme were given the go-ahead, and I hope to be able to provide some clarification on that, although he will appreciate that it is a complex matter. Any decision on an airport is dependent on several factors—what may be happening in other parts of the country, for example, or recommendations that may have been made. I shall try to cover that point in some detail.

Air travel is a fact of modern life for both business and leisure. Last year, 50 per cent. of the UK population travelled by air at least once. In my parents' time, that would have been unheard of—even 20 years ago, the percentage would not have been so high. Our forecasts suggest that demand for air services will increase significantly over the next 30 years, from 180 million passengers per annum in 2001 to between 400 million and 600 million in 2030. Additional airport capacity will be required if that demand is to be met.

The Secretary of State has already made it clear that the one option not available is to do nothing. We have to ask the following question: do we carry on increasing the ability people have to fly—including the hon. Gentleman's constituents? If we are to increase capacity, we must address the important question of where people will fly from. It would be irresponsible of any Government not to do that: development would happen on a piecemeal basis, and there would be no structure or plan to what was being done.

That is why we are currently consulting on the future development of air transport across the UK. The consultation documents set out potential demand under a range of policy scenarios from facilitating growth to constraining growth. They also set out the airport and associated developments that would be required to meet demand under the different scenarios. The documents also set out the positive and negative impacts of each scenario and seek views on the arguments for and against airport development. All responses to the consultation will be taken seriously, and when the White Paper is produced we will need carefully to balance economic, environmental and social needs.

The hon. Gentleman raised some specific issues. South-west airports currently handle about 2.9 million passengers per annum. However, more than 5.3 million people whose journeys begin or end in the south-west—about 65 per cent. of the total—travelled by surface modes, predominantly road, to access air services outside the region. Of that leakage, as it is sometimes called, more than 4.1 million passengers went to Heathrow and Gatwick, although I believe that about 15 per cent. travelled to Birmingham to catch their flights.

Bristol airport is the largest international airport in the south-west, and it handled about 2.1 million passengers in 2000. In 2001 it experienced significant growth of about 26 per cent., following the decision of the no-frills carrier, Go, to base aircraft there, serving a wide range of business and leisure destinations. Similar growth is expected in 2002. Bristol is well placed to develop further as it serves a wide catchment for population and businesses—particularly for sectors that use air transport often, such as banking, finance, information and communications technology, and advanced engineering. Many of those industries have grown rapidly in the Bristol area.

Other airports in the south-west are much smaller than Bristol and are expected to grow to a lesser extent as they serve smaller catchments and smaller markets. Bristol is therefore likely to remain the primary airport for the south-west for the foreseeable future. I hope that what I have said partly answers the hon. Gentleman's questions. I shall move on to deal with the future.

By 2030, if current policies are continued—that is the so-called RASCO reference case scenario—demand for air services from the south-west airports could rise to 15.9 million passengers per annum, with around 8.6 million of those at Bristol. However, if it were decided to constrain capacity in the south-east—the south-east constrained scenario, as that policy is called—many of the 50 per cent. of passengers who currently travel to the south-east airports to use air services would no longer be able to do so. Some might not fly at all, but most would use other airports and there would be pressure to use airports in the south-west.

That clawback of passengers could mean that the total traffic through south-west airports would increase to nearly 28 million passengers a year by 2030, with around 13.4 million of those wanting to fly from Bristol. The hon. Gentleman may see that a strong argument could be made by people living in the south-west that they would want facilities that would obviate the need to travel to Birmingham or London to take business or leisure flights.

Our analysis suggests that Bristol airport could handle around 6 million passengers per annum from its existing runway, subject to the expansion of terminal facilities. With a runway extension and a second terminal, the airport's capacity could increase further—possibly to around 12 million passengers a year—although that would be subject to resolving constraints arising from important environmental, land, property take and surface access issues. Topographical constraints also make expansion beyond 12 million passengers per annum an unrealistic prospect.

If those issues can not be resolved, or if we seek to accommodate the higher demand forecast under the south-east constrained scenario, we would need to consider developing additional capacity at another site in the locality. Need would also be exacerbated if no new runway capacity were to be developed in the midlands. Additional capacity, in the form of new runways, will be required in the midlands by around 2015 under all the policy scenarios that provide for growth, irrespective of decisions on capacity elsewhere. We have therefore examined options for new runways at existing airports in the midlands, and an additional detailed study has been carried out on a new site. That included a site search and the drawing up of an airport plan, with appraisal of the impacts.

As the need for a new site in the south-west will emerge only towards the end of the forecast period under scenarios giving the highest levels of demand, and is highly dependent on decisions regarding major capacity constraints being imposed elsewhere, it was decided that a full study of the north Bristol airport was not justified at present. Instead, a less detailed appraisal of a new airport on a site previously proposed by a consortium—the so-called UK One proposal near Pilning—was assessed. That allowed a means of comparing the costs and broad impacts of building a new site in the Bristol area, including its possible impact on the existing airport.

The results of the analysis are set out in the consultation document. The site would be well connected, close to the M4, M5 and M49 motorways. It would therefore offer good surface access from many parts of the south-west, south Wales and further afield to the north and east. For all we know, people from Birmingham, the hon. Gentleman's old city, might even travel down to use it. It would be more easily accessible to a wider catchment area than is the existing airport, but the analysis suggests that a new site north of Bristol would be financially viable only if no new runway capacity were provided in the south-east or the midlands and the existing Bristol airport was closed. The building of a new site would have to be predicated on all those issues.

We have received several responses, including responses from relevant local authorities, regarding the potential for a new airport north of Bristol. We are

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aware of concerns about the proximity of potentially hazardous installations, such as nuclear power stations and fuel storage facilities, as well as the impact on designated wildlife sites and the risk of flooding. Local concerns will be considered carefully in our analysis of the consultation responses and when we draft the White Paper.

Clearly, if the new Bristol airport proposal or any other significant development were to be taken forward in the White Paper, detailed plans would be drawn up, planning permission sought and an environmental impact assessment prepared. Detailed issues would have to be considered as part of the process. I am aware that the extended consultation will also extend the period of uncertainty for those who may be affected by the development.

Mr. Webb: Will the Minister clarify something? If the White Paper suggests that a new north Bristol airport is the way forward, do the Government have the power to shut Bristol airport? How would Bristol airport be closed in order to make the new Bristol airport viable?

Mr. Jamieson: If the White Paper suggested that a new site offered a viable option, there would still be many bridges to cross. The case would need a promoter, who would have to go through all the necessary processes, and market forces would then put pressure on Bristol airport. If such a decision were made, a lot of thinking would be needed over the next 20 or 30 years. There is a long way to go and views in the area may change over time. It is interesting that existing airports are backing some proposals for new airports in other areas, and some interesting reconfigurations of view may take place. It is difficult to answer the hon. Gentleman's question at the moment because so many things would have to happen before a new airport could be opened. Were I to go further, I would be entering the realms of speculation.

Extending the consultation has afforded the opportunity to consider alternative schemes suggested as part of that process. The hon. Gentleman referred to the Severnside proposal, but I shall not go into detail on that because I would be straying from the subject of the debate. When we drew up the consultation documents, analysis of the initial scheme suggested that a new airport in the Severn estuary was unlikely to be commercially viable in its own right. However, we have just received a formal, detailed response from the scheme's proposers and have yet to analyse it in depth. Unfortunately, at this stage I cannot rule any options in and I cannot rule any options out—I have heard that somewhere before. We hope to publish the White Paper by the end of the year.

I appreciate how important this issue is to the hon. Gentleman's constituents. It is important for them to be able to access flights for business and leisure purposes, but there are other issues relating to blight and the environment. No decisions have been made and we shall carefully weigh up all arguments made during the consultation process. I dare say that some of what has been said today will help to inform that process.

The Euro

Mr. Frank Cook (in the Chair): Perhaps I should point out that this is a 30-minute Adjournment debate and that interventions are not normally permitted. However, I have been approached about one, with the agreement of the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) and the Minister.

3.59 pm

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): I am delighted to have an opportunity—even though it is for only half an hour—to speak about one of the most significant issues that will face the United Kingdom in the next five to 10 years. We have had remarkably few debates about it in the House, and I can find no record of one in Westminster Hall since debates started taking place here, so this is a first.

The debate is about Government policy on the euro which, as I understand it, although the Minister may correct me later, is that it is right in principle for the UK to join the euro, but in practice certain economic tests—the famous five—must be met, because it would not be a good idea for Britain to choose to join the euro if it could be proved that it would not be in our economic interest. A decision on those economic tests will be made by the end of June, within the first half of this Parliament, as promised in the Labour manifesto. Thereafter, depending on the result of the evaluation, there should be a referendum.

I believe passionately and wholeheartedly that a referendum should be held soon, primarily because the UK economy is suffering from two problems. The first, and more obvious, is our economic isolation. Over the past few weeks, we have heard from nearly every senior figure in the tourism industry about the effect that Britain's isolation from the euro is already having. We are losing between 2 per cent. and 5 per cent. of international travel: American travellers have decided not to come to the UK as well as to avoid the eurozone, many British travellers choose to go abroad and many eurozone travellers decide not to come to the UK because of the high cost of the pound and the uncertain cost of their visit.

Some may sneer at the importance of the tourism industry, but it is the fourth largest employer in the United Kingdom. In certain regions, in particular in Wales, it is the third largest. It is the fifth largest industry in terms of gross domestic product. If we consider the manufacturing industry—I represent a constituency in which the main source of manufacturing is long gone, because the last mine closed in 1990—we find that yesterday's figures from the GMB make it clear that we are still haemorrhaging jobs.

Many of the businesses that move their operations out of this country and into places that are about to be part of the eurozone, in particular to the candidate countries of the European Union, cite at the top of their list of reasons for moving the fact that Britain has as yet no commitment to joining the euro. That leaves them with great uncertainty as to the value of their product and their labour costs so, for their own economic reasons, they go elsewhere. The isolation of the UK from the euro is, therefore, already a significant problem for jobs.

That isolation is also significant for trade. The UK is, by its nature, a trading nation. We rely more heavily on trade than nearly any other member of the EU. However, we are now posting our worst trade deficit since records began in 1697, while the eurozone countries ran a current account surplus of €5.2 billion in the second quarter of 2002. In case anyone is wondering why 1697 is important, it was the year in which Daniel Defoe wrote "An Essay upon Projects". That is when income tax was first mooted to the United Kingdom and it was the first time that there was a Whig Administration. That Administration laid down that the poor must wear badges to identify them. We have significant trade problems if we are posting our worst deficit since 1697.

That is the isolation problem. However, there is another problem—uncertainty. That goes to the heart of why we need to have a referendum at an early date with a positive vote for joining the euro. We have already seen that inward investment is falling, whereas it is rising in the eurozone countries. I also worry about the game of catch-up that we shall have to play. There will be 10 new members of the EU in 2004, many of which have already declared their heartfelt desire to join the euro as well as the EU.

There is a problem with Britain delaying even longer its decision to join the euro. If Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic join the euro over the next three to five years, Britain will end up having to negotiate its entry rate—which is key to the economic benefits or disadvantages of joining—with the Prime Ministers of Poland and the Czech Republic.

We should not be playing catch-up but learning the lessons of the past and ensuring that we are wholeheartedly at the centre of European policy. Incidentally, it is important to note that the stability pact will be renegotiated and tidied up over the next year or two, perhaps in line with the suggestions that the Chancellor has already made. If that is the case, it is essential for the UK to be part of those negotiations, not excluded from them.

Mr. Wayne David (Caerphilly): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Bryant: Of course.

Mr. Frank Cook (in the Chair): Order. I made it clear at the start that this is a 30-minute debate. The interventions must be agreed beforehand. That intervention was not agreed.

Mr. Bryant: I apologise. I had not understood that rule of the Chamber. I thought that it applied only to speeches, and that interventions could be taken at any point in a half-hour debate.

Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): On a point of order, Mr. Cook. I have a limited command of the English language, but this is meant to be a debate. I understand that only three people will be allowed to participate in the debate, but they are all singing from the same hymn sheet.

Mr. Bryant: I have no intention of singing, as hon. Members will be delighted to hear.

Mr. Frank Cook (in the Chair): Order. I must point out to everyone in the Chamber that the time already taken is time out of a 30-minute Adjournment debate. The agreement was made beforehand, and my ruling stands.

Mr. Bryant: Before I was not interrupted, I was referring to the uncertainty and instability that the UK faces because it is outside the euro. Those are powerful reasons why it is in the UK's interests to join, and to join soon and resolutely. One need only think philosophically about certain issues facing UK businesses such as Burberrys, which happens to be based in the Rhondda. When Burberrys manufactures a cashmere jumper or scarf and chooses the price at which it wishes to sell it in the eurozone, it must make complicated decisions about what its profit margin will be.

There are the costs of exchanging between one currency and another, which most businesses estimate at about 5 per cent., as well as the uncertainty about what price one may eventually get because of variations in the exchange rate. The exchange rate between sterling and the euro has fluctuated more than it did before the euro came fully into being a year ago. In the future, such currency fluctuation may be more, rather than less, dangerous and troublesome for the pound. That cost erodes British businesses and potential profit, and makes it more troublesome for UK businesses to trade in the eurozone. It also makes many businesses, especially the smaller ones, which are the lifeblood of the UK economy, decide to go into the wider market and trade. As I said, 5 per cent. of businesses' profits are lost to the cost of exchange. There is also the possibility of their entire profit being wiped out because of currency fluctuation.

In addition, European businesses must make a decision about whether they will invest in the UK.

4.9 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

4.21 pm

On resuming—

Mr. Bryant: We have had no interventions, but one interruption, and we may yet have another.

I talked at some length of the instability and uncertainty besetting the UK economy which is linked to our staying outside the euro. However, there are many nay-sayers in the country, and some are gathered in the Chamber today. The nay-sayers mainly tell us to look at what is happening to Germany's economy. They say that the fact that Germany's unemployment is growing and that it has economic problems is self-evident proof that the euro is not working, and it would therefore be bad for the United Kingdom.

The nay-sayers are sometimes rather selective in their quoting of economic statistics. If the euro were the primary cause of Germany's economic problems, all the other countries in the eurozone would be suffering exactly the same problems, and the trends in the countries outside the eurozone would be exactly the opposite of those inside. However, it is predicted that Sweden and Denmark—both outside the eurozone—will have lower growth than the UK this year, so being

[Mr. Bryant]

outside the euro does not necessarily lead to higher growth. Some of the other economic statistics for Germany show that its situation is not quite as the nay-sayers portray it. Wages and productivity are considerably higher in Germany than they are in the United Kingdom.

If one looks at unemployment figures across the eurozone, one finds that there has been a fall in all those countries since 1998 which is rather similar to the fall in unemployment in the United Kingdom. In the eurozone as a whole, the figure has fallen from 10.2 per cent. to 8 per cent. In France it has fallen from 11.4 per cent. to 8.6 per cent., and in Germany from 9.1 per cent. to 7.8 per cent. It is difficult to attribute precisely the rights and wrongs of the economic situation in Germany to the euro.

The nay-sayers also frequently say that the very process of joining the euro inexorably leads to inflation. Many people in Greece and in Spain believe that, and there has been significant inflation in those countries in the past year. However, inflation in eurozone countries has not done what many people predicted. Inflation last year was 1.8 per cent. in France, 1.3 per cent. in Germany and 1.1 per cent. in Belgium. In several eurozone countries, inflation is lower than it is in the United Kingdom, so there is not necessarily a link between inflation and joining the euro. When Britain joins the euro—a significant majority in the UK believe that we will eventually do so—it will be important to ensure that anti-inflationary measures such as maintaining dual billing in pounds and euros are in hand in the two years or so before and after joining. That is an important part of preventing inflation.

The third thing that the nay-sayers state frequently is that a single interest rate for the whole of Europe, including Britain, would be inimical to its future economic development and stability. However, the United States of America has a single interest rate and so, for that matter, does the United Kingdom, different unemployment rates in London, Glasgow, Newcastle, Manchester and Cardiff and the fact that few people move from area to area to seek employment. Not many of the nay-sayers suggest that Wales or Scotland should have a separate interest rate.

The economic tests that are central to the Government's policy on the euro are vital. Of course, we should never recommend joining the euro unless it is in Britain's economic interests, unless there is significant convergence and unless it is in the interests of UK jobs and inward investment. There should be sufficient flexibility in the UK economy and in the euro system to allow for significant growth. However, we should not assume that a negative assessment of the tests in June would be risk free; it would do significant harm to the UK just by itself, politically and economically. It would signal a lack of confidence about the UK's economic future and signify to inward investors and to trading partners that Britain had economic problems.

Britain's economy is strong now thanks to the many tough decisions that the Government have taken since 1997. But its economic future could be stronger, and it will have to be stronger within the euro if it is to withstand the dangers of greater exchange volatility. Let us avoid instability and uncertainty by having a referendum as soon as possible, and let us avoid economic isolation by securing a yes vote in that referendum.

4.27 pm

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) on securing the debate. I will concentrate on the effect of not adopting the euro on the economy of the north-east, especially the manufacturing industry.

The north-east has a long tradition of manufacturing industry. At one time, it was part of the workshop of the world. Today, the industry is smaller but clearly efficient and high tech. Manufacturing industry in the north-east accounts for 20 per cent. of the region's economy, employing some 175,000 people. Proportionately, the north-east is the largest exporter of manufactured goods in the UK, and that is where the problem lies, because the region is not part of the eurozone. Last year, the north-east lost just under 5,000 jobs in manufacturing, not because the smoke-stack industries were inefficient but because of the strong value of the pound and because it is outside the eurozone. Some people might ask why that should matter, as service sector jobs will fill the gap, but manufacturing jobs are important for skills and employment, not just in the north-east but throughout the country. They are skills that the country cannot afford to lose.

I have already mentioned that the manufacturing industry in the north-east is efficient, and I want to draw on the example of the Nissan motor corporation in Sunderland. Not only is the car plant the most efficient in Europe, it is one of the most efficient at producing motor cars anywhere in the world, outstripping some indigenous plants in Japan. I find it remarkable that the recent decision to build the Micra car in Sunderland was taken at a hair's breadth, despite a large Government grant and a 30 per cent. efficiency lead over any other European car plant. Last week, a story appeared in *The Northern Echo* that the decision to produce the Almera and Primera models in Sunderland is in doubt because of the strong value of the pound. The plant's competitive advantage, which has been clearly demonstrated, is wiped out at a single stroke by the strong value of the pound and by Britain being outside the eurozone.

What is the problem? What are people afraid of? There is the paranoia about loss of sovereignty, and we have the great and interesting debate about whose head should be on our currency. I agree with Sir Ian Gibson, the chair of Nissan UK, who said:

> "Why can't we just as a nation rise above it all? We're not anchored off the east coast of the US, but off the western coast of Europe . . . we cannot be anything else but European."

The competitive advantage of UK manufacturing is being lost because we are wedded to an outdated notion that this country's destiny lies somewhere other than in Europe. Manufacturing jobs in the north-east and the rest of the UK continue to be in crisis because we remain outside the eurozone. While the values of the euro and the pound remain worlds apart, we will continue to see a loss of manufacturing jobs not only in the north-east, but across the country. The only way to stop that decline is by joining the eurozone at a realistic rate as a matter of urgency. My message is that joining the eurozone will be good news for the manufacturing industry in this country and for the UK and the north-east economies.

4.32 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly): May I say, Mr Cook, that it is an additional pleasure being under your chairmanship for the second time today?

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) on securing this important debate, and I notice the interest shown by other Members, which indicates a strong and correct concern with the issues. I also congratulate my hon. Friend on his recent election to the chair of Britain in Europe, and I am sure that he will make a valuable contribution to the debate in the coming months.

First, I want to restate the Government's policy on UK membership of the single currency, which remains unchanged. In his June 2002 Mansion House speech, the Chancellor said:

"In principle British membership of a successful single currency offers us obvious benefits—in terms of trade, transparency, costs and currency stability—and could help us create the conditions for higher and more productive investment and greater trade and business in Europe."

More than half our total trade is with the European Union, and about 3 million jobs depend on our economic ties with Europe. The EU is the UK's largest trade and investment partner. The Government are in favour of UK membership of European monetary union in principle, but we will recommend UK membership only if it is in the national economic interest and the economic case for joining is clear and unambiguous. The Government believe that if that is the case, there is no constitutional bar to joining. My hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda summed it up neatly by saying that in principle it is right and in practice the economic conditions must be met.

As the Chancellor said in his October 1997 statement to the House, the five economic tests will define whether a clear and unambiguous case can be made. In that same statement, the Chancellor set out the five tests, which are: whether there can be sustainable convergence between Britain and the economies of a single currency; whether there is sufficient flexibility to cope with economic change; whether there is an impact on investment, which my hon. Friend highlighted; whether there is an impact on the financial services industry; and whether joining is good for employment.

I note with interest the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr. Jones), and I know the interest that he takes in the manufacturing industry in his constituency and across the north-east. However, the five tests provide a framework for robustly analysing the decision on economic and monetary union. As the Chancellor said in his Mansion House speech:

"To join without a proper, full assessment of the five tests could . . . prejudice our stability, risk repeating past failures of exchange rate management, and could return us to the days of stop-go at the expense of our ambitions for high investment, full employment and high and sustained levels of growth."

I was heartened to hear my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda put such emphasis on the economic factors. There is a serious economic debate to be had. The Government have consistently made it clear that the Treasury will complete an assessment of the five tests within two years of the start of this Parliament. We remain fully committed to doing so. On the basis of their assessment, the Government will decide whether the five tests have been met. If the Government decide to recommend joining, that decision will be put to a vote in Parliament and then to a referendum of the British people.

I turn now to the preliminary and technical work that will inform the assessment of the five economic tests. As the Chancellor noted in his November pre-Budget report:

"The preliminary analysis supporting the five tests assessment—technical work needed to enable the assessment to be completed within two years of the start of the Parliament—is well underway."

Hon. Members will be aware of the detailed paper on the preliminary and technical work that was produced by the Treasury for the Treasury Committee in September. A copy may be found in the Library. That paper built on the Chancellor's June 2002 Mansion House speech, and stated that a number of supporting studies would be published alongside the assessment, encompassing the preliminary and technical work. The supporting studies will cover key issues that relate to particular tests or that apply to more than one test. The paper for the Treasury Committee makes it clear that, when the assessment is complete, the detailed supporting studies will be published alongside it, and that everything will be subject to intensive public scrutiny and debate. I am sure that there will be much material in that preliminary and technical work when the assessment is published. It will take pundits and academics a long time to digest that material, which will provide much food for debate and comment in the months following publication.

On practical preparations, since 1999 the Government's strategy has been to prepare and then to decide. That work has included the publication of two outline national changeover plans and regular updates on the detail of changeover planning. Most recently, the sixth report on euro preparations was published in July last year. The Government are maintaining their commitment to prepare and decide. By planning now, the United Kingdom could make a smooth and cost-effective changeover should the Government, Parliament and the people, in a referendum, decide to join the single currency.

The introduction of euro cash in the euro area took place on 1 January 2002. The Government are pleased that the euro area countries experienced a broadly smooth changeover. The UK has taken the opportunity to monitor and learn from the experience in the euro area during the changeover. The findings have been published in the sixth report on euro preparations, and have now been reflected in the UK's own preparatory work.

For example, following the euro area's experience of a two-month dual currency period, we should, in the event of the UK joining the single currency, be able to adopt a dual currency period of no more than two months. That is less than our original estimate of six months for dual circulation.

We also work closely with consumer representatives in the voluntary sector to develop a communications strategy in case we decide in a referendum to join a single currency—to establish some of the issues about which

[Ruth Kelly]

my hon. Friend talked, such as scale of value, to establish ways to protect consumers, and to think about communications strategies for vulnerable groups that would have more difficulty coming to terms with a change of currency than other citizens.

The Government are committed to working with UK businesses to secure the right level of preparation that would enable them to work with the euro now. It is obvious that in many respects the euro is already operating in the eurozone and businesses in Britain have to come to terms with that, whatever their views on the merits of the UK joining the euro. The existence of the euro in the eurozone has implications for those businesses, and that should be reflected in their strategies.

The Treasury euro website has had more than a million visitors since its relaunch in March 2001. The Government have distributed more than 400,000 factsheet packs and they have sent information to around 1.5 million small and medium-sized enterprises, first in autumn 2001 and then in autumn 2002. The Government have produced, and recently updated, a wide portfolio of simple, practical business case studies, and they operate a national telephone helpline for those without access to the website, which provides businesses and travellers with practical information about the euro. Although such information has helped many businesses to address issues posed by the euro, our surveys suggest that many more could be affected.

We continue to work closely with the business community to provide it with the practical advice and assistance that it needs. Hon. Members are able to see that we take seriously the assessment of the five economic tests and, were we to make a positive assessment and were there to be a positive referendum result, we must be in a position to join—

It being nineteen minutes to Five o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the sitting lapsed, without Question put.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 16 January 2003

[SIR NICHOLAS WINTERTON *in the Chair*]

E-services

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

2.30 pm

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mr. Douglas Alexander): I welcome this debate on the e-transformation of public services. It offers the House an opportunity to discuss an important aspect of the Government's work in investing in and reforming our public services. It further provides an opportunity to hear the views of hon. Members, several of whom present today have particular expertise and experience in this field. I therefore propose to limit my opening contribution to setting out the context and scale of the Government's work, before responding in my concluding remarks to the contributions made by other hon. Members.

Over recent years in the marketplace we have seen the spectacular rise and fall of the NASDAQ, with an international decline in share values and significant global job losses in the technology and communications sectors. Against that turbulent background, it has been recognised that the laws of supply and demand still matter to the corporate bottom line, and that much of the initial hype surrounding the dotcom boom has obscured the true significance of the telecommunications and computing advances that we are witnessing today.

More than 600 million people globally are now online, and 140,000 more people connect to the net every day. In the past 30 years, the price of a transatlantic telephone call has fallen to a tiny fraction of its original level, and there are already more mobile phones in the world than traditional telephone landlines.

Against that changing backdrop, some commentators have asked whether the Government's enduring focus on the importance of electronic service delivery is misplaced. I believe that the answer is no—indeed, an emphatic no. Electronic service delivery remains an integral and expanding part of our reform and modernisation programme for public services. The e-enablement of public services, with the citizen at its core, is central to our strategy of transforming the interaction between state and individual. It is surely not contentious to recognise that experience of the private sector increasingly shapes the citizen's expectations of public services.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way so early. I just wanted to draw his attention to a company called Opportunity Links, in which I have a registered, although non-financial, interest. That company helps people to change their lifestyle and to get back into work, and has assisted the Department for Education and Skills in spreading the national child care information strategy. It demonstrates what a real difference electronic—

Sir Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): Order. This is becoming a speech, and interventions should be brief. I should be happy for the hon. Lady to bring her comments to a quick conclusion.

Mrs. Campbell: Is my hon. Friend aware of that organisation? If not, will he ensure that he finds out something about it?

Mr. Alexander: That was an endearingly brusque end to an interesting intervention by my hon. Friend. It would be remiss of me not to pay tribute to her work in this field, not least in representing the constituency of Cambridge, which shows world leadership on 3G technologies. I also pay tribute to the work that she has undertaken on e-representation. She is a pioneer in the House in advancing online surgeries, which provide an interesting opportunity that we could consider later.

I must confess that I am not over-familiar with the company that my hon. Friend cited, but I am certainly aware of the great deal of work that is being done on child care and the intermediate labour market in making those who have particular needs aware of the opportunities available. I would be more than happy for my hon. Friend to write to me to follow up her point about that company.

It is clear that people already use certain electronic services and that there are real successes that we can learn from, such as the company in Cambridge that has just been described. At national level, NHS Direct Online receives 500,000 hits each month. Last year, Learn Direct reached more than 245,000 people, who enrolled on more than 57,000 educational courses. UK Online is the Government's fastest-growing website, with an average of 119 per cent. growth per month. More than 500,000 people use it each month. If websites are user-friendly, reliable, secure and effective, people will use them. That is the lesson from websites in the commercial sector, such as Amazon or easyJet, to name just two successes in recent years.

Our e-transformation policy aims to meet the needs of the citizen, not just by tacking online capabilities on to old systems, but by developing new, creative, easy to use sites that are designed, end to end, around those needs. We are working to get Government services to the citizenry online by 2005 and we will, as the Prime Minister made clear at the e-summit on 29 November, also focus on driving up access in key areas, such as the NHS, education, transport, benefits, tax and criminal justice. For example, some services will enable drivers to conduct all their dealings with Government online, including those relating to tax discs, vehicle registration and driving licence applications.

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire): How often, on average, are the Government's websites updated? Is there a best practice rule on that? If not, should there be one?

Mr. Alexander: The right hon. Gentleman has raised an important point. I have already made it clear that

[Mr. Alexander]

information contained on websites should not just be of interest to the customer, but should be kept up to date. A range of work, which is led by the Office of the e-Envoy, is taking place to ensure that Government sites reflect the developing practice in the private sector, and that they capture essential information for citizens to access. Perhaps the best recent examples of that are the UK online site and the ongoing success of NHS Direct Online. Even the private sector has recognised that that is a genuine, pioneering initiative from the British Government. Such sites are increasingly popular with the citizenry, and could be a model for the services that we will need to develop in the years to come.

We will invest in the NHS to create a national integrated care record system, an electronic prescription service and an electronic appointments booking service. We already know what can be achieved. During recent Cabinet Office questions, I mentioned that the transfer of pathology information in a Stockport general practice has already reduced the average time taken between requesting tests and receiving the results from 12 working days to three. Those results are automatically incorporated into patient records.

There are considerable opportunities for the criminal justice system. We are building a future in which victims of violent crime may participate in a trial through video-conferencing, and witnesses and police officers may be called to give evidence by text message, pager or e-mail, rather than have to wait at court for days at a time until they are called to give evidence. That could free up thousands of police days that are currently wasted in waiting to give evidence, and it could save millions of pounds by reducing the number of trials that need to be reconvened after witnesses have given up and gone home, or back to work, thereby causing original trials to be abandoned.

To achieve such a transformation in service delivery requires work from the Government in three areas. First, on investment, I shall inform hon. Members of the scale of the resources that we are committing to this endeavour. Under the spending review settlement, £6 billion will be invested in information and communications technology throughout the coming years. Some £1 billion will be invested in networking our public services. That applies to every primary and secondary school, and it means broadband connectivity for every GP practice, hospital and primary healthcare trust in the country. That will provide higher bandwidth throughout the entire criminal justice system and across the network of offices that forms the Department for Work and Pensions.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): I am buoyed by the Minister's figures, but I seek an assurance that when he talks about linking every school he means the whole United Kingdom, not just England and Wales.

Mr. Alexander: It would be a rare debate indeed if my hon. Friend did not rise to his feet immediately the word "broadband" was uttered to ensure that Scotland was duly represented. He knows that I have a strong family connection with the policy of the Scottish Executive. My sister formerly served as the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning and she led on the issue of broadband roll-out in Scotland.

My hon. Friend is right to identify the fact that we face particular challenges in certain localities in the central belt and in rural areas of Scotland. The approach that the British Government have adopted, which has been echoed in the approach adopted in certain initiatives of the Scottish Executive, is correct and will help to maintain platform neutrality on the issue of broadband connectivity.

I shall explain what I mean by that by offering an example. Some areas of the Scottish highlands and islands do not currently have the infrastructure that we would like, and there are a diverse range of primary schools many of which are in remote locations. There may be an argument for using satellite technology to provide broadband connectivity rather than a simple ADSL or cable modem connection.

The virtues of the spending review decisions were that they allowed for decisions to be made within Departments—the constitutional reality is that judgments on educational policy and the networking of educational institutions in Scotland rest with the Scottish Executive—and they ensured that we did not create a broadband fund that is separate from mainstream education or health expenditure, for which some hon. Gentlemen would certainly have argued for. I strongly believed that we needed to maintain an open and competitive marketplace in broadband, and we are currently driving up the number of connections that we are securing from individual subscribers in the UK month by month. I also believed that we needed to ensure that broadband became a central part of the thinking of each of the main Government Departments, and that is undoubtedly true of the Department for Education and Skills and the Department of Health—and, I am glad to say, the Scottish Executive, as a report by Digital Scotland Task Force makes clear.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): Does my hon. Friend accept that many businesses in rural areas in England, such as those in my constituency, are having to move from their current locations because broadband is unavailable to them, so they are now uncompetitive? Such businesses in my constituency welcome the East of England Development Agency's lottery—they want to see whether they can get some additional profile for their broadband needs—but the idea that they might eventually get a satellite link fills them with horror.

Mr. Alexander: My hon. Friend clearly articulates the views of constituents and business organisations in his constituency. I suggest that it might be of interest to those businesses if they were to study the example that is already developing in Northern Ireland. In conjunction with the Northern Ireland Executive, a satellite project has been developed whereby satellite links have been offered to small and medium-sized enterprises. The reports that I have received—partly in my previous incarnation as a Minister in the Department of Trade and Industry, but also as a result of the ongoing work of the Northern Ireland Executive—suggest that, if an appropriate pricing mechanism can be found, satellite can provide an appropriate and useful technology for remote and small and medium-sized businesses that are spread across a geographic locality.

My hon. Friend made an important point. We must continue not only to drive up the numbers of subscribers to broadband, but to drive outwards the range of

networks that are available. One of the legacies of my time at the DTI was a broadband development fund that was specifically charged with supporting the work of the regional development agencies, because often RDAs best understand the particular needs of their localities. I was keen to ensure that we were not overly prescriptive on how that money should be spent. The challenges that I set for the regional development agencies at that time were to identify how they could drive up levels of usage and drive outwards the networks in their localities, and to ensure that the solutions that they individually devised were scalable nationally.

We are still on a learning curve with broadband, and there is a genuine and exciting opportunity for the best practice that is developed in places such as Scotland, Northern Ireland and Yorkshire to be learned in the east of England, and vice versa. One of the interesting developments of broadband is that, as we continue to drive up the numbers who use it and widen the extent of the networks, there will be increased opportunities for best practice to be shared between RDAs. If my hon. Friend has particular enduring concerns about the work that is being undertaken in the east of England, it might well be worth him raising them with my hon. Friend and colleague the Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness at the DTI.

David Cairns (Greenock and Inverclyde): I am grateful for my hon. Friend's answers—in particular to the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty)—and I appreciate the Government's neutrality as regards the platform. However, I wish to press him a little on ADSL, which is in the forefront of many of our constituents' minds. Is he entirely happy with the current commercial strategy of BT, which has a trigger mechanism of 400 in both Wemyss Bay—which is a very small village that he knows well—and in Greenock, which is many times larger? Does that not disadvantage people who live in smaller communities?

Mr. Alexander: An interesting point has been raised by my hon. Friend, who represents a neighbouring constituency to mine. As he may imagine, I have a particular interest in broadband roll-out in the west of Scotland. I would first pay due tribute to the work of BT, because for several months, and indeed during most of my tenure at the Department of Trade and Industry, I was one of the sternest critics of the pricing strategy that it was adopting on broadband. In the light of some of the comments I shall make in due course, it would only be fair to acknowledge that progress has undoubtedly been made. As for the pricing strategy to be adopted, I wanted fair but competitive and lower prices, and I think that real progress has been made on that. I was also keen to ensure that broadband featured prominently in the future thinking of what is still a major telecoms provider in the United Kingdom.

I was heartened that the model that BT has adopted was drawn from best practice, which I think was from Germany originally. It may be helpful to remind the Chamber that BT's previous position was to identify a certain number of exchanges throughout the country that were to be broadband-enabled. The effect of that was inevitably somewhat arbitrary. Once it had reached the target, but did not feel that it was sufficiently profitable, it did not feel a commercial obligation to continue beyond that.

In intense discussions between officials, BT and myself, we highlighted the situation in Germany, which allowed the market to lead the roll-out of broadband. Although there are particular regulatory differences between the British and German situations, one lesson that was helpfully learned was that, if there is a demand in a particular area, it should be reasonable for BT to service that demand. I understand that the facility on the BT site at the moment allows someone to register an interest in obtaining a BT service, so that ADSL can thereafter be enabled.

The point that was made about digital inclusion remains important. In that regard, I identify the work that has been undertaken by the UK online centres. I recently visited two computer learning centres in Paisley. I had the privilege of opening one of them, which is in close proximity to both Wemyss Bay and the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (David Cairns). What allowed a link to be established was the procurement by the computer learning centre of a broadband connection which, in turn, e-enabled and gave a broadband connection to the surrounding community.

When I visited the computer learning services in the west of Scotland, I was greatly inspired by the accessibility and services that could be provided by a broadband connection. Perhaps I should have emphasised more strongly my point about the level of resources that have been committed. The real prize out of the billions of pounds being spent by the Government in the months to come will be to secure not only large-scale procurement but smart procurement, which unlocks other market potential.

For example, if we can ensure that broadband connectivity in a locality is achieved through the Department of Health, through GPs' surgeries or local trusts, in a manner that is suitable and is in tandem with the work that is being taken forward in education, it is easy to envisage a future whereby the public sector demand could make provision for the private sector. In that sense, the point that my hon. Friend makes is well taken, but it strengthens the case for the digital inclusion work that the Government are undertaking—allied to the fact that broadband procurement is resting strongly within departmental budgets, rather than being seen as a discrete, self-identified fund that is remote from health and education provision.

Given the scale of the investment that I have identified, it is only fair to acknowledge that the second area where I think ongoing work needs to be taken forward is strong project management. Following the direction given by the Prime Minister in his speech to the e-summit in November, I can today announce new measures that will improve the Government's approach

[Mr. Alexander]

to IT projects and will build on the work already in place to ensure that, whenever possible, large IT projects will be better managed, procured more smartly and delivered on time and within budget.

The Office of Government Commerce will work closely with Departments on measures such as the setting up of centres of excellence to share best practice, thorough risk-assessment projects, the identification of common causes of failures of past IT projects and greater clarity and responsibility in project management. That will go a long way towards delivering effective and reliable IT projects in the future.

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): The industry has welcomed the establishment by the Government of the Office of Government Commerce's gateway review process, whereby projects are evaluated independently. Will the Minister tell us whether the intention is that the gateway review should be mandatory or only advisory? Should we be concerned if we hear of projects costing several millions that have been red-lighted by the gateway review?

Mr. Alexander: The hon. Gentleman rightly identifies the significance of the gateway review process that is being taken forward within Government by the Office of Government Commerce. One of the greatest successes of the gateway process, which has been running for a limited time, is not just the degree to which it has been recognised as a legitimate function at the centre of the Office of Government Commerce to scrutinise work that is being developed, but the degree to which it assists Departments in their information technology project management. The announcement that I have made on the directions that the Prime Minister gave in the e-summit are viewed as the logical extension of the gateway review process.

Perhaps it would be helpful if I described exactly what the gateway review process involves. It is a technique drawn from best practice in the private sector, and is led by the Office of Government Commerce. In a recent article in *The Economist*, the gateway review process was referred to as "almost mythical". The gateway review is a series of stages that need to be crossed, and at each stage effective scrutiny of how the project is advancing is offered by a group outside the relevant Department.

A key element of the gateway review is that, when cause for concern is found, a process is put in place to make sure that capacity can be built up to address it. The measures that I have identified today will work in tandem with the gateway review process to improve not just identification of problems but the capacity to address them, both in Departments and in the Office of Government Commerce. Reports of the Public Accounts Committee clearly identified the need for specific leadership in Departments on projects. If I had to identify one issue that has emerged in the more critical gateway reviews, it would be the lack of clarity about leadership in Departments.

The gateway review process helpfully identifies difficulties. The raft of measures that we will introduce to strengthen that process will build on its success and will take our work forward. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) and others scrutinising the work of the Government on major IT procurement will notice that any major IT project of significant scale will have exactly the checks and scrutiny that would be found in corporate sectors. Also, and perfectly reasonably, we have an obligation to uphold on value for money. Incidentally, it is worth while recognising that the Office of Government Commerce comes under the Treasury with regard to securing its primary function of providing value for money.

It is difficult to take forward the work of project management without recognising that there are related issues, such as diversity of suppliers. Value for money is a key matter that the Office of Government Commerce will continue to develop. I hope that I have been able to give some assurance to the hon. Gentleman that there will be the necessary scrutiny of major IT projects. That will supplement, rather than undermine, the gateway process.

Mr. Allan: Will the Minister make it clear that Departments can go ahead with projects even if the gateway process states that those projects have weaknesses? Will the Minister be happy for that knowledge to come into the public domain, so that if a project went ahead against the advice of the gateway review process, we would know about it and could criticise the decision?

Mr. Alexander: Of course, departmental Ministers remain accountable to the House of Commons and have to answer for the actions of officials. There are issues relating to the accounting officer. That officer would have to explain why, in the light of the findings of the gateway review, a decision had been taken to proceed with no catch-up plan to allow the project to get back on track. Certainly, following the gateway review's advice is encouraged, if not mandatory. We look ahead to the scale of investment that will be made, and the allocations of the comprehensive spending review. The discrete gateway review process and the work that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister charged us with in November, which will be started off by some of the announcements made today, show the degree to which a greater, and not a weakening, grip is being exerted on the projects.

Dr. John Pugh (Southport): The Minister has just said that the gateway review process recommendations were not mandatory, but he was asked a second question, which was whether a failure in the vetting process would come into the public domain, and he has not answered that. If a decision were not approved, would the public, and not just the accounting officer of the relevant Department, know?

Mr. Alexander: The Public Accounts Committee has trawled over a number of major IT projects. It is the enduring responsibility of every departmental Minister, not only me, to account for their actions before Committees of the House and the House itself. Criticisms may be levelled at the Government, but not being subject to the scrutiny of Parliament is not one of them. There are several PAC reports on the issue and, given the scale of Government investment, it will be an area of continuing interest to many Committees in the future.

I am conscious that I am in danger of contradicting my earlier undertaking not to speak for too long in my opening remarks. Perhaps that is a fault shared by many hon. Members. It is therefore appropriate for me to try to make progress towards a conclusion.

To supplement the point that I made about the efficiency of IT procurement, I should say that the Government have a responsibility to provide efficiency, but we must also address the issue of equity mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde. For citizens to use services online they must, of course, have access to the internet. That is why I am pleased that we have exceeded our target of 6,000 UK online centres by the end of 2002. Those centres provide low or no-cost internet access and training, and a crucial entry point for those unable to afford personal computers or broadband connections.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for giving way. He has been commendably generous and I shall try not to delay him and the rest of my colleagues for long. I am grateful that we have been able to draw down money from the invest-to-save budget to make local government services more accessible in Gloucestershire. However, is there not a conflict between making local government accessible to the general public and the work that the Post Office is conducting? Would it not be sensible to ensure that local government and sub-post offices work more closely together, otherwise a real opportunity will be lost?

Mr. Alexander: In the context of the debate, it would only be fair to mention the work undertaken by local government on e-government and the provision of services online. I recently attended a major international conference in Berlin and spoke to Thomas M. Siebel of Siebel Systems—a major provider of services to the IT community and to Governments throughout the world. When I was identified as a member of the British Government, he first wanted to make me aware of the pioneering work being done by local government, not in a single locality but throughout Britain. He was keen to say that, on the basis of the international experience that he had garnered, we had some pioneers in Britain. His point about providing services online through local government is an important one.

When I was at the Department of Trade and Industry, I was responsible for postal matters. I was keen to ensure that there was close liaison between Whitehall and the Post Office to discuss some of the thinking that was evolving in the Post Office about the provision of services. I facilitated conversations between the Office of the e-Envoy, which took a broad remit throughout Whitehall, and the Post Office.

I have to confess that, given my changed departmental responsibilities, I am not fully appraised of the stage that such conversations have reached. If it would help, I will make my hon. Friend the Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness aware of the concerns of my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew), who may have a particular constituency angle that he is keen to pursue.

Mr. Connarty: I thought that the Minister was going to answer the question about the role of post offices. In my meeting with the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters, concern was expressed that the pilot scheme using sub-post offices as points of access to Government information seems to have been terminated without explanation. Is it no longer the Government's intention to allow people to use sub-post offices to get information about Government services online?

Mr. Alexander: Again, I am wary of treading on the terrain of my colleague in the Department of Trade and Industry. I understand that the scheme on the provision of online services was piloted under the Government's general practitioner programme in the Rutland area of Leicestershire, and has come to a conclusion. The original intention was that the pilot was to run for a limited time.

I previously held departmental responsibility for that pilot, and issues were raised, such as how to ensure that the service was attractive to sub-postmasters and provided value for money for other Whitehall Departments. If there was a vulnerability in the development of the service, it was not that individual sub-postmasters in the Rutland area did not identify that the service was popular. The problem was how to translate that into either increased footfall or greater use of services—identifying value for money for sub-postmasters and how they would profit from the services. Identifying how value-for-money propositions could be offered to individual Departments such as the Department for Work and Pensions was the substance of discussions between the Post Office, the Department of Trade and Industry and other Government Departments.

Sir Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): Order. The Chair is not able to participate in the debate, but I might be more involved if the Minister addressed more of his remarks to the front rather than to the rear of Westminster Hall. I am fascinated not only by his accent but by what he is saying.

Mr. Alexander: I hope that you will forgive me for the discourtesy, Sir Nicholas. It is a great honour for you to suggest that what I have to say may be of interest. I am not sure that such an opinion would be shared on both sides of the Chamber. Perhaps with that all-too-trite remark, I should more gracefully conclude my remarks.

I hope that I have managed to communicate not only the scale of investment but the commitment of the Government to driving forward with work on the e-enablement of public services right across the piece—from local government to key Departments such as the Department of Health and the Department for Education and Skills. I will be interested to hear the comments of my hon. Friends and of other colleagues. We still have work to do on information technology project management and on making further progress on the equity issue. I look forward to the rest of the debate.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Sir Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): Order. Clearly, many hon. Members wish to participate, whether by speaking or by intervening. With good sense and discipline, all hon. Members will be able to participate. With permission, the Minister will want to make a few remarks at the end of the debate.

3.1 pm

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): This is not the first time that I have heard the Minister speak on this subject. As on earlier occasions, I have been enormously impressed by his enthusiasm for it and by his grip on the technology. His appointment certainly put a round peg in a round hole.

I endorse the view that the Minister set out at the beginning of his remarks. The United Kingdom should be a leader in this technology, in government and the public services as well as in commerce and entertainment. However, my experience and investigations suggest that, as well as the achievements and triumphs that the Minister mentioned, there are one or two defects in the present e-government strategy and a large question mark over the Government's plans for the development and use of the necessary infrastructure—a point that was touched on during interventions in his speech.

We certainly need reform and transformation in the machinery of government and the delivery of our public services. Many services are inaccessible, unresponsive and inefficient. The internet can play an important part. However, I am suspicious of the current fashion for adding an "e" at the front of words. It can be misleading and unhelpful. It is all to easy to be caught up in the latest fashion and waste both time and money following it, delivering little benefit to the end user while overlooking some basic and elementary steps that can bring immediate gains.

Members of Parliament may be guilty of some mistakes. A number of colleagues have invested in websites but then lost interest and not updated them for months or, in some cases, years. At the other end of the spectrum, a number of colleagues still do not offer their constituents an e-mail address. We are rightly cautious about passing judgment on how colleagues interface with their constituents, but I would say to colleagues whose constituents cannot reach them by e-mail that their constituents are now sending e-mail messages to MPs who have an e-mail address and asking them to print them out and pass them on. I received such a request yesterday. I do not expect my colleagues to take my telephone messages, so I do not expect to have to take their e-mails.

For most people, e-transformation suggests the use of the internet as a delivery and access mechanism. I think that that is the main thrust of Government policy. Departments, public services and local government are all being urged, and in many cases instructed, to

"make all services available electronically by 2005."

That is a great soundbite, but I wonder whether the strategy is right.

Too high a proportion of the services concerned are of poor quality and are badly managed and organised; they fail to deliver good results on either cost or quality. In my view, a service must be inherently efficient before it makes sense to add internet access to the existing access methods. If one puts a badly run service on the internet, it simply enables everyone to find out more quickly how bad it is.

Mr. Chris Mole (Ipswich): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that, although they might not provide the impetus for change themselves, electronic solutions provide the opportunity for an agency or body to grapple with fundamental management issues and to review thoroughly its modus operandi and change the way in which it does its business?

Sir George Young: There is some force behind the hon. Gentleman's argument. It is still better for a body to put its house in order before adding internet access rather than to use internet access as a catalyst for change. There might be a case for the hon. Gentleman's suggestion, but I would prefer things to happen in the tidier way that I outlined.

The Prime Minister is committed to providing

"broadband connectivity for every GP surgery, every hospital, and every Primary Care Trust in the country."

I welcome that objective, but people in the health service say that the use of computers and telecommunications in the health service is pretty primitive. That might be a reason why so much new spending goes on administration rather than treatment. What would be the effect of investing scarce resources and funds to allow patients to find out from the internet how long they must wait for an operation?

The soundbite that I mentioned ignores the need to be selective about the online services that will be most useful to the public and that will save the most for the public purse. There should also be selection based on the services that make sense in terms of available technology and the extent to which citizens are able and willing to use services. There is a need to prioritise. For example, I was delighted recently to find that rather than making the long, arduous journey to any post office or using the phone, I can now buy a fishing rod licence over the internet. I suspect that the average citizen would be more interested in being able to renew a tax disc over the internet. The Minister touched on that, and I hope that the scheme will move forward. I am not sure whether the Home Secretary's announcement yesterday about voluntary entitlement to an identity card could take that a stage further by giving each citizen a unique number to use in his or her transactions with the Government.

Mr. Robert Walter (North Dorset): Is my right hon. Friend aware that I tried to file my tax return on the internet two weeks ago but I was told that Members of Parliament were not entitled to do that?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend is psychic because along with millions of fellow citizens, I received my PAYE coding notice a few days ago. It made heroic assumptions about next year's income, which I wish I shared. The name and address of my inspector of taxes—probably the same inspector of taxes as that of other hon. Members—was at the top of the letter. Lower down the letter was his telephone number, which looks expensive to call because he is based in Cardiff. However, no e-mail address was given. At a time when many of us carry out routine business such as querying a tax code by e-mail, that option is not available.

I received a leaflet last year urging me to file my self-assessment tax return via the internet. I was given five compelling reasons why I should do that, including the fact that the form would be returned faster, which is an advantage, I suppose, and the fact that any money

would be repaid sooner. That was followed by a letter from my inspector of taxes, which is probably the document to which my hon. Friend refers, saying that because MPs have special dedicated pages covering their income, allowances and expenses:

"it is not possible to file Returns electronically."

I gather that the same exclusion applies to several other groups of taxpayers.

People with more than one employer have to correspond every year with the Inland Revenue at Longbenton to determine which employer will deduct national insurance contributions. That could be done perfectly well by e-mail in order to save a tedious exchange of letters, but it is not possible.

The Pension Service offers our constituents the facility of forecasting their retirement pensions. Why can people not tap in their national insurance number and relevant details online to find out what their pension will be instead of getting a form, filling it in and waiting?

The driving test is now in two parts: theory and practical. One test can be booked over the internet but the other cannot. I cannot find out on the internet which NHS medical practices are accepting patients. It seems that local general practitioners are even shyer than many MPs when it comes to providing an e-mail address.

I was pleased to discover from the Department of Health website that form E111—which would be useful if I were knocked off my bicycle in any part of the European economic area, is available—but I still have to go to a main post office to fill in another form as well as the E111.

There are, however, some good results. Top marks to the TV licensing authority; I can buy a TV licence over the internet. One of the Departments has enabled me to get a form to register a vote on the internet. There are, therefore, some achievements.

I looked at the Department of Trade and Industry site this morning and clicked on a seductive page offering the full text of ministerial speeches for one day, including a speech to the Insolvency Lawyers' Association. However, either the page has not been updated for over a month, or Ministers have been mute since 11 December, when Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean addressed an audience in Cleveland in the United States. A coherent approach would be to ask the public what transactions they would like to be available, and examine whether those could be delivered. That would be better than the less structured approach of stipulating a deadline by which all transactions must be available.

My final point—I am responding to your injunction to be brief, Sir Nicholas—is the most important one. To what extent do we believe that some citizens can and will access and use public services online? The Minister referred to that towards the end of his speech. Last year's report by the National Audit Office expressed considerable concern about it, and the more recent note by the House of Commons Library staff reinforces that concern.

Local authorities have been busy in the past two years responding to the Government's requirement that they, too, put all their services online by 2005. Looking through some of those local government plans, one is struck by the consistency with which it is reported that broadband internet rather than ordinary dial-up will be needed to make sense of such a strategy.

The Government have spoken a lot about broadband, but there are no effective plans to ensure that it will be made available to citizens across the country by 2005, or indeed according to any other timetable. It is obvious that online access to services is most important and attractive to those who have to travel furthest to obtain those services by any other means—those who live in rural areas. My rural constituents are already up in arms because they cannot get the broadband services that are being promoted so enthusiastically by the Government and others. Broadband is available in Andover and Tadley in my constituency, but more than half of my constituents do not live in those two towns, and therefore cannot get broadband. In many areas, there is no expectation that we will be able to get broadband on an equivalent basis to people in the cities.

I heard what the Minister said about satellite, but I am not sure that that is an acceptable alternative, as it tends to be a fast link one way and a telephone link the other way. It strikes me that the best approach, if one can overcome the regulatory hurdles and deal with the problems about neutrality of platform, is to get BT to enable the exchanges and to bring broadband to them in the way in which most people have it in the cities.

Mr. McWalter: Has the right hon. Gentleman managed to obtain any assessment of how expensive it is to update an exchange? Once that becomes a fairly standard operation, it ought to be possible to upgrade most exchanges in villages. The Government, the regional development agencies and others ought to be able to give assistance on that, to ensure that it can take place universally. That is the only way of achieving universality in these services.

Sir George Young: The answer, as I expect that BT would tell the hon. Gentleman, is that the cost depends on which exchange, its proximity, and how far BT needs to back up the service. My view is that broadband should be considered a universal service, such as telephone, water and other utilities. I believe that the approach adopted should be based on an entitlement to broadband rather than the alternative approach, which is that we should let the market speak, and that somehow it will all sort itself out. However, that may not be a policy which my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Knight) finds himself able to endorse.

Mr. Drew: I should like to clarify the picture with regard to a set threshold. One of the problems in rural areas is that the smaller the area is, the higher the threshold that needs to be achieved to break through the magic number. Following my discussions with BT, I understand that an additional problem is beginning to occur—low take-up once ADSL has been put in place. I am concerned that, if there is not a good level of take-

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up, partly because people are obsessed with the threshold, there will be a double whammy against the benefit.

Sir George Young: When we have this dialogue with BT, it tells us that take-up is pitifully low in areas where it has provided broadband, and asks why it should expand the service in rural areas before it can increase it in the towns. We may have a role to play in encouraging take-up through our chambers of commerce and our businesses to knock out the alibi that BT tends to use.

The Government have made optimistic statements on broadband, but no commitment. A senior BT executive says that he

"believes that by mid-2005 broadband services could be available to about 90 per cent. of households in the country."

It so happens that 90 per cent. of the population live in urban areas, and 10 per cent. in rural areas, which will not overcome the problem.

In November, the Prime Minister told the e-summit, to which the Minister referred, that

"too many of Britain's public services live in the technological dark ages".

I endorse that comment.

To conclude, we need a prioritised approach to putting services online rather than a deadline for all them. That should be linked to a more coherent strategy for ensuring that services are as available to people who live in rural areas as they are to those who live in towns. I will be the first to champion the Government's strategy if we can reach both those targets.

3.15 pm

David Cairns (Greenock and Inverclyde): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on an outstanding opening speech. He need have no worries about leaving the Chamber for half an hour.

I want to expand on some of the excellent points made by the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young). He is on to something with his warning not to adopt a tick-box attitude to which services are put online. We should start by finding out what services people want, need and will use, and not set about automating the past simply by sticking things on to the internet and calling that e-transformation. I hope that my first remarks of the afternoon will be understood in the context that e-transformation involves a radical change of mindset, not simply a series of technical exercises.

I was delighted to hear the Minister put the needs of the customer of public services at the heart of his statement. He said, rightly, that people expect and demand the highest quality of interaction with the private sector, which includes banks, building societies, Amazon.com, and in all the other ways in which we interact. Second-rate services from the public sector will no longer be tolerated. The needs of the customer, not the needs, desires or time scales of the producers, should be at the heart of the debate.

As the Minister said, the Government have a clear agenda of investment in and reform of public services. I was pleased to hear him re-emphasise the £6 billion investment in ICT which is part of the latest investment round, but he is right to point out that e-transformation is not simply a question of money, important though that is. The Prime Minister made it clear that we must combine that investment with reform if we are to achieve our goal. As the Minister said, we need money and reform.

E-transformation is not a technical exercise, and I am delighted to note that not a single anorak is draped over a chair in the Chamber this afternoon. It must be at the heart of the Government's agenda for reform in the services that we offer to our customers and our voters. The opportunities presented by IT and the internet are enormous, and we have only begun to understand them fully. Britain has some of the world's best IT companies and British consumers are among the fastest in Europe to adapt to using new technology. People have become used to dealing with the technology. Twenty years ago, people in my constituency were likely to be working with their hands in the shipyards. Today, those same people are working with PCs, and people who never knew heavy industry are using IT skills from a young age.

The fundamental questions of the debate are: what can we achieve by applying new technology more creatively to the way in which we deliver public services, and why is it necessary? Owing to time constraints, I am not sure that we have quite made the case for why e-transformation is necessary and what benefits might accrue from it. I shall choose one solitary example of why a radical e-transformation of Government services is long overdue.

About 80 per cent. of Government services are delivered by local councils—housing benefit, for example, is administered locally, but under national rules. However, as this month's Audit Scotland report shows, the variation of performance among Scottish councils alone is breathtaking. The time taken to process a housing benefit claim in Scotland ranges from 17 to 106 days. Processing a change of circumstance form ranges from three to 49 days, and the proportion of renewal claims processed on time ranges from 99 per cent. to 25 per cent. That is just one example of one benefit delivered by one sector of government in a part of the United Kingdom that is relatively small in population terms. We could multiply that 100,000 times across the full range of services.

That performance is simply not good enough. A taxpayer who has paid for a service has the right to expect the same quality of service from the producer—in this case, the Government—whether he lives in Greenock, Renfrewshire or anywhere else in the UK. Every local authority with its own IT procurement and human resources department and its own legion of administrators is doing exactly the same thing, but clearly some are doing it very well, whereas others are not.

Many authorities are putting more of their services on their own websites. They would argue that they are making a greater effort to e-enable, but it is a classic example of automating the past and believing that once a technological face has been grafted on a service, the job of e-transforming has been done. That is not e-transformation.

A better example of the use of technology to transform the delivery of a service is telecare, through which doctors can monitor patients over the internet. I

read about a GP surgery that used digital cameras to photograph a patient's skin, stored the photos on a laptop and sent them off to a dermatologist to decide what treatment, if any, was needed. The North Manchester primary care group has, through teleconsultations, reduced its waiting time to see a dermatologist from an average of 18 months to 17 days. That—not filling in a form online to wait in a queue to gain access to a consultant's surgery—is e-transforming services. It is all about using the technology radically to alter the way in which the service is provided.

I understand the Minister's difficulty. Sadly, he does not run every local council and every NHS trust. *[Interruption.]* I would be delighted if my hon. Friend took control over several local authorities and NHS trusts that I can think of, but I will pass on from that.

We have, rightly, given local bodies greater control over their own budgets and more freedom to direct their own affairs, but I must tell the Minister that at some point, such fragmentation will stand in the way of e-transformation. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State acknowledged that in what I take to be a change in Government strategy towards IT in the NHS, at least in England and Wales, where it will not be pushed down to local level but kept at the centre. If we want the e-transformation of public services, we will have to follow that example.

Organisations should be able to adapt to continuous change as a way of life. Far more important than large-scale, expensive and vulnerable single-change projects for the future—putting bits and pieces online—is a mentality that adapts to continuous change and to the challenges of continuous scientific and technological breakthroughs. We need make that step change only once.

Internal reform is vital, but the project will not be complete until the individual customer of Government services can access and interact with them in a fast, secure and convenient way. Almost every hon. Member who has intervened so far has made that point. In the past three years, access to the internet via home computers has more than doubled. Some 11.4 million households—46 per cent.—are now online, and nearly 1 million have been added to that total in the past year alone.

My constituency is top of Scotland's league for home internet use. More than half of households go online for half an hour or more every day, which puts us sixth top in the entire United Kingdom. That is in part because Inverclyde is heavily associated with electronics and the IT sector, but, like many places, it is not without its share of social problems. It is surely no coincidence that the highest take-up of the internet is in London and the south-east, where more than half the population have internet access, and the lowest is in Northern Ireland and Wales, where less than one third do. Furthermore, home internet access is available in four out of five of the richest 10 per cent. of households, but only one in five of the poorest and second and third poorest 10 per cent. of households.

How do we improve those numbers? Some 30 per cent. of people have never used a computer, and it is fair bet that those people come from the most disadvantaged social groups. One important question is whether there is a future in accessing the internet through digital television, and I hope that the Minister has time to address that in his winding-up speech. I appreciate that the take-up of digital television is another debate for another occasion, but there may be an important lesson to be learned. Although 30 per cent. of people have never used a PC, the percentage of people who have never used a television must be zero, so a medium may be readily available that requires no learning of specialist skills. That point was made by the e-envoy last year, when he urged:

"Government at all levels . . . should evaluate Digital TV as a key channel for e-government using the strengths of this medium to deliver richer services and inclusivity."

One of the biggest problems of access is that we are trying to deliver the e-agenda to an audience that is using the same technology that was used decades ago. Dial-up modems have been in use since the 1960s, and we have all experienced the frustration that they entail. As we have heard said, broadband is becoming more widespread, and I will not repeat other Members' remarks other than to say that I was intrigued to see a survey of trendsetters in last weekend's *The Sunday Times*. I am not sure how it measured trendsetters—no one asked me, so I assume that I am not one—but the survey showed that the must-have buy for trendsetters in 2003 is a broadband internet connection.

Too many hurdles are still in the way. Despite the fact that my constituency is the top in Scotland for internet access, we do not have ADSL, and looking at the most recent figures on the BT website, we are miles away from it. However, I commend the Minister's commitment and the Prime Minister's announcement of a new UK broadband taskforce at last year's e-summit.

The challenges that we face are great, but at least we have the opportunity to examine businesses that have gone through the e-transformation already and see whether we can learn any lessons. Many private sector businesses have undergone such a transformation, and I should like to offer a brief example of one business in my constituency that has undergone a global e-transformation. As the Minister knows, IBM has a large presence in Greenock, and I was happy to meet company representatives to discuss their global e-transformation to see what lessons we could learn as a Government. They said that 10 years ago IBM was

"inward focussed, slow to react to environment changes or customer demands, and wasteful because of all the inherent duplication within its separate fiefdoms."

I do not know whether that rings any bells in the Minister's head. IBM then set about transforming its business. I was told that e-transformation is virtually complete and that the gains and efficiency; to use IBM's term, have created an unstoppable momentum.

I will not dwell too long on that example, as I appreciate that time is of the essence, but I was told that when, to use IBM's term, an organisation is heavily "siloed"——when it has pushed down its budgets as far as possible and has given individual fiefdoms as much autonomy as IBM had by the end of the 1980s and early 1990s, that is a huge barrier to e-transformation. I offer the Minister my thought that pushing powers down the line is good in itself, but it may be counter-productive in the long term.

IBM has 350,000 employees. It is not the size of our civil service, but it is not far off it. There are parallels to be drawn, and if we can extract the best processes of

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companies such as IBM and combine them with the political will to implement e-transformation, our public services will be more customer-focused and accessible. However, that must come with a warning: the Government need to implement equivalent organisational improvement rapidly if they are not to become a drag on companies working and investing in the United Kingdom.

I conclude by reflecting on one of the most extraordinary comments that I have read. Speaking at last year's e-summit, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said that e-transformation was

"the key long-term economic and social challenge for our country."

When considered alongside the mountain of other challenges that the country faces, that is an extraordinary statement. To those of us who believe that massive improvements to our constituents' quality of life can be achieved through the better use of modern technology and a radical new mindset, the Prime Minister's words are extraordinarily encouraging. The challenge now is to make that vision a reality.

3.30 pm

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): I welcome the debate and the comments of the Minister who opened it. I have listened to him speak on several occasions, both at the Department of Trade and Industry and the Cabinet Office. Indeed, I have followed him along that route. My shadow responsibility makes me feel like a cyber-stalker. I am missing discussions on digital television roll-out in the Communications Bill Committee, but I thought that it was important to be here and talk about the e-transformation of the Government, which is not something that we often debate in Parliament. The hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Brian White) is in Committee, but he has to deal with amendments.

This is a cross-party issue. Several hon. Members tend to come together on such subjects, as critical friends of the Government. The failure of the Government's large IT projects means poor services for citizens. That gives me no pleasure, other than the obvious opportunities for partisan debate, which do not take us too far forward.

The Minister rightly cited the background of a period of the dotcom boom, after which we moved to what is called the dotcon bust. In many cases, it was a con. The court cases on the stock exchange in New York demonstrate that issues were deliberately talked up. As for the public sector and e-government, we must welcome the opportunity to move away from the rhetoric about utopian visions, where "e" would deliver everything, to a sense of realism about what we are trying to achieve.

I want to speak about challenges and to focus on three matters. The term "putting services on line" covers a multitude of sins—from a telephone call centre to transactions on the internet. It is probably helpful to talk about such matters in the sense of services being available via the internet, which can mean many things: from web services to e-mail access and a range of transactional protocols.

I share many concerns that have been expressed about the crude nature of the Government's targets. Their target of all services being online by 2005 has perhaps led to e-decoration, not e-transformation, when a thin veneer of "e" is laid on top of the service, rather than fundamental changes being made to it. I congratulate the efforts of the e-Envoy and his office. They have been a step forward in raising the profile of such matters. The e-Envoy has been equipped with a crude and blunt instrument and has been told, "Go out there and get everything online by 2005. If you can tick the boxes, we have all met our targets and everything is okay." Well, if all the boxes are ticked, everything will not necessarily be okay.

A key issue is the user base by which to use internet services. We talk about the internet being available in the household as though that is equivalent to the number of people who will use the internet for the Government's services. Such figures run at anywhere between 45 and 55 per cent. and half the population certainly has internet access within the home. However, that makes them only potential users of the Government's services, not actual users. Let us consider the surveys that have been carried out.

In October 2002, an article in *The Guardian* showed that last year the number of Britons who claim to use e-government increased from 11 to 14 per cent. The analogue that I look at closely is the figure for people using online banking, which I think is quite accurate and which reflects well the social divide. At the end of December 2001, the figure for online-enabled bank accounts was some 8 per cent. of the total, which was probably analogous to the numbers who felt comfortable using online services from the Government at that point.

Let us consider the figures for online voting in the pilots that took place in May. In my constituency, which is quite affluent, the figure was about 15 per cent. In constituencies nearby in Sheffield that are significantly less affluent, the figure was about 2 per cent. That gives me the overall sense that on average 10 to 15 per cent. of people feel comfortable carrying out transactions online. The figures will be far lower in deprived areas and a little higher in more affluent areas. That leaves a market of some 85 per cent. of people interacting with the Government using other media.

That is not an argument for slowing down, because there are significant advantages to increasing that 10 to 15 per cent. and working with them. However, we need to bear those points in mind and not assume that, if a Government service is put online, half the people will use it. That was the mistaken attitude of the dotcom boom.

The Inland Revenue figures are helpful. I understand that the figures from the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants in September last year were that only 113,000 people out of the 3.5 million people who had sent their returns to the Revenue by that stage had used the online self-assessment service. We can also consider international comparators. In Canada, for example, which has a smaller population than ours, some 2 million people a year file online, so we still have significant difficulties in getting people to use online services.

I understand that the Government are consulting on the future of the UK online site. There are design and structural questions to be answered about it. My figures show that there are 3,000 Government websites. The UK online concept is a first stab at trying to pull them together, but once someone goes beyond UK online, they start heading off towards lots of weird and wonderful other creations. Again, if we compare that with the Canadian Government online site, we find a far more coherent approach to life. It is far more centralised, but it makes sense to people.

I understand why people do not want to use the UK Government online services. I find using them difficult, so I have every sympathy with others who find that. Someone can reach UK online, search and find what they are looking for, but then they are in the hands of God knows who as they try to get the service done. It is a messy process.

Some of the advances that are necessary to increase the percentage that I mentioned are in the area of training. This is now not about having the kit, but about having the necessary skills. The British Computer Society has played a particularly important role in promoting the European computer driving licence, which I understand has been completed, or is being done, by more than 500,000 people in the UK. Such figures are important.

The other significant player was mentioned by the Minister. We in Sheffield know it as the university for industry, because it is based there, but it is known throughout the rest of the UK by the brand name of Learndirect. I visited people there recently, and it is now the biggest provider of online learning in the world. There was an international conference in Sheffield recently and it turned out that no one else had done what the university for industry has. There is huge potential for growth in this respect. That sort of initiative, which reaches hundreds of thousands and potentially millions of people, leads people to feel comfortable using online services.

I also want to mention the other nine tenths of the iceberg. If the bit that we see is the online bit, the other nine tenths are the back-office systems. Again, that reflects previous comments. The back-office systems are the most important; the website is the icing on the cake. Sadly, we have reversed that order of priorities in many cases. We have put the icing on the cake, but we have done nothing about the back-office systems.

We have been very successful in putting informational systems online, but it is widely recognised that transactional systems, which are the very tough ones, have not been dealt with. I think that it was the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) who highlighted that well with the list of services that he described. There is a common theme to all of those, which is the lack of a method for secure transactions between the public and the Government. I understand that work is ongoing on that, but it poses major questions. To tie it up with the ID card debate would worry me greatly.

There are reactions to ID cards and all sorts of questions relating to ID and the use of Government databases, which the Prime Minister has mentioned. That may act as a barrier to those transactions if people feel that the only way that they can get an ID is to sign up to other things that they feel much less comfortable about. We must to be careful about a neutral secure ID for transactions between citizens and the Government that is not tied up with ID cards and Government databases that link everything together. If that is achievable, it may be more acceptable to the public than going ahead with an all-encompassing solution. I certainly have some nervousness about that.

The comparison with the banks is important. It is a good analogy to return to for many reasons. The banks have developed much more efficient back-office systems; they have a single back-office system and then multi-channel access. The primary channel is the bank branch, but when one goes into a branch one is served by an individual who accesses pretty much the same system one would if one went online or the call centre receptionist would if one phoned up. That kind of architecture is proving successful. I am worried that we may not have engineered these new highly efficient back-office systems in the public sector. We have created a webface to an old fashioned system. That back-office engineering is critical.

The challenges are in three key areas. The first is the capacity of suppliers to deliver. We have seen problems in the Child Support Agency system. The Government expressed a will to change the system for making CSA payments. The suppliers of the IT have been unable to deliver in the required time scale. We may increasingly find that to be a problem. I am particularly keen to see information technology impact assessment brought into our legislative process so that we think about this at an early stage. It is easy for us to come along and alter a system that will require a major IT system change that simply cannot be delivered. That causes all sorts of problems.

The housing benefit systems that were cited by the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (David Cairns) are a good example of that. Local authorities such as Sheffield have contracted out the housing benefit systems, supposedly for greater efficiency. They brought in new mechanical systems to deal with that but they also introduced the housing benefit integrity project, which requires the collection annually of far more paperwork, causing huge delays. I can understand the reason for the housing benefit integrity project, but when constituents complain about waiting three, four, five or six months for a housing benefit payment, it is clear that the knock-on effect for people on the ground was not considered.

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one innovation we could introduce is a statement of each Bill's e-implications, just as each Bill now has a statement under the Human Rights Act? We could analyse the e-implications of each Bill.

Mr. Allan: That is precisely along the lines I was suggesting. There needs to be some form of impact assessment. We look at the money implications. Every Bill has an attachment saying what it will cost. The proposal would not apply to every piece of legislation. It might not apply to criminal justice law, but where we are making major changes to social security, for example, we should not simply vote it through without being told what the systems impact will be.

[Mr. Allan]

The other example is the child passport question. We changed the law, for good reasons, to bring in child passports while implementing a new system in the Passport Agency. The results were obvious and everything screwed up. There are numerous other examples. Some things have moved forward. Digital signatures are now available. However, the secure-transaction questions need to be answered.

The third element that I want to touch on is the public service difference. We have not exploited that. The public sector can command extra effort because of the good will involved in it. We have not extracted that public sector benefit in the way that we do continually in health and education. It is seen as obvious there, but somehow not in IT. There is huge public value on the IT front in the intellectual property in all public services, but we too frequently cede it to others.

In some of the contracting models we have used we have tended to say, "You have the whole thing; IT is yours." The Inland Revenue is a classic example where we have ended up in a single propriety supply-dominant situation. The current feeling in the industry is that no one will even tender for the Inland Revenue contracts because we have locked ourselves in. We effectively cede the intellectual property and fail to take advantage of the large community of developers who work across the public sector and whose work we could build into.

I have welcomed the Government's open source policy across the Dispatch Box. It is important to consider it in terms not only of classic open source software—Linux, Apache or the programmes—but of methodology. One can build open solutions on propriety software and companies, such as IBM, have taken us a long way forward. Its entire product range is now available with Linux as a platform, but it is not going out of business and giving everything away; it is selling solutions based on open source. Important software companies, such as SAP, have moved on to the open source platforms.

There is huge benefit to be reaped from the public sector. For example, we can imagine the vast number of people who work on digital imaging in the NHS looking at how to move X-rays around. Their expertise should be shared openly, instead of our shovelling the cash in the direction of external companies which then own the property rights. We may want to employ external companies to do the coding, but we should own the intellectual property, share it within the community and reap the benefits.

Mr. McWalter: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says about open source. I wonder whether he agrees that the Government need to direct that process. Instead of fragmentation with everyone developing their own systems, co-ordination is required so that the systems are pulled together and end up being more effective.

Mr. Allan: The hon. Gentleman is correct. What was positive about the Government's policy was that they spelled out certain areas where I hope that the Minister will indicate that they are making progress. In particular, they specified that the e-Envoy and the DTI should look at making all Government-funded R and D work open source as a default model, which was clearly within their policy. They are also looking at the option of purchasing the propriety rights to software so that in the health service, for example, one might buy the rights to a good proprietary package and make it available to the developer community. All of those would be great steps forward.

I hope that the Minister will respond positively. IT and e-transformation have now moved to the top of the political agenda, particularly with the Government's stress on IT and the NHS. IT is normally a backwater, but the success or failure of the NHS in terms of the Government's political targets is now dependent on whether e-transformation is achieved. The success or failure of Government IT projects now becomes for the first time a critical political issue. It will affect whether Labour wins the next election.

When the Passport Agency systems went wrong, it was annoying. If the NHS systems do not improve, it will be more than annoying; it will be a political make-or-break issue for the Government. I welcome the fact that IT is at the top of the political agenda and look forward to the rest of the debate.

3.48 pm

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): I thank the Minister for his speech and commend him on his aggressive attitude and deep knowledge, which is rare. I agree with the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) that he is a round peg in a round hole. Along with the Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness, that makes two round pegs in round holes, which must be rare in government. That is welcome because we are giving the right impression to the industry and to our citizens, which is so important. We spent five years not giving the right signal, and I am glad that we are doing so now.

When I came to the House in 1997 I did not think that it could spell the word "internet". We were one of the last Parliaments to go online. Now we are one of the finest. The transformation in our parliamentary data and video network in the past five years has been sensational and its instigators should be commended. I wish that the House could speed up its love affair with e-transformation. Although we passed the digital signature in 1998, we still cannot use a digital signature in the House for early-day motions or anything else. That is deeply disappointing, as we are not giving a lead to the rest of the country.

The Minister said that we would shortly be able to get a car licence online. That will be a wonderful transformation as unfortunately—I am sorry if any Swansea Members are present—the organisation is a disaster. Will the Minister put the BBC collection of the television licence fee online, too? In fact, why not merge those two businesses and float it on the stock exchange? If that money could be hypothecated it would be a major contribution to even more e-business for the Government.

Several different licence fee collection points throughout government could be merged. It is a bit like the back-end operation to which the hon. Member for

Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) referred. As he said, if there is one back office we want lots of channels into it. Who in government looks at this sort of process? We are losing an opportunity to have more efficient services and to make some money.

I emphasise the telephony element of e-transformation because many at local government level know that we are moving to front-office telephony. I shall explain why it is first-phase rather than third-phase and why I am nervous about it. The Government introduced a new child tax credit three years ago; the form was three pages long. In April there will be a new child tax credit; the form consists of 14 pages. The people who have to give that information are generally less able and less well educated; they struggle to read and find filling in forms difficult.

The same applies to housing benefit. Half the trouble is that the Benefits Agency will come back six or seven times to a constituent, who is overwhelmed because he does not understand the forms. The call centre, rather than saying, in effect, "Hallo, how can I misdirect you?" could say, "Please may I have your pin number? Can you confirm your date of birth?" as the banks do online. The person could then ask, "How can we help you fill in the form?" If they did so, £2 billion or £3 billion would no longer remain unclaimed; the amount that people received would go up substantially. That would improve their quality of life. One of the reasons why we become politicians is to improve people's quality of life.

Is there a best practice website in the Cabinet Office that gives the best telephony system in Britain, the best unit system supplying the telephony and the best-trained call centre staff? Could there be an award scheme to give gold medals to those groups? People talk about X-rays being sent up and down the country; as an MP, I would love to know where to find the best digital X-ray system. Where would I find it? There should be a best practice website for the public sector so that we can learn from each other, because that is what the web is about.

I have long argued for the information technology brief to be held in the Cabinet Office, which is why I am thrilled that the Minister is present. However, there are some outstanding issues, although I am not sure how and why they crop up. For example, if I had not tabled a question in December about the failed Foreign and Commonwealth Office computer system, I do not think that Ministers would have known that it was failing. That is critical, because we are trying to change the way the Foreign Office works.

The right hon. Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Knight) and I were fortunate enough to be on a British-American parliamentary group visit to California. To our great surprise, we found that the regional development agencies—south-east is in San Diego, east midlands is in Los Angeles, there are three in silicon valley and one is in San Francisco—do not report to the consular general's offices in Los Angeles, Phoenix or San Francisco. That is complete madness. The community in the United States does not understand where Britain is half the time. It does not want different agencies; a front window should be open electronically for the Foreign Office in California. It is, after all, the sixth largest economy in the world. It matters how we are perceived in California.

Mr. Greg Knight: I am with the hon. Gentleman 100 per cent. on this issue. The scenario that he describes is one of the United Kingdom not having a focused voice in America. Does he agree that the development agencies that are using public money to set up offices in California would be better advised to give grants to bring broadband to rural areas here in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Wyatt: I will discuss broadband in a moment. We have agencies overseas—the British Tourist Authority, the British Council, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and now we have regional development agencies. What the right hon. Gentleman suggests is not the message to send to overseas plc. Someone will have to get a handle on this. It is confusing and is complicating the work of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in its responsibilities to the Department of Trade and Industry.

I am not fond of the Child Support Agency, but I will not lay blame for it. I come from a business and media background and did not know in 1997 what CSA stood for. However, I took a huge interest in it because it was the subject of the biggest part of my mailbox. I then became part of a confidential team in my Department to change the law. Once a week or once a fortnight, I used to go to meetings with the Minister. In about April 1998, it was explained to us that we would be introducing a system in April 1999. I said, "Oh really? There are 1 million cases and there will be approximately 1 million more by next April. I do not know of a piece of software that can deal with that." One of the permanent officials turned to the Minister and said, "It's done."

The reason why things have been delayed is either that the secretariat in that Department does not understand software or that people were conned by somebody telling them, "No, don't worry. Two million cases is a piece of cake." Today is 16 January 2003 and the system has yet to be introduced. That represents four years of hell for people whose cases are dealt with by the CSA, which came about as a result of a horrible piece of legislation. The cause of the delay is a failure to consider the e-implications. We must have a deep look into those implications when we pass legislation.

Have any further advances been made on lottery terminals? The hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam mentioned bank terminals. Of course, bank terminals go down at midnight and are empty for six hours a day—that is an example of a potential back-end use. The Branson bid included a proposal to do most of the work on the post offices and the licence fees, but I have seen no movement whatever from Camelot.

Mr. Allan: I could not agree more about bank machines. Recently, I was in Spain and noticed that cinema and theatre tickets were being sold from bank terminals as if they were internet kiosks. The network is ready and waiting, and I hope that the Government will take advantage of it.

Mr. Wyatt: I could not agree more.

I want to talk now about UK online, which is just wonderful. It is the most amazing thing to be able to open, in the poorest areas of my own patch, four centres. They are full. It is incredible; it is an unnoticed revolution. I commend the Government for what they have done. However, we also have libraries and schools

[Mr. Wyatt]

that are online but not connected to each other. Schools close at 4 o'clock and libraries close at 5 o'clock and are not open on Sundays when children need access. The UK online centres are good because they are open all the time.

I would like there to be some co-ordination. We could have created a broadband hub in every town and village and fed in the schools, the post offices, the libraries and the village halls. It is not clear to me that we have got that message across. The Minister is nodding; I am sure that he has got the message, but we have to corral Departments to think about joined-up government.

The BBC has missed a trick. I know that, at the media conference in Oxford yesterday, the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport announced a review of the BBC. That is very welcome. The BBC spends more on its online site than Yahoo!, which is the largest online site; the BBC spends more money on its content than does the most commercial site. There is something wrong there. That money is being spent by the BBC, but not on a public service. For instance, people cannot get consumer advice online, or the Encyclopaedia Britannica or information services.

Mr. McWalter: I understand what my right hon. Friend is saying, but does he not commend the extraordinary depth and quality of the educational materials on the BBC website? They are some of the most splendid sources of information on the web.

Mr. Wyatt: I do commend them. However, the Open university, which is the finest in the world, does one thing while Learndirect produces something else on the same principle—teaching. There is also the BBC. That is crackers. The organisations should work together. The Open university should be a partner with Learndirect and Learndirect should be part of the BBC education project for which the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport gave permission this week. There are insufficient stakeholders. The BBC wants to build a bigger and bigger empire, but I want it to be a stakeholder in other people's businesses rather than running things itself. Its website is excellent, but there is a principle that citizens need advice, such as on how to buy a house. That is a public service, which is what the BBC is for. Most of the BBC website does not represent a public service.

I went to see the Leader of the House to suggest that a review of broadband would be sensible and to ask him to set up a special Select Committee on broadband that could discuss all the implications such as whether broadband should be universally available, like water and electricity, and how we should achieve that. He was very keen. I then spoke to the Chairmen of the Select Committees to which broadband is relevant—Trade and Industry; Culture, Media and Sport and so on. None were interested in joining together to create a broadband Select Committee. It is sad that they would rather hold on tight to their little bit of territory. It is like the silos that we keep complaining about in government.

The hon. Members for Sheffield, Hallam and for Esher and Walton (Mr. Taylor) and I created our own broadband group, which we called the shadow Select Committee. We held a meeting, the Minister gave evidence and we have worked with *Computing* magazine to ensure that that evidence will come out. That committee will establish best practice, and we want a committee to consider spam for the same reason. Spam represented 8 per cent. of internet traffic a year ago, but now 35 per cent. of internet traffic is made up of spam e-mails. Some of it is awful and pornographic. It is crackers that billions of spam messages a day clutter up the internet.

The House needs to be able quickly to set up Select Committees on single issues so that we can corral the best information and bring people in to decide the legislation that we need. The fact that we cannot do that is a weakness of the House. I e-mailed the Minister this morning to ask whether he would allow us to hold a shadow Select Committee on spam, but I would rather have a proper Select Committee.

Mr. McWalter: As a member of the Select Committee on Procedure, I ask my hon. Friend to direct his suggestions to it.

Mr. Wyatt: I will do that, and I thank my hon. Friend for the suggestion.

Sir Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): I make no comment from the Chair. *[Laughter.]*

Mr. Wyatt: When I chased up my regional development agency, I found that there was absolute chaos. It had started using the money that has been made available without preparing an audit of need for the south-east. It said, "Here's some money; let's apply for it." Two hundred businesses have been given a satellite link for broadband. Well, please. That is what we mean about holding things in the centre and best practice coming out. We have wasted about £1 million on broadband. Not one of the links is in the Isle of Sheppey, which is part of my constituency and the sixth poorest area in the south-east. We do not have cable television because no one would bid for a poor franchise, would they? The Independent Television Commission, bless it, thought about the Isle of Sheppey, and then thought that the Isle of Thanet was an island. It put the two together and made a cable offer. Of course, nobody made a bid for it; the Isle of Thanet is the poorest area. Alleluia.

We have never had cable so we have always had to pay British Telecom prices, but we will never get broadband because BT will not bring it to our area. The South East England Development Agency, which has been challenged to reduce poverty, has not even done an audit of need. Will the Minister ask all the regional development agencies to send in audits of need before spending more on broadband?

We have got a satellite link in our rural UK online centres. That is a BT link and it goes down about 80 times a day because its Berlin operation is not working properly. We had to track down where in the system things are wrong. It is all very well to say, "Do satellite," but one has to be really careful with it. There are better satellite systems than the one that BT uses, but there are cost implications to them. The planning regulations must be changed so that broadband is delivered

universally just like water and gas are—it must be part of that provision. It is obvious that that is what we must do.

I commend a project that is in its infancy and that I mentioned yesterday. Nick Dunlop of PA Consulting near Victoria is putting together a very ambitious and visionary project called e-Parliament that will connect online all the Parliaments in the world, so that if someone has a particular interest—in health or transport, for instance—they will be connected to the people who are interested in that in France, Germany, the United States of America, Australia and so forth. It will bring people together. When someone thinks, "Hang on, I wonder how do they do that in Germany," they will not have to run around worrying about the answer. They will be able to click and connect with a group of people whom they can ask, "What is your legislation on that? Show me what it looks like." That is an amazing concept. This is the most exiting project that I have come across for many years, and I commend it to the House.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Sir Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): Order. Several hon. Members wish to speak. The spokesman for Her Majesty's Opposition has not yet risen to his feet, and I would like to call him at approximately 10 to 5 at the latest in order to enable the Minister to have sufficient time to wind up.

4.6 pm

Mr. Chris Mole (Ipswich): E-government is one of the most exciting and crucial agendas of our time, and I am lucky to have had a range of experiences that enable me to bring a trio of perspectives to the subject. After surviving 17 years as a research manager at the BT laboratories just outside Ipswich, I became one of the few engineers to move into the brave world of politics at local, regional and now national levels. My most recent insights come from these experiences, but they are applicable across the full range of public services.

As a Member of Parliament, I want to reflect my constituents' desire to see a step change in the improvement of the convenience, quality and quantity of all public services at national and local level that are delivered by national Government or local government or by others acting on their behalf.

My constituents should expect the services of the future to be very different. Those services should be joined-up in ways that make sense to them; accessible at the times and places most convenient to them; delivered or supported electronically, thereby facilitating fast, more reliable and better value services; delivered jointly, where appropriate, by local and regional partnerships, and connected to a national infrastructure; delivered seamlessly, so that customers should not be asked to provide the same information more than once and service providers are better able to identify, reach and meet their needs; and open and accountable, so that information will be freely and easily available, complaints will be easy to make and responded to quickly and effectively, and citizens will be able to participate effectively in local decision making. As has been said, the focus of the development of e-government must, therefore, be citizen-centred.

The comments of the Minister for Local Government and the Regions and Sir Jeremy Beecham, the chair of the Local Government Authority, summarised the approach on which we need to focus. Last year, they stated:

"e-Government means exploiting the power of information and communications technology to help transform the accessibility, quality and cost effectiveness of public services and to help revitalise the relationship between customers and citizens and the public bodies who work on their behalf.

e-Government is more than technology, more than the Internet, more than service delivery. It is about putting citizens and customers at the heart of everything we do and building service access, delivery and democratic accountability around them. Local e-government is the realisation of this vision at the point where the vast majority of public services are delivered. This is why the Government—and local government—have committed themselves to making all services electronically available, and the Internet available to everyone, by 2005."

Therefore, services must continue to be available to everyone, and that may mean delivery through a variety of channels that are suitable to different ages, cultures or social groups. We should aim for universal access, recognise the risk of digital divide, and look at solutions such as providing training and hand-holding for those currently without the necessary skills and confidence. Some service outlets, such as libraries, tourist information centres and colleges, could be tailored to provide such support. To an extent, Learndirect and other projects in my constituency are already doing that. All of that recognises the fact that government at any level is democratic and must be accountable. There are clearly issues about confidentiality and data sharing that must never be forgotten.

During the mid to late 1990s, the e-government agenda continued to grow in importance. It was obvious at that time that local government had an enormous capability to create innovative solutions, but the biggest challenge was the potential size of the agenda that organisations had to address. The agenda includes transactions, access channels, enablers, e-business and organisational development. Of those, transactions are probably the most straightforward and offer an immediate sense of progress. Certainly, in Ipswich, the borough council's sports facility bookings and the county council's online library service are excellent examples of how services have been make easier for citizens to use. Customer First provides a one-stop for social care customers. Electronic prescriptions speed up responses to medical needs and e-commerce improves transaction efficiency.

Similarly, there have been national initiatives, including NHS Direct Online. The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency uses an online payment system for television licences, making life simpler for citizens. However, just considering the plethora of potential access channels highlights the difficult decisions that policy makers have to take. Which technologies will achieve penetration and which will last? Given the pace of change of technology, guessing the future is a risky business. However, web penetration in the UK is now significant, with a generation of people leaving school having learnt to use the web, a generation of workers for whom the internet is a way of life, and a growing army of silver surfers. Broadband connections are currently growing at a rate of 30,000 a week.

[Mr. Chris Mole]

However, there are risks. Was WAP—wireless application protocol—a successful technology? On the other hand, SMS text messaging was never supposed to be a primary feature of GSM—global system for mobile—mobile phone technology, and it now accounts for £1 million of business a week for mobile operators, generated mostly, but not exclusively, by those under 30. I was encouraged to hear that the new Connexions service in Suffolk is developing the use of text messages to arrange appointments and communicate with some of their clients in the 14 to 19 age group.

There is always the risk, for those of us who are old enough to remember the early days of video recorders, of another VHS-Betamax competition. On the subject of television—this is relevant to comments made by hon. Members—it is interesting that the iSuffolk Pathfinder is considering the potential of digital television. The case is unanswerable. The TV is just about the most ubiquitous piece of domestic technology, and if the Government achieve digital switchover by 2010, almost everyone will have one. The recent troubles of ITV Digital show that even in that channel, waters do not always flow smoothly. However, there are already solutions on the satellite and cable network platforms, although we might need greater penetration than one TV per household if we are to avoid arguments about going online to pay council tax when one's sons and daughters want to watch "Neighbours".

However, it is the last of the items on the agenda for public service agencies—that of organisational development—that is probably the most critical. In no sense can the full potential of e-government be realised by computerising existing processes. Indeed, wider modernisation must be seen as a sibling agenda, and the introduction of call centres, one-stop shops, customer relationship management systems and business process re-engineering must be thought of as part of the same set of challenges. At that point, decision makers may reach a crisis, as there are too many options, and the future is almost too uncertain for investment decisions to be clear. That can almost lead to a somewhat rabbit-like paralysis in the face of the technological headlights. Clear business planning will be one tool for informing the business case when savings can be identified and when investment payback times are reduced. Other strategies must include reducing the risk and sharing the cost.

It is likely, therefore, that to achieve maximum value for money, bodies will engage in multi-tiered, multi-agency partnerships. Frankly, the public do not see the silos in which services are held, whether by central Government or one of the tiers of local government, and naturally expect services to be joined up. They do not want to have to give their details more than 50 times to people in different organisations, let alone to those in the same one, as often happens. A local retailer who has access to some form of postcode database will only want to know a customer's house number and postcode to complete successfully all the address fields on an invoice. The private sector will be an important partner, bringing technical expertise, ready-tailored solutions and different cultural perspectives. We shall all watch the partnership between Liverpool city council and BT to see the potential of such a high level of dependence on external solutions.

Clearly, where we start can be driven by national and local priorities, such as education, health, crime, economic development, transport and the environment, which go some way to guiding the e-government agenda in prioritising projects. The Local Government Association added e-citizenship and e-democracy to the service priorities. E-citizenship refers to the drive to empower local populations to give them the skills, confidence and opportunities to exploit e-enabled access. E-democracy means not just the capacity to vote electronically in local and national elections, but the use of the internet and related technologies to involve people in consultation and community planning.

E-enabled councillors are a crucial stage in the process. Councillors or non-executive directors of boards and other agencies that are online will have better access to information, be better informed, have a more effective interface with full-time staff and should engage more readily with their communities. They will also have a greater capacity to take key decisions about the e-government agenda.

It became a mark of inclusion in the post-executive/scrutiny split world of Suffolk county council that the leadership of the Labour group that I led would initiate e-mail-based policy discussions to clarify the thinking of colleagues around key issues. With more than 30 members in the group, it produced some lengthy e-conversations, but headed off much of the rumour and misinformation that so often plagues good decision-making.

For three years I was the deputy chairman of the East of England Development Agency, which had a different, but parallel, agenda. Its regional vision was

"to make the East of England a world-class economy, renowned for its knowledge base, the creativity and enterprise of its people and the quality of life of all who live and work here".

Within the regional economic strategy, EEDA supports enablers for regional economic competitiveness in which increasing the productivity of businesses and public agencies is critical. The fundamental principle is that, in a knowledge economy, a developed region like the east of England must compete on the strength of its skills and ability to exploit knowledge, not on wage competition.

The three most critical aspects of the RES for our region are: the coverage and capacity of broadband networks, access to ICT hardware linked to the networks and ICT to underpin the development of skills. As regards the last, I was pleased recently to open a learning centre and a community shop on the Chantry estate in Ipswich, bringing access and learning to an area where technology uptake might not otherwise have been expected.

The Ipswich constituency sits in a region with a mixed urban/rural topology, of which Suffolk is highly representative. That leads to critical questions about the development of innovative methods of delivering high quality and high capacity broadband network coverage through wireless, satellite or cable. I have even heard discussion about the development of a series of low orbit transmission stations suspended from medium altitude balloons, though I am thankful that suppliers are now offering satellite-based broadband products.

It is interesting to note that Suffolk was an early trial location in the 1970s for a line-of-sight microwave link intended to offer wireless voice services in the Saxmundham area. An abortive high capacity analogue microwave waveguide test was tried around the same time. Many thought that it would have been more valuable if it had been extended to Southwold and connected directly into Adnam's brewery.

The distances from exchange to premises are a technical barrier to broadband in rural areas. It is not just a question of whether an exchange can be enabled, but whether it is possible to get from the exchange to the premises. The problem of insufficient demand, which undermines the economic case for upgrade to ADSL or similar technology, can affect both urban and rural localities. A good example is the Felaw Malting enterprise centre in Ipswich—a successful location for growing and high-tech businesses, but the local exchange cannot currently supply high-speed data connection because it is not based on the town's main exchange.

Thankfully, the objectives of agencies such as the RDA and the UK broadband task force to co-ordinate the aggregation of demand, has been taken on commercially by BT. Some hon. Members have spoken about the BT website on which people can register their need for broadband: when demand is sufficient, conversion can take place. The Government's £1 billion investment in public service networks will contribute to the weight of demand to produce viable cases for broadband locally. It is through such solutions that our RDA envisages every home eventually having access and providing the opportunities for people to acquire the basic ICT skills that will allow them to access online learning.

EEDA is managing a £5.8 million Government fund to encourage more telecommunication providers to supply more broadband services to the east of England. Through that fund, it intends to establish a brokerage system for potential customers, encourage application providers to assemble packages of broadband applications to make such services more attractive to business and public services, connect business parks, run an awareness campaign and set up a competition to provide community-based demonstrations of the benefits of broadband technology.

The digital dividend at this stage is potentially significant. That dividend could include overcoming obstacles to accessing rural and peripheral areas, such as living locally and working globally; enabling business participation in e-commerce and e-banking and thereby enhancing productivity and competitiveness; and reducing the need to travel and the demand for new business premises by flexible and remote working. The benefits could also include giving flexibility to business location decisions, encouraging and promoting business start-ups in areas of physical regeneration, delivering training and learning opportunities via ICT, enabling the use of ICT for further skills development, and the promotion of social inclusion by enabling internet access for all.

In a way, the regional agenda exemplifies the best practice role of government. No one in central Government would claim, any more than they would in local government, that the ability of Departments to respond to the e-government agenda is anything more than patchy and sometimes inconsistent, despite the best efforts of the Cabinet Office and the Office of the e-Envoy.

My favourite anecdote concerns the day on which we had been considering at county hall the Government's new proposals for education maintenance allowances. Frustrated by the enormity of yet another paper-based form to be faced by schools and pupils alike, I fired off an e-mail to the Secretary of State for the Home Department, in his former capacity as the Secretary of State for Education. I suggested to him that Suffolk county council, of which I was leader at the time, could perhaps develop, in partnership with the Department for Education and Skills, a web-based form that might simplify life in schools. I waited patiently and finally received a reply from some functionary in the Department, which started, "I hope you do not mind me replying by e-mail." That sort of thing does not fill one with hope.

I am not sure that even the Cabinet Office has solved the problem. One of the sources of information that is critical to us as MPs is a list of ministerial responsibilities, which we use to direct inquiries from constituents to the correct Minister. Following last year's mini-reshuffle, the existing PDF file became out of date. Some weeks later, having failed to elicit a response to the message I had left on the Cabinet Office website, I e-mailed the officer responsible, who e-mailed me back saying that the document was going to the printers, which was not what I wanted to know. I do not know why they had not updated the PDF file on the website the day after the decision was finalised.

That is sufficient criticism, because the role of Government must be a positive and facilitative one. That role should include a statement of central priorities for local service delivery, policies that deliver outcomes that matter, a framework for strategic e-planning and delivery, a common model of e-government, technical standards to promote communication and shared services, a national infrastructure for electronic service delivery, and the allocation of resources.

The Minister and others mentioned the £1 billion that was allocated for networking in 2000, and the commitment in the comprehensive spending review to £6 billion for ICT for public services over the coming years.

I am pleased to see that the partnerships that are developing between local government in my constituency, central Government and other agencies intend to get the best for our citizens. As MP for Ipswich, I am encouraged to see that the iSuffolk Pathfinder has been an important tool in improving the convenience, quality and quantity of public services.

E-government is a critical agenda. Those who see that agenda as important only for some are a continual frustration to me. Driving change in public service culture is crucial to delivery, and all MPs should be engaged as advocates and champions for e-government to serve their communities.

4.23 pm

Dr. John Pugh (Southport): There is general consensus that e-transformation of public services is a good thing. It speeds up delivery, improves access, and enables information to be made easily and widely

[Dr. John Pugh]

available. However, there are also bad facets of e-transformation. It depersonalises a service that should be personal, creates confusion, excludes people who do not have access to the requisite equipment, and can lead to inflexibility.

However, there are thousands of good examples of the huge progress that has been made through e-government and e-technology—whether in applications and form filling, planning procedures, complaints procedures or traffic management. In the police force, enormous benefits have been gained in surveillance and detection due to the introduction of e-technology.

On education, recent research has shown that there is not always a proportional improvement in the performance of pupils despite massive investment in IT. I tried to think of an explanation and came up with a simple one that may commend itself. In essence, teaching is a communication business, and it is not invariably the case that people who sit in front of keyboards and stare at screens are the best at communicating. In fact, there is little correlation between good social skills and an obsession with computers. Even in the public service, we lose the personal dimension through various forms of e-government, which may not be an advantage.

However, my primary focus is on value for money. As we all know, there have been well-documented catastrophes in IT procurement throughout the public spectrum. One need only mention the Home Office, and the Learning and Skills Council, whose software makes it impossible to determine how much further education colleges have to spend. That is a recent hiccup, but one that is all too frequent in the history of e-government. One might also mention the enormous amount of obsolescence and the computer equipment that is now in crates or skips throughout the country because it was ordered ill-advisedly. That was not always because technology overtook it, but simply because such things as compatibility were not checked out.

I am concerned about the amount that we will spend on e-government. We have already spent enormous sums. Councils have spent fantastic amounts again and again. I accept that it is one thing to make the odd bad buying decision: over a period of time, good practice sets in and such mistakes become less frequent. However, I am deeply concerned about embracing a strategy that is correct and avoiding one that is flawed. Any advance in e-government that leads to a greater dependence on monopoly suppliers and providers worries me deeply. The entente between Bill Gates and the Prime Minister worried many people in the IT world and the commercial world in general. It is well accepted that Bill Gates and Microsoft are not natural pluralists. The experience in the United States and in Europe shows that, from time to time, Bill Gates needs to be reminded that there is such a thing as a competitive and open market.

Worrying signs persist. We all recognised that it was a mistake when the Government allowed Microsoft to design their e-portal in such a way that made it inaccessible initially to all but Microsoft browsers. The procedure was over-budgeted and we eventually tried to sell the system to Egypt. Even now, I am told that the relationship between the civil service and Microsoft is cordial, to say the least, yet there are still certain hitches when using non-Microsoft technology to access Government services.

I am told that it is difficult to get far on page 3 of the income tax form without using Internet Explorer or some other Microsoft product. I am also told that the national health service has done a deal with Microsoft whereby computers are provided with the OEM operating system thrown in for free. I am worried by repeated stories in the press that digital certificates for VAT returns and similar forms are not universally accessible to non-Windows-based computers. Someone who is by no means inexpert in the use of technology to fill in their corporation tax return on the Equifax system told me today that they had experienced problems.

The Government have set their face against such problems. I know about the Electronic Government Interoperability Framework—eGIF—the principles of interoperability and other principles for which the Government stand. However, it is not the principle that primarily concerns me, but the implementation of it across the board. It is possible for industry standards to be confused with proprietary standards. Proprietary standards occasionally become industry standards simply because the firm is so successful and its technology so good that it dominates the market and everyone must use it. That has happened in all fields of technology from time to time. However, it is best when it happens through open competition.

It is crucial that the Government try to make that competition as open as possible, if only because it can save billions. There have been significant savings to private bodies that have looked outside the Microsoft world. A current example is the use of a UNIX-based system by the West Yorkshire police authority. There are significant and increasing risks in putting ourselves in the position of being solely dependent on a monopoly supplier, because we are moving away from a system in which we purchase software to one in which we lease and pay to re-lease software, thereby ensuring an income stream for the IT companies.

In the IT world, people are buying less and less hardware, possibly because they are unimpressed by the pretensions of new hardware. However, computer companies will pick up the income stream lost there by endeavouring to lease software, rather than sell it outright. Increasingly, software is requiring digital authorisation, which does not yet lock out third-party software but may in the future, and in America people are dreaming up schemes associated with trusted hardware for which not only the operating system, but the hardware that accompanies will be prescribed.

I am worried that we may be sleepwalking into a degree of dependence, which would be unfortunate as there is increasing evidence that there are a variety of robust alternative solutions outside individual suppliers. Recent research in education established that schools found Macintosh-produced products to be more stable and reliable than some of the products that they customarily buy, and systems exist that are not as virus vulnerable as some of the systems that the Government use. I hope that the Minister does not think that I am pleading for some sort of geeks, or anoraks, charter. I am arguing that what is written in the open-source software document presented by the Office of the

e-Envoy should not remain sitting in the document. It should come up front as a Government promotion. We are looking not for indulgence of anoraks, but a fight against monopoly provision and a battle for technological standards.

More importantly to the Government, it is an opportunity to save a colossal sum of money. I am worried about procurement naivety, and I should like to give an example of that from my experience. The House of Commons provides all hon. Members with PCs, which have Windows 2000 or nothing, although that is not the fundamental objection. We have an e-mail system that is probably the most virus vulnerable of any on the market, and we have also been provided with excellent Hewlett Packard machines, which provide scanning and copying facilities, fax access and so on. We pay for them as client MPs, as it were, and are provided with printer cartridges, which are replaced X number of times and quickly exceed the cost of purchasing the machine. If I had ordered a machine, I would not have put myself in that position, but the House of Commons has.

I am arguing for the promotion of robust competitive standards and proper and public audits of procurement, for which I think the Minister has sympathy. I am arguing not for a re-examination of patent law in so far as it constricts computer procurement, but for a realistic appraisal of benefits. Ultimately, I suppose that I am arguing for a little more cynicism and a little less naivety.

4.33 pm

Margaret Moran (Luton, South): I will argue for a little more politics and passion on e-transformation and perhaps a little less of the perception outside the Chamber—I think that we are the good guys, because we realise this—that the agenda belongs to boring bureaucrats and turgid techies. E-transformation has little to do with the technology; in my view, it is all to do with the citizen.

As has been said, we need to keep that citizen focus firmly in our mind and make some of the political arguments more strongly, particularly to those who will be delivering e-services and achieving our e-transformation, than we have perhaps done so far. Without that understanding, we are in danger of having not an e-transformation but an e-oil slick. That would be a superficial and unsustainable approach in which things happen as they always have and there is a gentle, pretty slick on the top that achieves nothing or is counter-productive.

I, too, congratulate the Minister. In him, we have someone who understands the agenda and is driving it forward. The announcement of additional resources at the e-summit has already been mentioned. Those resources are substantial and over and above those e-projects that have already taken place, such as UK online and schemes to get IT into libraries and schools. We must ensure that our reasons for transforming public services are clearly understood. There is an imperative to get it right. That is not easy, and we must ensure that the message of why we are doing this work is conveyed to councils, many of which are endeavouring to push the agenda hard, but some of which see the policy in terms of targets and ticked boxes rather than as a radical re-engineering transformation.

We must ensure that councils are looking not only at the quantity but the quality of services online. We need to get the message across to staff, some of whom may fear modernisation or job cuts by the back door rather than viewing the changes as a transformation of their employment opportunities. The changes can cut out the boring back room and release staff into more productive, satisfying frontline roles and personal service opportunities. Opportunities can be offered to citizens who, in many instances, feel no relationship to online services. They do not understand the value of such services or why they should use them. We have to think more broadly about encouraging citizen engagement online rather than simply seeing e-services as a mechanistic process of putting services online and hoping that citizens will engage with them.

The political message is not only, "My God, if the computer project crashes we will not have helped people on a hospital waiting list". It is broader. We want to modernise our public services, not only to save them, as in the bad old days, and to make them more efficient, although that is at the heart of what we are trying to do. We also have to transform them in order to continue investment in frontline services, to maintain and improve our citizens' confidence in our public services. The alternative is that people will lose confidence. The ethos of what we are trying to achieve—we do not mention the socialist principle too often these days, but we should—will be undermined.

There is a clear political divide. Some hon. Members in this debate see the issue purely in terms of efficiency, cost savings and, dare one say it, achieving their targets to reduce public spending and give money back through tax cuts to those who need it least.

We need to send a clear message. A key task is to encourage citizens to engage online. The key issue is e-equality—with a big "E". We must ensure the quality of online services and also the equality of services, which means targeting those citizens least likely to be engaged online. We must focus absolutely on that.

In years past, we have talked about the digital divide. It no longer exists in the sense of access to technology because the reverse is true and there is more kit out there than most people know what to do with. We must enable them to use that technology. There is another issue: empowerment—another big "E". It is about ensuring that communities have the confidence to go online and are able to use the technologies in various ways that are not prescribed by the Government.

People must feel comfortable with the technologies, and they must gain the confidence and skills that will enable them to feel that online public service is important and that they can engage with it. They could then inform us about the services that they value and tell us about their priorities. Those are the things to which we should be paying attention. If we do that, we are more likely to appreciate that process and, by linking what we do to e-democracy, to enhance the democratic process.

Citizens are telling us what they value and how they think that services could be improved, so we must ensure that public services are always improving. That issue is linked with e-participation and technology. If we are investing this much in our e-government services, we

[Margaret Moran]

must at least build into them the opportunity for citizens to give us feedback on a range of issues, thereby enhancing the health of democracy.

We are, at the moment, seeing different agendas forming. In talking about e-transformation, we must bring those agendas together, because one of our problems is partly the way in which we are organising and, as we have said endlessly, creating Government silos. The task of transforming Whitehall will inevitably be huge and, although I am sure that the civil servants will not be pleased to hear me say so, it will probably be the most difficult task. We must deal with that; otherwise we are in danger of delivering services, using that silo mentality, which do not relate to people's complex lives. The Government must ask the right questions. This is not a technocratic agenda. We must ask how we can help and enable people, rather than ask, "How are you meeting your 2005 targets?" We need to look at our structures.

I am delighted that the delivery unit, rightly, has the lead responsibility for the agenda. However, whether we are talking about e-public services provided by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the Leader of the House, part of the Prime Minister's office or someone from the Lord Chancellor's Department, or about e-democracy, let us start thinking across the piece. If we do not, there is a danger that we will miss opportunities. We are also in danger of initiative-itis, about which we complain endlessly. Departments set up projects, but they bear no relationship to each other and, as a result, we are not getting the best value, either for our money or for communities. We must focus on quality, not on quantity.

I agree with the hon. Member who referred to our looking at the kinds of services that we put online. I call that the "moose licence" approach to online services. The Canadian Government put moose licence applications online and wondered why they were not overwhelmed by people going online. I do not know how many people hunt moose—or, perhaps, meese—in Canada. We have put online the simple tasks and not those which people need or value. We need, therefore, to consider the more complex operations that, due to their procedures, require many different forms to be completed.

Housing benefit provides a classic example of how too many agencies can be involved. In my former life I was the leader of Lewisham council in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and we put housing benefit online and joined up with social services and the Benefits Agency to try to get some coherence for our citizens, so that they did not have to replicate information and we did not have the chaos of forms getting lost. Those services, and even more complicated ones, need to be online. It is no good just putting information services online, useful though that is; citizens need interactive and transactional services, but we are still far from achieving that.

Some years ago, we had a vision in Lewisham of a personalised, relationship-building portal whereby citizens could be e-mailed about the fact that Johnny needed to bring his gym shoes to school that day or that Catford bridge was to be dug up the following week. That is how good businesses act, especially in the States. We should be aiming at that smart use of technology. We need a system to focus on complex services that affect people's lives—the wicked issues.

A little more than a year ago, I put forward a proposal to the e-Envoy's office about a project that we were trying to get off the ground in my constituency of Luton. It was called Women Speak 2. I cite the traumatic experience of a woman fleeing from domestic violence who had to contact between eight and 10 different agencies, giving the same information. Imagine that: she loses her home and her life, but then has to take the kids to different agencies and fill in eight to 10 forms. Why cannot such information be gathered at the click of a button?

Moreover, a click of a button could alert the police to a problem, and help would be available. What I am talking about is not rocket science, but a complex issue that could be dealt with through technology. I have heard no more about my proposal, but I am sure that the e-Envoy knows the reason for that. Such services would be incredibly valuable. They would make contact with the hardest to reach. If we can tackle such issues, everything else will come right.

Work needs to be more joined up. For example, we must ensure that the work of local authorities is online and that they know their targets for 2005. They must fill in their "implementing electronic government" statements. Why are we not encouraging them to consult about their community plans online, instead of that being done by four men and a dog in a cold, draughty hall on a rainy Wednesday evening? Why are we not enabling online links to be made to the neighbourhood renewal strategies and regeneration strategies for our communities?

Why, when the 10th most deprived ward in the United Kingdom—my area—has more technology than we know what to do with through UK online centres, schools and libraries, do we not have a sensible connecting strategy as Canada did? Connecting Canada allowed the community to go into schools or wherever technology was available to learn skills, to search for jobs, to play games or to set up e-communities. Our strategies are not joined up, partly for want of a ha'p'orth of tar. We have spent the capital. We need now to spend a little revenue to ensure that communities can be facilitated.

I am working on a project in my constituency called Click Bury Park. It is aimed at building a community portal for young Bangladeshi mums and youngsters, to enable them to use facilities outside of the time when they would usually be used. It was set up to bring together local information and to allow online debates to take place. The people involved want to discuss drugs and forced marriages to inform our public sector agencies and local authorities.

We need to take a community-based, bottom-up approach. I differ from some of my colleagues in that respect. If our citizens are to be online, engaged, e-enabled and skilled, we must allow them to participate in activities with which they feel comfortable. That is how our e-transformation agenda will make progress.

There has been too much top-down, and too little bottom-up. Let us have more community empowerment.

4.49 pm

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): I am a bit short of time, so I shall use the time available to me to raise points that other hon. Members have not raised.

I suppose that I disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South (Margaret Moran). I accept that there is an important role to be played in respect of community development, but I shall plead with the Minister to be more directive and to bite the bullet on some of the implications of that initiative, particularly for support and administrative staff.

I shall begin, however, with the way in which e-government has affected me as a Member of Parliament. I must confess that, even as an ex-director of IT at a university, I did not initially allow my constituents to access me by e-mail. The reason for that was straightforward: I had a huge volume of mail, but there was only me and a small administrative team to answer it. Only when Parliament voted extra funds through was I able to appoint someone whose duties included helping me with e-mail. Now, instead of a closed system, I have an open system, through which I am accessible. The moral of that story is that we cannot simply give someone some type of link and say, "There you are. Now you've got it." There are staffing implications. If we provide the facility and the additional staff, we improve the service.

With my relatively modest IT skills, I could have taken short cuts. I could simply have set up an e-mail system, coded it, and, when people wrote in, issued an e-reply without taking into account what they had said at all. The hon. Member for Southport (Dr. Pugh) spoke about the possibility of a depersonalised service arising from e-transactions, and it is important to recognise that, if the service is too depersonalised, we make things worse, not better. People must be deeply involved in the delivery of these services. If that is what my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South meant, I agree with her.

We are considering the empowerment of people to use e-technology, and that empowerment should go all the way down to their being able to report an overflowing dog poo bin, or whatever. That sounds trivial, but when people try to get my local authority to take the information that a dog poo bin needs emptying, no one seems to know who should be told about that. The telephone number on the sign may have been scratched off by vandals, so people do not know how to report it.

We need systems that do not deal only with reports. The councils should have an internal system that is IT-enabled, but much of the time that is simply not the case. Through a private finance initiative, my local authority, Dacorum borough council, is trying to become an IT chief authority by setting up a system and then offering IT services to others, in the hope that they will buy in and that that will keep the rates down and so on. That does not have my support, because the process of dealing with a fragmented system and making it slightly less fragmented is not as good as a process that is clearly underwritten by all the resources, authority and power that a Government can provide. I therefore hope that the Government will be more directive in dealing with these matters.

We have community safety wardens, who are responsible for expressing the concerns of people in the community to the local authority and the local police. Why, then, can we not have e-wardens? I am talking about localities in which people have a particular role to play in helping people to get the most from the technology that we now have available, whether that involves general information or empowering them to conduct transactions.

I subscribe to the citizens advice bureaux' system, which costs about £300 a year but is updated monthly on a CD-rom. It enables me to give completely up-to-date information to constituents about facilities that the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux makes available. That is not available as an e-system, but all MPs can get hold of it. With respect to my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt), I do not think that the BBC needs to do that. That system is already available to people who are suitably interested and trained.

The plea for support from people at the bottom end of the system and direction from the Government at the top end has been striking. It was quite extraordinary that the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) should say that broadband should be like water, and it was very welcome. The whole business has been hamstrung by the market. BT has headquarters in my constituency, as has Dixons. Dixons was furious that BT was pricing broadband so high. The services that could be provided were denied people. That price has finally come down, but we still have that old system and it will not let us have it if it is at all expensive to provide it.

I agree with the right hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friends the Members for Sittingbourne and Sheppey and for Ipswich (Mr. Mole) that broadband should be seen as a fundamental service. If it is not a fundamental service the school in an area that does not have it or has only limited access to it will become a worse school than one that does. When things are not put on the system because a huge amount of time is required to download them, the result is a restricted, diminished, impoverished service rather than one that addresses the needs of users and communities.

If the service is not universal the whole business is hamstrung and the schools and colleges in those areas that are denied proper access cannot make the best use of this technology. Development will be stymied unless we bite the bullet and accept that it must be a universal service. We must run with that through education and health and all the other systems that the Minister and the Government rightly want to see developed.

4.57 pm

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire): I welcome this debate. Today we have heard many interesting and relevant views. I congratulate all hon. Members who have taken part. The debate has been of the highest standard. Debates like this show the House at its best. I have to congratulate the hon. Member for Luton, South (Margaret Moran) on bringing the word "socialism" into a debate on the electronic delivery of services. I do not know whether it is ingenuity or her perverse reasoning, but the idea of introducing electronic public services did not originate post-1997; it was an initiative started under the last Conservative Government.

[Mr. Greg Knight]

In 1996 we launched a Green Paper on electronic government, well before most people were taking the issue seriously. Hon. Members on both sides of the House rather thought that it was a subject confined to computer nerds. It is only with time that the House and the public at large have begun to realise that this is to do with the quality delivery of services and, therefore, the quality of life. If one can save money by delivering services more effectively and more cheaply, that money is available to go into the service itself, rather than its provision. My party's aim was to work towards implementing a policy of providing public services electronically. There is no divide between us on our aims.

However, I am disappointed that electronic government is behind schedule and, more worryingly, that we appear to be slipping behind many other countries, some of which were late starters in this field. We are a long way from realising the targets that even the Government have set themselves. We should not be afraid to learn from other countries how to make our electronic public services not only the best, but the best used in the world.

I should be grateful if the Minister could tell us today whether he thinks that the Government are now on target for achieving their goal of all public services being available online by 2005. If they are not, where does he see the difficulties arising? For example, one area that I am interested in is pre-legislative scrutiny. When does he envisage that being available regularly online? Is he intending to issue any benchmarks to Departments?

The Government's target of 2005 has already been pushed back once. Initially, we were told that they expected 70 per cent. of all services to be available electronically by the end of last year and, of course, as the Minister knows, that target was not reached. In assessing whether the target has been met, we need to look behind the figure because very often what is available online is not an interactive service, but information. Hopefully, it is the aim of all Departments as far as possible to enable the services available to be accessed electronically. At present, it is correct that online tax assessments can be completed, but the user target of 50 per cent. was not met. Part of the reason for that failure was not only in the reliability of the system, but in the security of it, which is a serious problem.

As the House will know, we had a problem fairly recently where it was feared that 700 or more people may have had their confidential tax affairs viewed by others who used the online service. Will the Minister comment on the remarks made by Sir Nicholas Montagu, chairman of the Inland Revenue, who said:

"The security breaches that led to the suspension of the online service on May 27 have been an acute embarrassment for the Revenue"?

The point that I hope the hon. Gentleman will address is that the privacy breaches could in the view of Sir Nicholas Montagu

"have lasting damage on the government's ambitions to deliver large numbers of services over the internet."

What has the Minister done following that breach to reassure the public? Moreover, following that problem, what security evaluation of online services has he decided is necessary to be undertaken in the future? Security is an ongoing issue; does he have plans to put best practice in place?

Some hon. Members have already mentioned the point that in comparison with other countries, the electronic use of public services here is not as good as it could be. According to statistics, 14 per cent. of our population have used the Government's services at some point. That is a fairly low figure compared with other countries: the figure for France is 18 per cent. and Canada is way up there at 40 per cent. Does the Minister know why other countries that are as sophisticated as we are seem to be more successful in attracting users? Is the range of electronic services offered in those countries much greater because certain transactions that can be completed online in other countries cannot be done here? The registration of births can be done electronically overseas, but not in the UK. I hope that the Government will act to ensure that we at least keep pace with our European partners.

I want to be fair to the Minister and I acknowledge some success stories. NHS Direct, for example, is widely judged to provide a good service that works well. It has helped many people, particularly in rural areas, who are worried about the health of a family member. By going online to NHS Direct, they have been reassured, or at least pointed in the right direction. However, other public service websites have a long way to go before the same can be said. We have not seen enough progress in the availability of such services in other sectors.

The hon. Member for Luton, South mentioned the problem of access for poorer members of society. I understand that only 7 per cent. of those in the lowest income group currently have access to the internet. We must all work to increase that figure and help the most vulnerable in society to access e-government.

Those who possess a computer are often plagued with problems about constant software upgrades. What is profitable for software companies is not necessarily desirable for the consumer. The Government should examine further ways of providing access at locations that people can reach, both physically and financially, so that no one misses out on electronic provision of public services.

UK online centres are most welcome, but more needs to be done. The hon. Member for North Dorset (Mr. Walter), who could not stay with us because of a pressing constituency engagement, told me recently about a local business that obtained a grant of public money to have broadband installed. He wants to know why, when public money is invested, the recipients of grants are not required to make the service available to the wider community that they serve. It would be worth trying to link the giving of a grant to ensuring that the recipient uses it to benefit the local community.

The hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (David Cairns) rightly spoke about the need for a change of mindset among the public. Many people probably ask themselves what would be the advantage of going online. If they can see an advantage, the mindset should quickly follow. I hope that the Minister will examine ways of enticing the public to use electronic services.

David Cairns: For the avoidance of doubt, I was talking about a change of mindset on the part of the

providers of services rather than individual consumers. The right hon. Gentleman is right that we need to make it more attractive for individuals, but I was talking about the producers.

Mr. Knight: I am grateful for that clarification and for the hon. Gentleman's acknowledgement that I am making a valid point. I hope that the Minister will not rule out providing incentives, perhaps even financial ones through reduced fees, to encourage the public to embrace electronic access.

Many contributors to today's debate have said that low take-up is often linked to how websites are presented. Some are lacking in relevant information or are not updated. The Minister was honest enough to acknowledge the problem in his opening remarks and I am pleased that he is dealing with it.

As the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) said, there has been no single source for accessing information on public services and one has to go to each different departmental site for information. I hope that the development of UK online and the provision of a useful public access site will remedy what is clearly a gap.

Many services can be started but not necessarily completed online. I have not recently needed to apply for a passport, but I understand that if people seek to do so online, the application can be filled in electronically but has then to be sent back for a signature. For many people, that sort of process is far more hassle than it is worth. If they find that they can do only half the job electronically, many people will decide that they may as well go for the old-fashioned process of filling things in by hand. I hope that the Minister will tell us what the Government are doing about that particular problem.

We have been united in saying that universal broadband access is essential. My right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) raised that point and I know that his views are shared by the hon. Member for North Dorset and other hon. Members. A lack of availability of broadband in rural areas is bad news for small businessmen who seek to stay in their local community and develop their business but find that they are uncompetitive because they do not have access to the service. I hope that the Minister, not only in his reply today but afterwards, will continue to consider ways of bringing about a universal broadband coverage in the United Kingdom.

The hon. Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt) mentioned regional development agencies and our joint surprise at the money that is being spent in California from UK public funds. He made his point very well.

The hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde spoke about digital televisions. I wholeheartedly agree with him. A large strand of society does not need to use a computer and has no intention of buying one. Some people almost make a virtue of that, saying, "I'm never going to own a computer." However, if they had the facility in their own home to access services electronically through their television, they would be surfing most of the time. I would put my father into that category. He would not have a computer in his house but I know that, if he had a handset and a digital television and a keyboard, he would be a great user of electronic services. When they come, such facilities will bring about a great change in the use of electronic services.

I was interested in what the hon. Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey said about his attempts to bring together a Select Committee to deal with the issue of broadband and how he had been thwarted by the parochial attitude of a number of Members of individual Committees. I was not aware that the hon. Gentleman was leading such a campaign. The Procedure Committee and the Modernisation of the House of Commons Committee would certainly wish to consider such a campaign. As a member of the Modernisation of the House of Commons Committee, I would certainly be prepared to press the hon. Gentleman's points on his behalf. What he said was valid and relevant. I do not know whether he has tried to get the Chairman of the Liaison Committee on board, but I would urge him to do so if he has not done so already.

The hon. Member for Ipswich (Mr. Mole) mentioned video recorders and Betamax. I am a little older than he is and I can remember, in the days when it was a rare but desirable thing to have music on the move, that most of us who wanted to play music in a car or on a boat were faced with two options: cassette tapes or eight-track tapes. We all know what happened in the battle between the two—the cassette won and VHS won the battle with Betamax. The moral is that the best system is not always the winning system.

The hon. Member for Southport (Dr. Pugh) made a valuable point about the dominant market position, which I hope the Minister will refer to in his reply. The hon. Gentleman mentioned Microsoft, but in future it could apply to another company. What he said about industry standards was valid and I hope the Minister will reflect on what he had to say on the risk of building in software dependency.

This has been an interesting debate and I welcome the opportunity we have had to discuss the subject. I look forward to further debates on the matter because it is vital to continue to ensure that our citizens receive the most efficient and cost-effective delivery of public services now and in the future. The key to that is increasing and improving electronic delivery.

5.15 pm

Mr. Alexander: I concur with the opinions expressed on both sides of the Chamber. This has been an invigorating and interesting debate, which I will reflect on long after its conclusion.

There have been contributions from hon. Members on both sides of the House and I shall endeavour to reply to as many as I can in turn in the remaining time. However, first I want to pick up a point made by the Conservative spokesman, the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Knight) in his concluding remarks. He began by suggesting that there is no divide between the parties in recognising that e-enablement is an actuality in public service delivery. I suggest, respectfully, that there is as great a divide as there has ever been between the parties on the issue. The Government are investing £6 billion in such projects; that stands somewhat askance from the position of a party that in recent weeks confirmed its intention to cut

[Mr. Alexander]

public expenditure not by 5, 10 or 15 per cent. but by 20 per cent. Crocodile tears about the need for more UK online centres are ill-judged against the financial background of a Shadow Treasury Bench committed to closing one in five.

In contrast, the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) spoke with characteristic grace, and I am grateful to him for his kind remarks. As a fellow fisherman, I would not underestimate the significance of being able to find a fishing rod online; the problem for me after a day on the river is that there is all too rarely a fish on line.

The substance of the right hon. Gentleman's critique was that getting Government services online was not enough and in that respect we are also in agreement. I agree, too, with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in his speech in November, to which several hon. Members have referred. He said that in addition to the 2005 target—I will speak about that later—of getting Government services online, the Government were focusing on securing high levels of take-up on key e-services that had the capacity to add the most value in our drive to improve public services such as health and education. The right hon. Gentleman was less charitable, however, in his characterisation of progress on the issue of broadband, which we have debated for a number of years. On price, I can confirm that last year's wholesale DSL cuts put the UK third in the G8 for DSL prices, behind only Canada and Japan. Similarly, cable prices in the UK are now among the lowest in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Given the right hon. Gentleman's constituency interests, there is a concern about levels of coverage, but I emphasise that 67 per cent. of the population of the United Kingdom has access to mainstream broadband services.

My hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (David Cairns) raised important points about the centrality of IT manufacturing to the local economy of his constituency with its historical connections with IBM, and the more general point about the experience of local government and the risk of automating the past, as he accurately put it. My local authority in Renfrewshire found challenges in coming to terms with receiving e-mailed requests for housing repairs 24/7. That has involved a number of changes to back-office functions. The opportunity he rightly identified for e-transformation is exactly the focus in the local government online strategy, which was published immediately after the Prime Minister's speech at the e-summit by the Deputy Prime Minister's office to provide the kind of sharing of best practice that my hon. Friend asked for. Of course he is right, as the strategy recognises, to argue for fundamental reform. He is equally correct to identify the need for sharing of best practice so that, where possible, unnecessary course duplication of diverse bespoke systems and the like can be avoided. He also brought a different dimension to the debate through his recognition of the central role of digital TV in this area of Government policy. It is less recognised than it should be that the United Kingdom has led the world in the level of digital television penetration.

As my hon. Friend accurately said, digital TV can play a critical role in making sure we address the equity as well as the efficiency issues. It is a commonplace that there are sectors of the community whose members may for whatever reason, as the Front-Bench spokesman acknowledged, have no wish for a computer in their home in the future, but who are relaxed about pressing the red button on the television and interacting directly through digital TV. That is why I am particularly glad of the work of the e-Envoy's office in ensuring services can be provided through digital TV, which has the capacity to reach sections of the community that might otherwise risk exclusion.

Perhaps more contentiously, as a friend I will accept my hon. Friend's proud and rather charitable interpretation of why Greenock and Inverclyde has the highest level of internet use per day in Scotland. I merely add for hon. Members' information that it tends to rain quite a lot in Greenock.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) echoed the comments of the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire on the central charge that the Government need to focus more on getting services online. In this sense there is agreement across the House. He then made the case for further work to bridge the digital divide—another point on which we are in agreement. He identified Canada in particular as a leader in government services. It is fair to acknowledge that, not least on the basis of the benchmark work we have conducted, that is indeed the case. The hon. Gentleman recently travelled to Canada as representative to the e-Envoy's office to see some of the work there. I commend the Canadian Government's work in e-government services. Furthermore, when I spent time at the Department of Trade and Industry I found the development of the Canadian Government's broadband strategy highly instructive and useful in helping to frame the British Government's response to what are not altogether analogous but neither too dissimilar challenges.

The benchmarking exercise, which was published at the time of the e-summit, affirms our recognition that there are opportunities not only for local government but for central Government to learn from best practice elsewhere, partly because this is an innovative and new area of policy making. The e-Envoy's drawing together of strands of work from around the world has strengthened the case that Britain will be able to take forward this work effectively.

The hon. Gentleman was correct in paying tribute to Learndirect's work in Sheffield. It may not be known to hon. Members that in a previous life I was a speechwriter for the now Chancellor of the Exchequer, the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown). It was a matter of anxiety that year upon year in opposition we used to write into his conference speech the fact that we would establish a university for industry that would do for the modern era what the Open university achieved in the 1960s. Therefore it is a matter of particular pride to me not only that the university for industry has proved so popular, but that it has been so attuned to the needs of the time. We all have examples of constituents who have benefited from Learndirect. It is a good example of the current reach for services that otherwise might not be available.

The hon. Gentleman also made a point about banking services, from which an interesting analogy can be drawn with Government services. The number of people who no longer enter banks but instead either contact them by telephone or access them online is probably a good beacon of progress for us. Of course, there are particular security challenges in the banking sector, which in some ways replicate the challenges of e-government services. Where there are best practice examples we can learn from in the private sector we should undoubtedly do so.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to diversity of supply and avoiding proprietary lock-in. Government research and development and the use of open source are policy areas driven by the Department of Trade and Industry. Our policy on open source is a level playing field. We will consider open source solutions alongside proprietary ones in IT procurement and contracts will be awarded on a value-for-money basis, as the hon. Member for Southport (Dr. Pugh) argued. I was intrigued by his characterisation of public sector difference. Where value can be extracted from our intellectual property rights, of course we should look at that. An example of that is the Government gateway, where we own the intellectual property rights; we have licensed it to Microsoft, and potentially stand to get significant income streams from overseas sales of this world-leading infrastructure.

I turn to the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt). He offered a range of characteristically innovative propositions to which I will give thought not only in the debate but after it has ended. I received his e-mail this morning, when I was sitting at my desk preparing for the debate. However, as we are under time constraints, I will not address all of the points that he raised.

On my hon. Friend's initial point about being able to pay for the television licence, I am reliably informed by my outstanding officials that licences can be bought online. The only difficulty that I faced is that I could not read the website address that had been given to me, so I respectfully suggest that my hon. Friend might wish to punch into Google, "TV licensing." That might be a useful start in seeking to ensure that one is able to access that site. On the general issue of best practice websites for the public sector, I commend the govtalk site on the office of the e-Envoy's website.

I said that broadband policy is led by the Department of Trade and Industry, but my hon. Friend's suggestion that there should be a broadband hub is currently being tested in the broadband fund pilots. He might be especially interested in the developing work of the South West of England Regional Development Agency in advancing a broadband hub in that part of the country.

On the alteration of planning regulations for broadband, that immediately brought to mind the last report of the broadband stakeholders' group, and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is examining that issue through consultation, as was recommended by the group. That is also what my hon. Friend argued for.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Mr. Mole) brought the wealth of his experience from industry and local government to our deliberations. He made many points. One of them echoed the point of my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey by acknowledging the vital work that UK online provides, particularly to socially excluded communities throughout the country. I agree with those sentiments and wish to reiterate how central those centres are to our vision of social inclusion. I would argue that an appropriate analogy is the work that the Victorians undertook in establishing public libraries. That is one of the best parallels that can be drawn with this quiet revolution that has been taking place. By the strength of our common endeavour we were able to provide the means by which individuals, even in deprived communities such as mining towns and inner cities, were able to realise their potential through reading and learning.

With regard to my constituency, I would argue that similar transformative capabilities are being offered by computer learning centres. A single illustration might be sufficient to make that point. I recently visited the South End action centre in Paisley, which has established a computer learning centre, and the first thing that struck me was the fact that a senior citizen was sitting next to a teenager. These days there cannot be many public spaces—or places that have been provided by public investment—where such a wide age range is represented within a single community facility.

However, I was even more struck by something else. I asked the senior citizen about the use that he made of the e-mail service. He lives in the high flats that are across the road from the centre and he explained that his brother had left for Canada more than 40 years ago and that, because of the cost of using the telephone and sending post by air mail, they had very rarely communicated with each other until he was able to use the computer learning centre's facilities. Now he communicates with his brother by writing lengthy paragraphs to him once or twice a day. He said that that had transformed family relations, because he was able to catch up with a relative with whom he had lost touch for many years. That is exciting: I never anticipated that an online centre would have been put to that sort of use.

Other people in the centre were engaged in a range of different activities, such as looking for work and filling out CVs. If one is searching for an example of where, by the strength of our common endeavour, we can implement genuinely radical transformation, one needs to look no further than the computer online centres in our constituencies.

The hon. Member for Southport raised the issue of Microsoft and the gateway. The UK Government gateway will communicate effectively with the products of companies other than Microsoft. We support open standards: the Government abide by strict rules to ensure fair competition for procurement and service provision, and across Departments we work with various private sector partners to deliver our e-government objectives. In the gateway project alone, we are working not only with Microsoft but with several other partners.

I turn to the specific issue of which browsers can be used on the gateway. The browsers that are currently available are Internet Explorer, Netscape, Mozilla and Opera, and we are committed to providing further access. The majority of personal computers run Windows with Netscape, and these were implemented first, followed by Macintosh, which is the second most popular. Testing browser and operating system

[Mr. Alexander]

combinations to ensure that they work successfully can be a lengthy process, and I hope that further browser and operating system combinations will be tested and released during the coming year.

I also affirm to the hon. Member for Southport that the Government have never worked to a policy in which Microsoft products and services were favoured above others, including open source software. Our policy is explicitly to have a level playing field in Government procurement, so that OSS products and services will be assessed alongside proprietary ones, and the solutions will be chosen on a case-by-case basis.

Sir Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): Order. I regret that we have run out of time. Before we end, I congratulate all hon. Members who have participated, as this has been an interesting and well-informed debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Five o'clock.

Written Ministerial Statements

Tuesday 7 January 2003

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD & RURAL AFFAIRS

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (12th Conference)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): One hundred and thirty Parties attended the Conference in Santiago, which took place in a very positive atmosphere in the excellent facilities provided by the Chilean Government.

The Conference considered 60 proposals to amend the species covered by CITES, which are listed in three Appendices. Appendix I lists highly endangered species which are prohibited in international trade. Appendix II lists species in which trade is permitted only under licence. Appendix III contains species which are listed for monitoring purposes only.

I attended the Conference during its second week and presented the UK's proposal to list the basking shark on Appendix II. Our first attempt—made at the 11th Conference in Nairobi in April 2000—failed to gain the two thirds majority needed. Since then we have worked hard to produce a stronger proposal based on sound science. This time, following a narrow defeat in an initial vote, we were eventually successful when we took the issue back to the final Plenary session, where we achieved a resounding 82 votes in favour, 36 against and 3 abstentions. I am delighted that our second listing attempt at Santiago has succeeded, providing much needed protection through proper CITES regulation and monitoring of trade. We also welcomed the successful bid by the Philippines to list the whale shark, the world's biggest fish, on Appendix II.

Another significant success was the Conference decision to support the proposal from Nicaragua and Guatemala to list bigleaf mahogany on Appendix II. We lobbied hard in support of this proposal, and very much welcome the outcome which will help enormously in properly regulating trade in this much sought after timber.

We also lobbied against certain proposals and were particularly pleased that the Parties rejected Japan's proposals to downlist Minke and Bryde's whales from Appendix I to Appendix II. We are opposed to all forms of whaling other than subsistence whaling by indigenous people and all EU Member States opposed these proposals at the Conference.

There has been considerable public interest in the elephant proposals. We believe that the outcome of the elephant proposals was fair and reasonable.

The proposals from Zambia and Zimbabwe for a limited trade in products from their elephant populations were rejected, whilst those from Botswana, Namibia and South Africa were adopted with significant amendments to ensure that adequate safeguards are in place before a one-off sale takes place. Under the terms of the agreement reached in Santiago, Botswana, Namibia and South Africa may conduct one-off sales of their raw ivory stockpiles, but not before May 2004 and only provided that a number of strict conditions relating to trade controls, monitoring and the use of the funds raised for elephant conservation have first been met. The sale will not take place if any of these conditions are not met. Under the agreement, the only trade which may go ahead will be in:

a) hunting trophies for non-commercial purposes;
b) live animals for in-situ conservation programmes;
c) hides;
d) leather goods for non commercial purposes;
e) registered raw ivory (whole tusks and pieces) subject to the following:

i. Only registered government-owned stocks, originating in [Botswana/Namibia/South Africa] (excluding seized ivory and ivory of unknown origin);
ii. Only to trading partners that have been verified by the Secretariat, in consultation with the Standing Committee, to have sufficient national legislation and domestic trade controls to ensure that the imported ivory will not be re-exported and will be managed in accordance with all requirements of CITES Resolution Conf. 10.10 (Rev.) concerning domestic manufacturing and trade;
iii. Not before May 2004, and in any event not before the Secretariat has verified the prospective importing countries, and MIKE (the 'Monitoring of Illegal Killing of Elephants' programme) has reported to the Secretariat on the baseline information (e.g. elephant population numbers, incidence of illegal killing);
iv. A maximum amount of [20,000kg/10,000kg/ 30.000kg] of ivory may be traded, and despatched in a single shipment under strict supervision of the Secretariat;
v. The proceeds of the trade are used exclusively for elephant conservation and community conservation and development programs within or adjacent to the elephant range;
vi. Only after the Standing Committee has agreed that the above conditions have been met.

On a proposal from the Secretariat, the Standing Committee can decide to cause this trade to partially or completely cease in the event of non-compliance by exporting or importing countries, or in the case of proven detrimental impacts of the trade on other elephant populations. All specimens that are not allowed to be traded under the above provisions shall be deemed to be specimens of species included in Appendix I and the trade in them shall be regulated accordingly."

In addition to the 60 species listing proposals the Conference considered 71 Resolutions relating to implementation of the Convention. These included a Resolution to address conservation of and trade in tigers and other Asian big cat species such as the leopard, snow leopard, clouded leopard and Asiatic lion; and another agreeing to continue the work of the CITES Bushmeat Working Group for the intersessional period to the next Conference. The Conference rejected a proposal by Switzerland to exempt synthetically derived material from the requirements of the

Convention, but adopted a Resolution outlining simplified procedures for issuing permits and certificates for time sensitive biological samples which will reduce the administrative burden on those transmitting DMA or other diagnostic samples for example.

The UK's application on behalf of the Cayman Islands to register the Cayman Turtle Farm narrowly failed to obtain the necessary two thirds majority for approval, despite support from the CITES Secretariat and many Parties. The main concerns were over the lack of proof of legality of the founder stock, and possible mixing with and contamination of wild stocks. The Farm will now seek to address the concerns which emerged in debate, with a view to resubmitting this application under the CITES postal procedure.

I believe that this represents an excellent outcome overall, not only for the UK but also for the CITES process itself, which has demonstrated that countries all over the world can unite to provide effective conservation measures to protect a wide range of commercially exploited species.

FOREIGN & COMMONWEALTH

Arms Embargo (Iran)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mike O'Brien): The Government has recently issued a licence for the export of synchros to be used as an inspection tool on Tay 650 engines used to power Fokker 100 aircraft. These synchros were made as military electronic equipment. However, the Government is satisfied that these synchros are to be used only for the upkeep of the Fokker 100, a civil aircraft. The risk of these goods being diverted for use by the Iranian military is minimal.

Indonesia (Travel Advice)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mike O'Brien): The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) travel advice for Indonesia was today changed.

Previously it advised against all travel to the country. It now advises against all non-essential travel to Indonesia. The FCO continues to assess that the threat to British nationals and British interests from terrorism throughout Indonesia remains high and that British nationals already in Indonesia should consider leaving if their presence is not essential.

The decision to change the advice was taken after careful consideration of the latest information, including intelligence. It also brings it into line with the latest advice of the Australian Government. The terrorist threat in Indonesia remains real, and further attacks cannot be ruled out. But account has also been taken of the strengthened Indonesian commitment and actions since Bali to confront the terrorists.

Since Bali there has been only one significant attack, at a McDonalds restaurant and a car showroom in Makassar, Sulawesi, in December, which killed three Indonesian nationals. A number of anti-terrorist decrees have been passed and some important arrests made in respect of the Bali bombings and previous terrorist incidents. The Muslim mass movements are now speaking out against terrorism. The radical cleric Abu Bakar Bashir has been held for police questioning. The Indonesians have also provided more security than before to diplomatic missions and international schools, as well as other non-specifically Western targets, such as shopping malls, entertainment centres and churches.

A copy of the latest advice can be found on the FCO web site www.fco.gov.uk.

Iraq

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): As I have made clear to the House on a number of occasions, our policy on Iraq is to ensure Iraq complies with its obligations under relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions (UNSCRs), including by giving up its weapons of mass destruction. I thought, however, that the House would now appreciate a more detailed statement of the Government's objectives on Iraq.

Our prime objective is to rid Iraq of its weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and their associated programmes and means of delivery, including prohibited ballistic missiles (BM), as set out in UNSCRs. This would reduce Iraq's ability to threaten its neighbours and the region, and prevent Iraq using WMD against its own people. UNSCRs also require Iraq to renounce terrorism, and return captured Kuwaitis and property taken from Kuwait.

These UNSCRs are an expression of the will of the international community, with which Iraq has persistently failed to comply, thereby perpetuating the threat to international peace and security.

A further objective is to maintain the authority of the United Nations by demonstrating the Security Council's effective response to the challenge posed by Iraq's non-compliance. Success in achieving our prime objective should help deter the proliferation of WMD and BM more generally.

We have pursued these objectives through the United Nations, culminating in the unanimous adoption by the Security Council of UNSCR 1441 (2002) on 8 November 2002.

Our immediate priorities are to:

a) Support the work of the UNMOVIC/IAEA inspectors in Iraq;

b) Enable UNMOVIC/IAEA to institute long-term measures to ensure compliance as part of their Ongoing Monitoring and Verification regime;

c) Maintain international solidarity behind the United Nations Security Council and support for effective UNMOVIC/IAEA action;

d) Preserve regional stability;

e) Continue to make military plans and preparations in case military action is required to enforce compliance by Iraq with its WMD/BM obligations under UNSCRs;

f) Continue to support humanitarian efforts to relieve the suffering of the Iraqi people.

We would like Iraq to become a stable, united and law abiding state, within its present borders, co-operating with the international community, no longer posing a

threat to its neighbours or to international security, abiding by all its international obligations and providing effective and representative government for its own people.

These objectives are consistent with wider government policy, which includes:

a) Efforts to resolve other causes of regional instability, including the Middle East Peace Process;

b) Wider political engagement with Arab countries and the Islamic world;

c) Efforts to counter the proliferation of WMD; and

d) The elimination of terrorism as a force in international affairs.

To achieve our objectives we will act in conformity with international law, including the United Nations Charter and international humanitarian law.

Consistent with the above, we are working intensively with our allies and partners to secure the peaceful disarmament of Iraq's WMD by means of UNMOVIC/IAEA inspections. But as SCR 1441 makes clear, if the Iraqi regime does not comply, it will face serious consequences.

Venice Commission (Alternate UK Member)

The Minister for Europe (Mr. Denis MacShane): I am pleased to announce that I have today appointed Professor Anthony Bradley as the Alternate UK Member of the European Commission for Democracy through Law (the Venice Commission). The Venice Commission is a Council of Europe body, which is made up of constitutional experts who provide member states with advice on constitutions and democratic institutions furthering human rights and the rule of law.

Written Ministerial Statements

Wednesday 8 January 2003

CULTURE, MEDIA & SPORT

Fixed Odds Betting Machines

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): The Government have noted with concern the increasing installation in licensed betting offices of machines, described as fixed odds betting machines, which enable customers to play virtual casino games for prizes up to £50,000.

The present law allows only two gaming machines in any betting office, offering maximum prizes of £25. Under the Government's proposals for reform of the laws on gambling in Great Britain, published in "A safe bet for success" (Cm 5397), betting offices would be able to install up to four gaming machines with a maximum prize of £500. Cm 5397 also noted the appearance of betting machines, pointing out that they have many of the characteristics which justify controls over gaming machines.

The Government understand that the Gaming Board for Great Britain and the Association of British Bookmakers have agreed to the bringing of a test case to clarify the status of fixed odds betting machines under the existing law. While it would not be appropriate to comment on the merits or possible outcome of such legal proceedings, we welcome any action which will bring certainty to this issue so far as the present law is concerned.

In order to make the position on future legislation clear for interested parties, I wish to confirm that the statement set out in "A safe bet for success" remains the Government's current policy. Therefore, our current plan is to introduce new legislation which will be drafted in such a way that those betting machines which in reality involve gaming will be brought within the relevant controls for gaming machines. We take the view that the uncontrolled proliferation of high-prize machine gaming on the high street risks seriously increasing problem gambling.

DEFENCE

Service Museums

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): A business process review of the six principal service personnel museums is to be carried out by the Ministry of Defence. These organisations have non-departmental public bodies designation and receive Grants in Aid from the MOD. They are the Royal Naval Museum, the Royal Navy Submarine Museum, the Fleet Air Arm Museum, the Royal Marines Museum, the National Army Museum and the Royal Air Force Museum. The previous review termed a Quinquennial review was completed in March 1997.

Preliminary work has defined the scope of the study. The second phase will begin shortly and is expected to be completed within six months. The aim of the review is to examine the function, role, operation, funding and organisation of the museums, seek to identify key objectives and performance and to determine whether their current status is most appropriate to future needs.

The review team will consult with a range of stakeholders during the course of the review including the museum directors, staff and trustees, MOD and single service sponsors, TUs, local government, other government Departments and other museums. The Ministry of Defence is interested also to hear the views of other organisations or individuals who would like to make a contribution to the review. Those wishing to do so should send their contributions by 28 February 2003 to:

The Museums Business Process Review Team
Open Plan Area, 2nd Floor
Ministry of Defence
St Giles Court
1–13 St Giles High Street
London WC2H 8LD

Or by email to:
dgmo-musbrhd@defence.mod.uk

METEOR

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): I am pleased to inform the House that the contract for the Meteor air-to-air missile for the RAFs Eurofighter Typhoon aircraft was placed with MBDA on 23 December 2002. This followed the signature of the Meteor MOU by Germany, the last of the six partner nations (France, Italy, Germany, Spain, Sweden and the UK) to sign, which permitted the UK, as lead nation, to sign the contract with MBDA.

Meteor is a key element of the Government's commitment to provide the best possible equipment for the Armed Forces. It will ensure Typhoon has the capability to combat predicted air-to-air threats thereby meeting our requirement to maintain air superiority well into the future.

This is extremely good news for British and European industry, sustaining high quality jobs in new technology and in system and software design. Furthermore, it puts MBDA at the forefront of a strengthened European missile defence industry and enhances export prospects for Typhoon.

When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence announced on 16 May 2000, *Official Report*, columns 149–51 the decision to select Meteor as the beyond visual range air-to-air missile to arm Typhoon, he agreed to publish the details of the breakpoints and

determination of when theseassessments will be made, once the Memorandum of Understanding was established. Now that this has been achieved, I can confirm that the contract includes four breakpoints as follows:

Demonstration of Ramjet Propulsion System (Boost to Sustain Motor Transition and Sustain Motor Operation)—at month 40 of the programme.

Demonstration of Guidance and Control of the Asymmetric Airframe—at month 45 of the programme.

Demonstration of the Effectiveness of Aircraft to Missile Transfer Alignment Process via Data Links—at month 45 of the programme.

Demonstration of Electronic Protection Measures—at month 51 of the programme.

The process for the independent assessment of the achievement of the milestones, and for securing partner nation agreement that they have been either achieved or failed, is set out in the MOU, copies of which will shortly be placed in the Library of the House. If MBDA fail to achieve any of the milestones, partner nations will be able to terminate the contract and recover all monies paid.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD & RURAL AFFAIRS

Commons Commissioners

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): The Department is undertaking a financial management and policy review of the Commons Commissioners.

The Commissioners are an independent tribunal, sponsored jointly by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Welsh Assembly Government. They were established under the provisions of the Commons Registration Act 1965 to deal with disputed registrations of common land.

The review will comprise an investigation of the functions carried out by the Commissioners, whether these functions still need to be undertaken and, if so, whether they should continue to be carried out by the Commissioners or whether another body in the public, private or voluntary sector could undertake the work.

If it is considered that the Commissioners should be retained the review will consider issues such as cost effectiveness, staffing, finance and their relationship with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Welsh Assembly Government and the Lord Chancellor's Department. The full terms of reference are:

Stage 1.

To consider whether there is a continuing need for the functions carried out by the Commons Commissioners and, if so, whether the Commissioners provide the best means of doing so or whether the work could more effectively be carried out by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) or another body in the public, voluntary or private sectors.

Stage 2.

If the conclusion from Stage 1 is that the Commissioners should be retained, the review will then look at all aspects of their financial management, accountability and relationship with Defra, WAG and the Lord Chancellor's Department. The review will consider and make recommendations on:

the Commissioner's cost effectiveness, and the value of its work;

the composition, operation, management and staffing of the Commissioners;

the financial regime applying to the Commissioners and the effectiveness of

financial and other management controls;

the way in which Defra and WAG sponsor the body and monitor its performance and the role of the Lord Chancellor's Department in appointing Commissioners.

The review will also consider and take account of the work of related reviews, such as the Leggatt review of tribunals and the policy and legislative review of common land being undertaken by Defra and WAG.

The review will be undertaken in accordance with Cabinet Office guidelines, and we expect it to be completed in April 2003.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Immigration Control

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): The Government are firmly committed to maintaining effective immigration controls and ensuring that genuine passengers are able to pass through our ports with the least possible delay.

For some years the number of Jamaican passengers being refused entry on arrival in the United Kingdom has been increasing, nearly 3,500 or 6 per cent of arrivals last year. The number of Jamaicans who abscond having been given temporary admission is also unacceptably high, more than 150 a month during the first half of this year. These problems create enormous pressures for the Immigration Service but also lead to unacceptable delays and inconvenience for the great majority of genuine travellers from Jamaica. The situation can best be demonstrated by looking at the period leading up to Christmas. During the six weeks to 17 December 2002, 1,233 Jamaican nationals were refused entry at the UK's 12 busiest ports. This represented nearly 20 per cent. of all refusals at those ports during that period.

The only effective way of easing these problems is to ensure that Jamaican passengers have demonstrated that they qualify to enter the United Kingdom before they embark for this country. In the circumstances I have decided to impose a visa regime on all Jamaican nationals wishing to visit the United Kingdom.

I would want to provide reassurance that the presence of a visa regime should not be a bar to those Jamaican nationals who genuinely wish to visit the United Kingdom. The rules under which decisions are made are the same whether that decision is made on arrival or before. This visa regime simply allows officials to consider the application before the passenger embarks for the United Kingdom. Providing greater certainty that a person has satisfied the Immigration Rules will also smooth the passage of genuine visitors through the immigration controls, giving advantage to all concerned.

Board of the Central Police Training and Development Authority (CENTREX)

The Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety (Mr. John Denham): I am pleased to announce the appointment of Professor David Croisdale-Appleby to the board of the Central Police Training and Development Authority. Professor Croisdale-Appleby will be taking up his duties immediately.

He is a visiting professor of strategic marketing and communications at Strathclyde University, and these skills will be of immense value to the board. He has extensive experience as a board member with various bodies, and has been a CEO of major international marketing and advertising businesses. He was recently invited by the Lord Chancellor's office to become a member of the Family Health Services Appeal Authority and for one year was seconded to run a firm of solicitors specialising in criminal and family law.

Professor Croisdale-Appleby joins the board at a time when Centrex is still finding its feet, having only been established as an executive non-departmental public body on 1 April last year. Centrex has a pivotal role to play in developing policing excellence, charged as it is with new police recruit training, and developing leadership skills within the police service. In addition to providing support and consultancy to forces, both domestic and international, on operational policing matters, Centrex is leading the way on alternative learning technologies through its new web based learning portal. Centrex is also establishing the National Centre for Policing Excellence, which will identify and disseminate good policing practice, such as the new street crime knowledge map, and develop regulations and codes of practice for effective operational policing.

HEALTH

National Health Service

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): I am announcing capital allocations for the national health service for the next three years today. This is consistent with the revenue budget allocations which were issued late last year.

Capital allocations are made to the NHS in two parts. Operational capital is for the purpose of maintaining and enhancing existing capital stock, and is made direct to NHS Trusts and primary care trusts. Strategic capital, which is allocated direct to all strategic health authorities (StHAs), is for distribution at their own discretion for larger scale investments.

Total operational capital is increasing by 10 per cent., in each of the three years 2003–04 and 2005–06. The growth in strategic capital in the StHAs is 13 per cent./ 11 per cent./14 per cent., for each of the three years. The residue of the capital is being held centrally—the largest being for information technology, where £400 million is being held for 2003–04, £700 million for 2004–05 and £1.2 billion for 2005–06.

This is the first time that day-to-day operational capital has been allocated directly to NHS StHAs, trusts and primary care trusts.

This is the first time that capital allocations have been made for three years rather then one year, allowing the local NHS to plan with confidence and certainty for the future.

In addition, allocations have been informed by a new funding formula for both operational and strategic capital to give a nationally consistent and fairer basis for the distribution of funds.

Of the money allocated to StHAs, £100 million is for the establishment of a local access incentive fund. The purpose is to reward NHS trusts and primary care trusts who make rapid progress in improving access to NHS treatment. Clearly this could include any of the NHS plan targets for access, both in hospital and primary care. Initially, however, we expect the main focus to be on:

(a) reducing waiting times in accident and emergency (A&E) (progress towards the maximum four-hour total wait in A&E);

(b) reducing in-patient and out-patient waiting times (progress towards the maximum six month waiting time target and the maximum 13 week wait);

(c) reducing in-patient and out-patient waiting lists.

Details of the allocations and an explanation of the new funding formulae have been placed in the Library.

Written Ministerial Statements

Thursday 9 January 2003

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Ethiopia

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): Ethiopia remains dependent on food aid year on year. However needs have grown throughout 2002 and the Department for International Development has been continuously monitoring the effects of the drought and contributing to the relief efforts. In 2002 we had committed some £7 million to the ICRC and UN agencies by March. After further monitoring we provided an additional £2 million to ICRC in July and continued to support interventions in response to the unfolding situation. By early December DFID had committed over £17 million bilaterally. In addition we contribute almost 20 per cent. of the EC support. In 2002 this included an October commitment of €23 million for food; €4.2 million for other relief, and the Commission's pledge of emergency food aid programme worth €70 million, made in December, equivalent to about 260,000 metric tonnes, to help meet requirements in the first half of 2003.

The early warning systems have been indicating that, as a result of poor rains and harvest failure across many parts of the country since about the middle of 2002, many rural communities are likely to face difficulties in 2003. On 7 December, a joint Ethiopian Government/ UN appeal was launched for humanitarian assistance in 2003; 11.3 million people were identified as needing more than 1.4 million metric tonnes of food assistance with a further 3 million people requiring close monitoring. The World Food Programme considers current food aid pledges to be sufficient to meet needs until end of this month but there is concern about prospects after that. Prime Minister Meles Zenawi said during the Appeal launch that he does not anticipate a repeat of the suffering experienced in 1984 provided support is forthcoming from the international community. We agree with his judgement.

We are continuing to keep the situation under review, using the reports and assessments made by the Government and international agencies involved. We have also been involved in the frequent in-country dialogue on the humanitarian situation between the Ethiopian Government, other donors and non-governmental organisations. Overall, the main rainy season ended on time having started late. The harvest is now in, and early indications are that it is 21 per cent. down on average. Recent nutritional data indicates unusual levels of malnutrition for this time of year.

On the basis of our continuous monitoring and using information from a wide range of sources, we now consider a further substantial UK bilateral humanitarian contribution is timely. We have therefore made a further £15 million available for food-aid through the UN World Food Programme. This contribution should continue to help allow greater certainty about food supplies in the months ahead and thus avert a crisis. We hope it will encourage others to act too.

In the longer-term we are working with the Ethiopian Government and key donors to help tackle some of the deep poverty and underlying causes of food insecurity. For example , we will contribute to improvements in agriculture sector policies and support efforts to increase people's access to markets through improvements in rural transport infrastructure. We will also help to reduce the vulnerability of the poor to drought by promoting the development of safety nets for the predictably food insecure. Pastoralists, who are one of the most vulnerable groups, are an important target group for this work. Our country assistance plan, outlining our proposals for long-term partnership with Ethiopia, is currently in final draft form, having been subject to wide consultations since November. We are holding development talks with the Government on 14 January at which we expect to agree the final version, which will then be published.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Temporary Workers

The Minister for Employment Relations, Industry and the Regions (Alan Johnson): On 28 November 2002 the European Commission issued a revised draft directive on working conditions for temporary (agency) workers. The DTI will publish a revised explanatory memorandum and regulatory impact assessment on the revised proposal on 10 January. A summary of the responses to the Government's earlier public consultation on the directive will be published at the same time. Copies will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

HEALTH

Diabetes

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. David Lammy): We are publishing the diabetes national service framework delivery strategy today, just 13 months after publishing the diabetes national service framework standards. An implementation group of outside experts has helped us to develop the delivery strategy. This is an important NSF and the first to be published under the "Shifting the Balance of Power" reforms. As such, it needed to be developed in a new way.

The delivery strategy confirms the targets in improvement, expansion and reform: the next three years:

putting in place registers, education and advice, to support systematic treatment regimes

ensuring a systematic eye-screening programme to national standards.

These are the first steps in reaching national diabetes standards for services which:

- lead to fewer people developing diabetes and better care for those who have it
- are centred around the needs of people with diabetes, developed in partnership with health care staff, equitable, integrated and focused on delivering the best outcomes for the person with diabetes
- offer care that is structured and pro-active providing people with the support they need to manage their own condition.

The delivery strategy offers a framework for the NHS to build capacity to put in place building blocks for the NHS to reach the national service framework (NSF) standards over the next ten years. In addition to the two targets, key elements are:

- setting up a local diabetes network, or similarly robust mechanism, which involves identifying local leaders and appointing and resourcing network managers, clinical champions and a person*(s)* with diabetes to champion the views of local people
- reviewing the local baseline assessment, establishing and promulgating local implementation arrangements with a trajectory to reach the standards
- participating in comparative local and national audit
- undertaking a local workforce skills profile of staff involved in the care of people with diabetes and developing education and training programmes with the local Workforce Development Confederation.

As announced in the delivery strategy, we plan to appoint a national clinical director for diabetes this spring to provide both national leadership and support to localities in delivering the national service framework.

Copies of the diabetes national service framework delivery strategy have been placed in the Library.

Health Costs

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. David Lammy): When new tax credits start from next April—working tax credit and child tax credit—the arrangements for entitlement to help with health costs via tax credits will continue largely the same as now. Families (single people or couples) who get:

- working tax credit and child tax credit, or
- working tax credit with a disability addition
- and whose income is below a certain limit will be entitled to full help with health costs.

In addition, families who cannot get working tax credit because they do not work 16 hours per week but get child tax credit, and whose income is below the same limit, will also be entitled to full help with health costs. This will include families whose income support stops when they start to get child tax credit.

The income limit will be based on the family's gross annual income, that is income for the year before tax and national insurance are taken off. For tax credit awards which start from April 2003 the income limit will be £14,200 gross per year. This is around the same income level as now after taking account of inflation and 2002 Budget changes to tax and national insurance.

Currently the Inland Revenue sends out a tax credit exemption certificate to families who are entitled to full help with health costs. For awards of the new tax credits, the Prescription Pricing Authority (in Newcastle) will send out exemption certificates on behalf of all the health departments. Families in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland getting new tax credits who are entitled to full help with health costs will all be sent their exemption certificates by the Prescription Pricing Authority on the basis on information provided by the Inland Revenue.

The Inland Revenue will include information for the public in a leaflet to be sent out with new tax credit awards.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill

The Minister for Social Exclusion and Deputy Minister for Women (Mrs. Barbara Roche): I am today placing in the House library a short briefing note, as provided to the Standing Committee, covering the detail of the secondary legislation to be made under part 1 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill. The note will also be available on my departmental website.

I will be issuing further briefing notes on the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill as it progresses through its Committee stages.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Digital Curriculum

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): I have today placed my decision, in the form of a letter to Gavyn Davies of 8 January and its accompanying schedule, on the BBC's application for approval of a licence-fee funded digital curriculum service in the Libraries of both Houses.

I have approved the application, and have attached specific conditions to the approval to ensure that the service makes a positive contribution to a varied and competitive industry in education software.

The service against the approval will be reviewed within two years of its launch.

Written Ministerial Statement

Monday 13 January 2003

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH

Export Licences (Iran)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mike O'Brien): The Government have recently issued a licence for the export of goods to be used as part of the process of drilling oil and gas wells. These goods include HMX pellets which could be suitable for use in anti-personnel landmines. However, the Government are satisfied that these HMX pellets, specifically designed for cutting collars and perforating tubes, are intended only for the legitimate end-use stated. The risk of these goods being diverted for use by the Iranian military is minimal.

Written Ministerial Statements

Tuesday 14 January 2003

TRANSPORT

Braer Oil Spill

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): On 5 January 1993, the Liberian oil tanker Braer ran ashore in the Shetland Isles, spilling its cargo of 84,700 tonnes of crude oil and some 1,600 tonnes of heavy fuel oil bunkers. The consequences of the spill were serious. Since then, a large number of actions have been taken nationally, regionally and internationally.

In many ways the Braer marked a defining point in the effort to address pollution and its consequences. The Braer still ranks as the world's twelfth largest oil spill—84,700 tonnes of cargo and 1,600 tonnes of fuel oil. A pollution incident of such magnitude inevitably brought major hardships for many people. It is a tribute to the resilience of local people that they coped so well with the consequences which such a devastating incident had. The Braer raised many new compensation issues which, once resolved, assisted in the handling of similar issues which arose subsequently with the Sea Empress and with other oil spills elsewhere in the world.

No matter what measures are taken to minimise the risks of accidents, we must still ensure that we have careful plans in the event of a major incident occurring. Having such contingency plans in place demonstrates our commitment to protecting human life and the environment, and to promoting the safe and efficient movement of goods.

Following the Braer, Lord Donaldson's report in 1994 'Safer Ships, Cleaner Seas' set out 103 recommendations to improve ship safety and protection of the marine environment. The vast majority of these recommendations were accepted and most have now been implemented. This report effectively became a blueprint for redefining shipping policy in the UK but also became an important influence in determining the international efforts at the IMO.

Many lessons had to be learned and applied as a result of the Braer and subsequently the Sea Empress (spilling 72,000 tonnes of oil) as well as other major spills that have followed.

The UK has played a key role in bringing in many measures which have substantially improved the position, internationally, regionally and nationally, during the ten years since the Braer ran onto the rocks at Garths Ness, in Shetland, on 5 January 1993.

The key developments since the Braer incident may be summarised as follows:

Compensation and liability

The 1992 Civil Liability and Fund Protocols were introduced in mid-1996—more than doubling the limit of compensation from the £51.6 million available at the time of the Braer to £118 million.

In 2000 the UK initiated action at the IMO to increase the limit of compensation under the 1992 CLC/Fund regime by a further 50 per cent. to £177 million, with effect from 1 November 2003.

In 2001, along with six other states, the UK pressed for a world-wide initiative to create a Supplementary Fund to the 1992 CLC/Fund to provide further substantial compensation for the most serious oil spills. This Supplementary Fund is due to be adopted at the IMO in May 2003.

The UK took a lead role in calling for a clearer policy on coverage by the 1992 CLC/Fund regime to cover the costs of environmental assessment following major oil pollution and for appropriate reinstatement afterwards.

The UK participated fully in the adoption in 1996 of the Hazardous and Noxious Substances Convention which will provide cover similar to the CLC/Fund regime but for chemicals and other pollutants and for explosion, death or injury from such products. The limit of compensation will be equivalent to £220 million. The UK is co-ordinating the international effort to bring this key convention into force soon.

The UK was one of the countries which developed the Bunkers Convention 2001, which will set liability and compensation rules for pollution from ships' fuel oils.

The UK has ratified the 1996 Protocol to the Convention on Limitation of Liability for Maritime Claims. This should enter into force quite soon and will increase limits of liability for most third party claims arising from damage form shipping by an average of 250 per cent., but in some cases as much as 600 per cent.

The UK has been pressing at a European level for EU states to ratify the LLMC Protocol, the Bunkers and HNS conventions quickly so as to help bring them into force soon.

UN Convention on the Law of the Sea 1982 (UNCLOS)

The UK became party to UNCLOS in August 1997. This sets out the framework of customary international maritime law. It is a key convention setting out coastal states', port states' and flag states' responsibilities, obligations and rights. It is an important means of protecting the marine environment from adverse consequences from shipping, while protecting the UK's shipping interests.

Protecting the UK coastline and waters

In 1996 the UK declared a counter pollution zone which extends to the fullest extent allowed under UNCLOS which, around much of the coastline, is out to 200 nautical miles.

In 1997 the UK co-ordinated an EU Member States' initiative at the IMO to have the whole of the North Sea, and all waters around the UK and Ireland, declared a special area for the purposes of protecting those waters from operational discharges of oil from shipping.

The UK Maritime and Coastguard Agency has a dedicated Enforcement Unit, and this has led to a large number of prosecutions and a very high success rate. In 1997, legislation was passed to enable magistrates to impose a fine of up to £250,000 on either the master or the shipowner for an oil pollution offence; this is the highest fine for any offence in a Magistrates' Court.

In 1997 the UK was the first state in the world to introduce a statutory requirement on each port to prepare a port waste management plan to address the waste disposal needs of all types of ships calling. This requirement has since been incorporated into a Directive, which the UK and other EU Member States are in the process of implementing.

The UK played an active part in the work leading to the development of the Vessel traffic monitoring and information system Directive which EU Member States are required to implement by 5 February 2004.

ETVs

In 1994, recognising the value of tugs in preventing groundings and other incidents, the UK introduced Emergency Towing Vessels (ETVs) on a trial basis. Initially ETVs were stationed at Dover and Stornoway for the winter months only. After further review, the number of ETVs was increased to four—stationed at Dover, Stornoway, the Fair Isle Channel, and in the South West approaches—and since October 2001 all four ETVs have been on station all year round.

Protecting the public interest during incidents

In 2000, following a wide-ranging review, the UK published a revised National Contingency Plan for Marine Pollution from Shipping and Offshore Installations, setting out how the relevant agencies and authorities in the UK will respond to such incidents. The UK has also created the role of the Secretary of State's Representative for Maritime Salvage and Intervention (SOSREP). On behalf of the Secretary of State, SOSREP has the power to oversee, control and—if necessary—intervene in salvage operations within UK waters involving vessels or fixed platforms where there is a significant risk of pollution. To reduce the risk of pollution of our seas and coasts, SOSREP can direct vessels which are in difficulties to a suitable place of refuge. The powers of direction invested in SOSREP are extensive, and are called into play when he believes that the public interest is not being adequately protected. The SOSREP role has proved very successful, as well as being an international first for the UK.

Quality Shipping Campaign

In 1997, the UK played a leading role in launching the Quality Shipping Campaign at the IMO and in the EU. The main problem of substandard shipping and marine pollution is not the result of inadequate international standards, but of failure by some owners and flag States to fulfil their responsibilities under the conventions. The Quality Shipping Campaign engages all those involved in shipping ventures; owners, flag States, brokers, charterers, insurers, financiers, etc, with a view to rewarding the responsible in the industry and to increasingly marginalise substandard ships, owners and flags.

Double hull tankers

Following the loss of the ERIKA in 1999, the UK played a leading role in the EU and the MO to secure international agreement to accelerate the phasing out of single hull tankers. Double hulls are not a panacea, but they do provide additional protection against spillage in the event of collisions and groundings.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD & RURAL AFFAIRS

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): The latest Progress Report on BSE in Great Britain will be placed in the Library of the House today.

The Report explains how we have managed BSE during the period 1 January–30 June 2002. The encouraging reduction in BSE in cattle continues. This shows that the controls which have been put in place are continuing to have an important effect.

The Report discusses the introduction of an enhanced active TSE surveillance programme and the Food Standards Agency's review of the Over Thirty Month Rule. It covers issues bearing on European matters and the TSE research programme. It also sets out progress on the National Scrapie Plan and the results of enforcement visits to ensure compliance with the rules on specified risk material and animal feed.

The report is being published on Defra's website at: http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/bse/index.html

NORTHERN IRELAND

Northern Ireland (Remission of Sentences) Act 1995

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Paul Murphy): On 10 January 2003, following the receipt of information from the Police Service of Northern Ireland, I exercised my powers under section 1(3) of the Northern Ireland (Remission of Sentences) Act 1995 and revoked the licence granted to John James Adair. He has since been arrested and returned to prison.

I revoked his licence because it appeared to me that his continued liberty would present a risk to the safety of others and that he was likely to commit further offences. Unless I exercise my powers under section 1(5) of the 1995 Act, which I have not plans to do, he will remain in prison until 13 January 2005.

I have put in place additional safeguards for persons whose licences are revoked. These include the appointment of independent Commissioners, who hold or have held judicial office, to consider and advise me upon any representations made by recalled prisoners. I will also make available funds to meet the reasonable legal expenses of prisoners in connection with making such representations whether in writing or at any oral hearing the Commissioner may decide is necessary. Further details of the procedures and how they will operate will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

These additional safeguards will, remain in place until superseded by amending legislation and I commit the Government to them until that legislation is in place.

Northern Ireland Prison Service

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Jane Kennedy): Following the closure of Belfast and Maze Prisons and the release of prisoners under the Good Friday Agreement, the Northern Ireland Prison Service established a project to develop a Strategic Estate Plan for a 20-year period commensurate with the Prison Service's Statement of Purpose, and its Vision and Values, as set out in its Corporate and Business Plan.

That project is now complete and NIPS has concluded that it should retain and progressively upgrade the existing three sites, with the possibility of females being moved to Hydebank Wood being the subject of a feasibility study.

Copies of the report can be obtained through the Northern Ireland Prison Service website at www.niprisonservice.gov.uk.

HOME DEPARTMENT

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): I have today placed in the Library a copy of a report entitled "Race Equality—The Home Secretary's Employment Targets—Milestone Report". The targets cover recruitment, retention and career progression for minority ethnic staff in the Home Office, the prison, the police, and probation services.

HEALTH

Patients' Facilities

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): In our 1997 manifesto, we promised to end mixed-sex accommodation in national health service hospitals. In February 1998, we set a target for the achievement of three objectives which were designed to deliver separate sleeping areas, separate toilet and washing facilities and safe facilities for the mentally ill. Our target was that 95 per cent. of trusts would meet these new standards by December 2002.

We have exceeded the target to provide good standards of privacy and dignity, ensuring single-sex sleeping accommodation and robust operational policies which protect patients' privacy and dignity in 98 per cent. of NHS trusts.

We have met the target set to ensure the safety of people who are mentally ill—95 per cent. of NHS trusts meet additional criteria set for this patient group, offering for example day rooms which are "off limits" to both patients and visitors of the opposite sex.

The target to provide separate toilet and washing facilities for men and women will be met by the end of March. Progress to date means that 93 per cent. of NHS trusts provide properly segregated bathroom and toilet facilities for men and women. A further 2 per cent. of NHS trusts have works underway to deliver the required standard, affecting just 32 wards, which will be completed by the end of the March.

Over 98 per cent. of NHS wards meet our guidelines. As there are approximately 10,000 wards currently in use across the NHS, this is a significant achievement. New hospitals and hospital facilities currently being built will bring the remaining wards to the necessary standard.

This has been a particularly challenging target, which the NHS has met with enthusiasm and fervour. Meeting the target has taken time, energy and commitment from a wide range of professionals. The extremely high level of compliance achieved is a testament to their hard work and commitment to the interests of NHS patients.

DEFENCE

Iraq

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): In my oral statement to the House on 7 January 2002, *Official Report* column 23, I announced the deployment of naval and amphibious forces, including 3 Commando Brigade Royal Marines with all supporting elements. They will conduct training in the Mediterranean, with a view to proceeding to the Gulf region if and as required.

3 Commando Brigade Royal Marines will have an integral reconnaissance capability. This will be provided by a number of tracked vehicles. These will be moved by ship and loading will begin shortly. Despatch of Royal Marines personnel and other equipment by air will also begin shortly.

In parallel, preparatory activity continues to ensure the availability and readiness of a range of military options, should they be required. This includes continuing planning activity, exploratory visits and liaison with other military staffs in the region. It also includes the preparation, movement and deployment of enabling equipment that might be required in the event of operations, including logistics, engineering, signals and command vehicles and equipment. This will involve major road movements in the United Kingdom and Germany, and the loading of ships which will sail in the next few days.

As soon as any decision to deploy additional British combat forces to the region is taken, I will inform the House at the earliest opportunity.

Written Ministerial Statements

Wednesday 15 January 2003

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH

Palestinian Reform

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): Yesterday I chaired a meeting in London attended by representatives of the Quartet and Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. I am very grateful that they were able to attend and contribute. We were joined through a video link by Palestinian Authority Ministers and civil society representatives, as the Israeli Government had unacceptably denied permission for them to travel to London. This arrangement was no substitute for a face-to-face conference, but I believe the meeting to have been constructive and wide ranging. It will support and complement the efforts of the Quartet on the Roadmap towards a two state settlement.

Palestinian Reform is only one part of the work required to achieve a just and comprehensive peace, but it is an important part. It is clear that the Palestinians are committed to the reform of their institutions and have already started that process. But there remains much to be done, and they need support and encouragement. At the meeting they repeated their condemnation of violence against civilians as a means of achieving Palestinian ends and briefed us on their plans for a new Palestinian constitution, political, economic and administrative reform and the creation of a Palestinian state.

This is an objective the whole international community shares. The next step will be meetings in London in early February of the Taskforce on Palestinian Reform and of Quartet Envoys. It will take action from all sides, including Israel, to maintain momentum and implement the Roadmap.

I urge the leaders of all sides to demonstrate the courage necessary to realise their obligations towards one another and turn that realisation into a genuine process of negotiation.

I am placing in the Library of the House a summary of my understanding of the proceedings and outcomes from the meeting. The key elements were:

An agreement that we need practical action to begin implementing the clear Palestinian declaration against violence and terrorism.

A new Palestinian commitment to work on constitution. We expect an agreed outline by the end of this month and have promised to support their work on this.

A clear commitment to finalising preparations for free, fair and open elections.

Recognition of the work the PA has done on financial accountability.

A clear message to the Palestinians on the need to do more on the judiciary.

HOME DEPARTMENT

National Criminal Intelligence Service

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): I am pleased to announce the appointment of Peter Hampson, currently Chief Constable of West Mercia Constabulary, as Director General of the National Criminal Intelligence Service.

Peter Hampson will take over from the current Director General, John Abbott, who retires on 21 March this year.

Written Ministerial Statements

Thursday 16 January 2003

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Local Authority Housing

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Tony McNulty): The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister yesterday laid before Parliament an amendment to The Local Authority (Capital Finance) Regulations 1997 to allow local authorities to use up to 100 per cent. of the capital receipt they receive from the disposal of certain housing assets, excluding right to buy sales and large and small scale voluntary transfers, for the provision of affordable housing.

Copies of the regulation have been placed in both House Libraries.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Small Arms Export Control Conference

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mike O'Brien): HMG hosted a successful meeting on strengthening export controls on small arms and light weapons at Lancaster House on 14 and 15 January. Over fifty nations and representatives of international organisations and NGOs attended. The Secretary of State for International Development and I addressed the delegates.

The meeting was an initiative of the Government's Global Conflict Prevention Pool. The Government's objective was to build on and develop consensus between small arms exporting nations, whether producers or stock-holders, on the need for effective export controls and controls on arms brokers. These were sensitive issues that the Government considered would benefit from further work following the UN Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects in 2001.

Recognising the central role for the UN, the meeting discussed ways of taking forward work on an international agreement to control the activities of arms brokers. There was also general agreement on the need for effective export controls on small arms.

The UK will report the outcome of the meeting to the United Nations biennial review meeting in July 2003 and follow up on the common ground established at Lancaster House.

The meeting demonstrates the strength of the international consensus to implement more effective controls on small arms exports and brokers. All who attended saw the meeting as a useful initiative to take forward key elements in the international effort to control the spread of small arms, a major factor in instability and conflict, particularly in Africa and in human rights abuses and crime worldwide.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prison DNA Sampling

The Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety (Mr. John Denham): The DNA Expansion Programme is a major Government initiative that has been developed to enable the police to make maximum benefit of DNA in tackling crime. Home Office funding has been made available to enable the police to take DNA samples from all people cautioned or charged with a recordable offence and from as many crime scenes as possible. The database has already played a leading role in solving a large number of crimes.

A number of prisoners and mentally disordered offenders do not have DNA on the database as they were convicted before the DNA expansion programme enabled every offender to be DNA sampled. An exercise is now underway to identify those offenders without DNA on the database and to ensure that a sample is taken before they are released from prison or hospital. This Prisoner DNA Sampling Programme is being run under the auspices of the existing DNA Expansion Programme.

A dedicated programme management team has been recruited and is developing plans to ensure that the majority of those without DNA profiles on the database do provide them by Summer 2003. Centrally managed but regionally based teams of police officers working in close co-operation with prison and mental health establishments will ensure a speedy completion of the exercise with minimal impact on the establishments involved.

The exercise will underpin the Home Office aims of reducing crime, increasing the efficiency of crime investigation and increasing successful prosecutions. If known offenders can be linked to their offences more often and more quickly then we will be able to detect and deter more crime in the future—and also improve victim reassurance and so contribute to reduction of the fear of crime.

The Prisoner DNA Sampling Programme and the broader DNA Expansion Programme are clear examples of the use of science and technology to reduce crime and improve the effectiveness of the police. In the National Policing Plan, published recently, we state our commitment to ensure that the DNA database covers all known active offenders by 2004.

Science and Technology Strategy

The Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety (Mr. John Denham): Today sees the launch of the first ever science and technology strategy for the police.

Science and technology have been important tools in the fight against crime for many years. However, as criminals become more technologically aware, so it becomes vital that the police service is not only properly equipped to combat this new strain of criminals but also that the tools they use are as effective and efficient as possible. From early on in the police reform process the major stakeholders in policing identified the need for an overarching strategy for the police use of science and technology—a commitment which was made in the police reform white paper: "Policing a New Century: A Blue Print for Reform".[1]

I established the Police Science and Technology Strategy Group to bring together the key stakeholders and commissioned them to identify and prioritise the police's requirements for science and technology. This work has formed the basis of the overarching strategy that we are launching today.

The purpose of the S&T strategy is to ensure the police service is equipped to exploit the opportunities in science and technology to deliver effective policing as part of a modern and respected criminal justice system. To achieve this the strategy identifies three key aims:

to establish priorities for current and future science and technology applications and research;

to co-ordinate the development and implementation of technology between users and suppliers to ensure a coherent and effective process; and

to implement processes for future scanning to ensure that the police service can exploit new technology at the earliest opportunity and is prepared for new technology-based threats.

These activities will support the delivery of national priorities for policing as identified in the National Policing Plan. This strategy will inform local planning as forces, police authorities, and key providers draw up their individual plans for the use of science and technology. Hence, the role of this strategy is not to usurp or replace individual plans and strategies but to provide a framework for their successful development. This provides the opportunity for a more co-ordinated approach in those areas where that is appropriate.

An important first step in this new process was the identification of the capabilities which science and technology can enhance to deliver more effective policing. The most important of these have already been outlined in the National Policing Plan: the effective use of intelligence gathering technology, secure exchange of data and mobile data input and retrieval, effective management of investigation and case handling, and maximising the value of evidence including the use of DNA.

The process of prioritising, improving co-ordination and scanning for future threats and opportunities is not a static one, but will be developed and improved upon over the coming year. This strategy sets out how this process will be carried out.

Despite being very different in their roles and status, the Forensic Science Service, Police Information Technology Organisation and Police Scientific Development Branch will all play important roles in delivering the strategy. The strategy, along with the priorities it has identified, will provide the framework for their individual plans for 2003–04 and beyond to ensure a more co-ordinated approach to meeting the science and technology needs of the police service.

This first overarching strategy, developed with both the key stakeholders and independent experts, marks a significant step but is not the culmination of our work. The next and perhaps most important step is that of implementation. This, with our partners in the Police Science and Technology Strategy Group, will be our main focus for the year ahead.

[1] Home Office (2001), *Policing New Century: A Blueprint for Reform*, CM5326, Stationery Office

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Royal Mail

The Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness (Mr. Stephen Timms): I would like to update the House on the implementation of the Royal Mail financing package.

In her statement of 13 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 1016 my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry announced that the Government had agreed a package of measures to put the company on a stable financial footing. This draws on the £1.8 billion of gilts (the accumulated cash generated by the business) on the balance sheet of the Royal Mail to enable the mails business to implement its renewal plan, and to support the nationwide network of post offices. The individual elements of this package have now been agreed.

Mails

The package for the mails business has been put together on commercial terms and provides an appropriate level of debt financing to allow Royal Mail management to finance their restructuring programmes, which aim to return the mails business to profitability in 2004–05. The Government is providing £1,044 million of debt, which comprises:

£544 million of loans from the National Loans Fund (NLF), secured on cash deposits from Royal Mail; and

Two DTI bonds, one of £200 million and one of £300 million, both secured against Royal Mail's assets.

Both the loan and bonds will be provided on commercial terms, and will be repayable between 2007 and 2009. Before the Departmental bonds are issued, the Department will seek Parliamentary authority, in the form of a main or supplementary estimate, for the necessary funds to acquire the bonds from Royal Mail.

Post Office Limited

I announced to the House on 2 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 518W, that £450 million from the gilts will be made available from 2003 to 2006 to help maintain the rural post office network over the next few years. In addition to this, and subject to state aid clearance, which we are currently seeking from the

European Commission, we intend to support the network business through its current period of transition by allowing the use of the gilts:

to repay short term loans from the Royal M[illegible] up to Post Office Limited totalling £420 million; and

to meet the net cash outflows of POL (up to £57[illegible] million) over the next 5 years, based on the decreasing levels projected in its strategic plan.

TREASURY

Appraisal and Evaluation in Central Government

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Paul Boateng): I am today publishing a new edition of the Green Book, "Appraisal and Evaluation in Central Government", guidance which the Treasury has for many years provided to other public sector bodies. Copies are being placed in the Vote Office and the Libraries of both Houses.

The new edition incorporates revised guidance to encourage a more thorough, long-term and analytically robust approach to appraisal and evaluation. It has been prepared following extensive consultation, including a public consultation exercise that ended last October.

Among the main changes are the following. First, there is a stronger emphasis on the identification, management and realisation of the benefits of proposals. Secondly, the new edition 'unbundles' the discount rate, introducing a rate of 3.5 per cent. in real terms, based on social time preference, while taking account of the other factors which were in practice often implicitly bundled up in the old 6 per cent. real figure. In particular, the new Green Book includes, for the first time, an explicit adjustment procedure to redress the systematic optimism ("optimism bias") that historically has afflicted the appraisal process. Finally, there is greater emphasis on assessing the differential impacts of proposals on the various groups in our society, where these are likely to be significant.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Greater Manchester Police Incident

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): I said yesterday that I would report further to the House, when I was able to do so, about the operation in Greater Manchester on 14 January in which a police officer, DC Stephen Oake, died.

The basic facts about this incident have now been confirmed by Greater Manchester Police. In the late afternoon of Tuesday 14 January, two immigration officers, with the support of Greater Manchester Police, entered premises in Crumpsall Lane, Manchester, for the purpose of detaining, pending deportation, an individual whom I had certified earlier in the day under the provisions of Part IV of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001. In addition, the officers of Greater Manchester Police had obtained a warrant to search the premises.

Three men present at the premises were detained. Nine Tactical Aid Unit officers, who had entered the premises, assisted in securing these men and in making the scene safe. All these officers were wearing full protective equipment, including body armour, and remained in the premises. Fourteen Special Branch officers were there to undertake aspects of the operation involving investigation and intelligence gathering. These officers were not wearing body armour.

The exact detail of what took place is still under investigation and will be the subject of an inquiry. But, as is already known, it is clear that a violent incident occurred during which DC Oake was fatally stabbed, three other officers were stabbed and a fourth officer sustained a broken ankle. One of these officers remains in hospital, suffering from stab wounds to the abdomen. His condition is stable and he is likely to leave hospital next week. The other three officers have now been released from hospital.

Following the struggle, the situation was brought under control by the police and all three men were arrested under Section 41 of the Terrorism Act 2000. Subsequently, one man was released from these provisions and immediately detained by the Immigration Service. He is currently detained in prison under Part IV of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act. The second man has also been released from the provisions of the Terrorism Act and remains in the custody of Greater Manchester Police, pending investigation into the death of DC Oake and injuries to the other officers. The third man remains detained under the Terrorism Act and is now in the custody of the Metropolitan Police.

Armed Response Vehicle resources were available throughout the operation for immediate deployment as required, but firearms officers were not deployed in specific support of this operation. The inquiry will obviously examine this. All the Tactical Aid Unit officers who entered the building were wearing full protective equipment, including body armour.

The Chief Constable of Greater Manchester, Michael Todd, has, with my agreement, established an inquiry which will be led by a senior police officer from outside the Greater Manchester Police Force. The inquiry will be held with the support of the Immigration Service. The senior investigator from Greater Manchester Police will be a Detective Superintendent and, from the Immigration Service, an Assistant Director.

The inquiry will concentrate on all aspects of planning, briefings, communications and implementation of the operation. The key objective will be to learn the lessons from this tragic incident, as I made clear in my oral statement to the House yesterday. The preliminary findings will be available within four weeks.

Written Answers to Questions

The following answers were received between 20 December 2002 and 6 January 2003

WORK AND PENSIONS

Asbestos

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the cost to business of the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 2002; and if he will make a statement. [88065]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The total costs of the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 2002 to business are estimated, over a 50-year period, at £1.5 billion. These future costs are discounted in present values under standard government accounting conventions. The regulations will help to prevent some 4,700 people dying from asbestos-related diseases from future exposure to asbestos in commercial buildings. This is equivalent to total benefits exceeding £3.0 billion. Full details of costs and benefits are contained in the Regulatory Impact Assessment available in the Library.

Adviser Discretion Fund

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to his answer of 27 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 316W, on the adviser discretion fund, how many persons have received payments from the fund; how many payments have been made *(a)* in total and *(b)* broken down by month; how many persons have received *(i)* more than one payment, (ii) more than two payments and (iii) more than three payments from the fund; what the value is of payments from the fund, (A) in total and (B) broken down by month; what the average payment from the fund to date is; if he will list the types of goods and services purchased from the funds, indicating how many payments have been used to purchase each type of goods and service; if he will place in the Library a summary of the records referred to in his answer; and if he will make a statement. [88511]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The adviser discretion fund was introduced to give personal advisers more flexibility in the help they can offer their New Deal clients. Over 71,200 people have moved into work after receiving help from the fund. We are building on this success by extending access to the fund to people who have been claiming benefits for six months or more.

Information on the number and value of awards made through the adviser discretion fund since its introduction in July 2001 is in the table.

	Number of awards	*Value of awards (£)*
2001		
July	4,331	215,216
August	7,086	399,327
September	8,821	525,822
October	9,594	565,114
November	12,327	787,215
December	7,660	491,621
2002		
January	11,524	693,955
February	13,432	783,235
March	19,242	1,226,270
April	15,562	1,254,727
May	21,014	1,528,999
June	15,869	1,094,076
July	16,976	1,145,953
August	17,818	1,377,355
September	18,433	1,196,375
October	15,413	1,444,183
November	8,495	617,192
Total	223,597	15,346,635

The average Adviser Discretion Fund award is £68.63.

Information on the number of people who have received payments, and the number of times they receive payments, is not collected centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. An individual can receive more than one award from the adviser discretion fund, but the total value of the awards cannot exceed £300.

Information on all the goods and services the adviser discretion fund has helped to purchase is not collected centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, the following table gives information under broad headings on the type of goods and services purchased using the adviser discretion fund by people who have started work after receiving an award from the fund.

Type of goods or services purchased	*Proportion of the number of awards provided to people who have moved into work (percentage)*
Help with clothes purchase	52
Help with travel fares	20
Help buying tools	6
Help with training/certificates	2
Help overcoming other barriers	20

Source:
Jobcentre Plus

The latest information on the number of awards made under the adviser discretion fund; their total monetary value; the number of people who have moved into work having received an award; and the type of goods and services purchased by people who have started work after receiving an award from the fund has been placed in the Library.

Departmental PCs

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the cost was of the new PCs recently

installed in his Department; how the PCs that these computers replaced were disposed of; and what the lifespan of the new machines is. [88450]

Mr. McCartney: The purchase cost of PCs installed in the Department of Work and Pensions up to 30 November 2002, including the associated software and network costs, is £156.7 million. Installation costs, again up to 30 November 2002, amount to £58.5million.

The old PCs are being disposed of by the Disposal Services Agency through a company called "Recommit", which redeploys suitable surplus computer equipment back into the community. Some old PCs and dumb terminals are not suitable for redeployment.

"Recommit" set no hard and fast eligibility criteria and charitable organisations and their clients, usually low income families, can order from them direct. Recent recipients of DWP PCs include Age Concern, the Arthur Rank Centre for Rural Studies, All Nations Christian College, Whizzkids (a children's charity), Woodend Park Community School and Firth Primary School Orkney.

It is assumed that the PCs will need replacing after five years.

Employers' Liability Premiums

Andy King: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when the Government last reviewed employers' liability legislation. [85823]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Government last reviewed employers' liability legislation in 1997.

Fairground Safety

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what recent discussions he has had with the Showman's Guild regarding fairground safety; [85726]

(2) what recent discussions he has had with the Fairground Licensing Agency, NAFLIC, regarding the registration of surveyors; [85729]

(3) what discussions he has had with the Health and Safety Executive regarding fairground safety since the death of Stacey Rowe in 2000. [86503]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: My right hon. Friend has had no discussions with the Health and Safety Executive regarding fairground safety since the death of Stacey Rowe in 2000. The Secretary of Sate for Work and Pensions assumed responsibility for the Health and Safety commission and the Health and Safety Executive on 24 July 2002. However, meetings were held on 10 and 26 July 2001 between HSE and my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead), the Minister with health and safety responsibilities at the time.

There have been no discussions between my right hon. Friend and the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain (SGGB), nor the National Association for Leisure Industry Certification (NAFLIC).

However, discussions between the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and members of the SGGB and NAFLIC on fairground safety take place on a regular basis.

In addition, both trade associations are full members of the Fairgrounds and Amusement Parks Joint Advisory Committee (FJAC), which comprises members of the trade associations and others involved in the fairground industry together with representatives from the Health and Safety Executive. This committee has a number of sub-committees; these are the Technical Working Group, the Amusement Devices Inspection Procedures Working Group (ADIPS) and the Research Working Group.

The Health and Safety Executive, and the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain and the National Association for the Leisure Industry Certification are represented on these working groups, which meet regularly and whose purpose is to maintain and improve standards of safety within the industry as a whole through a formal communication process.

Gas Pipes

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of mains gas pipes Transco agreed to replace by 1 January 2003; and what percentage of this work had been achieved by 1 December. [87483]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: This required replacement of mains gas pipes, as part of the medium pressure ductile iron replacement programme, was 0.86 per cent. of the total mains gas pipes by 1 January 2003. As at 1 December, Transco was on target to achieve 1 per cent., thus exceeding their original target. Actual performance is at a level of 116 per cent. against original projections.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the terms were of the agreement between Transco and the Health and Safety Executive for the replacement of metal gas pipes; and if Transco has met the time scale for replacement agreed with the Health and Safety Executive. [87486]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I am informed by the Health and Safety Executive that Transco's mains replacement work is governed by a five-year programme which commenced in January 2001 for iron mains within 30 metres of property. This programme was agreed following discussions with Transco and Ofgem. At the end of this five-year period, Transco should be replacing mains so that the remaining mains within 30 metres of buildings should be replaced within the following 25 years.

Implementation of this programme is in the very early stages. HSE is carefully monitoring Transco's progress and evidence suggests the company is meeting current targets.

Health and Safety Executive

Andrew Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many of the Regional

Directors and Operational Managers in the Health and Safety Executive possess a formal qualification in management. [84778]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The table shows all management qualifications recorded on HSE's Personnel database. Managers in HSE are B4 (HEO equivalent).

	SCS SCS	*G6 B1*	*G7 B2*	*SEO B3*	*HEO B4*	*Total*
Educational qualifications						
Admin and Info Management	—	—	—	1	—	1
Administration Management	—	—	—	1	—	1
Business Management and Finance	—	—	—	—	1	1
Business Management Studies	—	—	—	1	4	5
Health and Safety Management	—	—	2	8	—	10
Human Resource Management	—	—	—	—	2	2
Info and Admin Management	—	—	—	—	1	1
Management	1	5	14	12	8	40
Management for the Professions	—	1	—	—	—	1
Management Services	—	—	1	—	—	1
Management Studies	3	2	10	10	7	32
Management Techniques	—	—	—	1	—	1
Personnel Management	—	—	1	5	2	8
Prof Cert in Management	—	1	—	—	1	2
Project Management	—	—	2	2	—	4
Supervisory Management	—	—	—	1	—	2
Total	4	9	30	42	26	111
Professional Memberships						
British Institution of Management	—	—	—	2	—	2
Inst of Personnel and Development	—	1	2	4	10	17
Institute of Admin. Management	—	—	—	1	—	1
Institute of Management	—	—	4	2	—	6
Institute of Management Services	—	—	—	1	—	1
Institute of Personnel Management	—	—	2	5	4	11
Institute of Supervisory Management	—	—	—	1	2	3
Total	0	1	8	16	16	41

It is mandatory for all managers in HSE to attend 'essential training for managers'. This includes 12 modules: HSE's Expectations of It's Managers (Mod 1); The Legal and Policy Framework (Mod 2); Performance Management: Appraisal & Development (Mod 3&4); Getting the best from your team (Mod 5); Management Communication Part 1&2 (Mod 6&7); Selecting staff (Mod 8); Managing resources (Mod 10); Developing your Management style (Mod 11); The Appraisal Managers role (Mod 12).

Andrew Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether above standard hours of working have been ended in HSE at each grade. [84782]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The only data available to answer this question are found in the staff survey. As the title of the survey suggests, it is based on the opinions of staff rather than objectively recorded data. The 2002 staff survey showed that there were still staff at all grades working above their conditioned hours. There was however a small reduction of 2.6 per cent. in those working between five and eight hours compared with 2001.

Housing Benefit

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of the population in *(a)* Birmingham, *(b)* the West Midlands region and *(c)* the London region claimed housing benefit in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [82868]

Malcolm Wicks: The available information is in the table:

Housing Benefit recipients as a percentage of the population in Birmingham, West Midlands and London—May 2001

Area	*HB recipients as percentage of the population*
Birmingham City Council area	12.1
West Midlands Government Office Region	8.4
London Government Office Region	10.2

Notes:

1. The data refer to households claiming Housing Benefit which may be a single person, a couple or a family. More than one benefit household can live in one property, for example two or more adults in a flat or house share arrangement.
2. The percentages have been rounded to one decimal place.
3. Housing Benefit figures exclude any Extended Payment cases.
4. Figures for any non-responding authorities have been estimated.
5. Figures are based on the estimated mid-2001 population aged 16 and over.

Sources:

Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Management Information System Quarterly 100 per cent. caseload stock-count taken in May 2001.

Office for National Statistics population estimates unit: estimated resident population mid-2001 based on the 2001 Census.

New Deal (Disabled People)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many disabled people were found jobs through the New Deal for Disabled People in *(a)* 2001 and *(b)* 2002 in *(i)* the United Kingdom and (ii) the west midlands; how many of these people are still in employment; and what plans he has to review the effectiveness of the service. [86866]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP) is the first national programme designed specifically to help people with health conditions and disabilities move into and keep jobs. A comprehensive programme of evaluation is in place to assess its effectiveness.

The available information is in the table.

People helped into work through NDDP since the national extension of the programme began

Period	*People finding work*
July 2001-March 2002	2,304
April 2002-September 2002	3,795
Total	6,099

Notes:
1. Information is not available broken down by government office region.
2. The information in the table is for Great Britain. The Northern Ireland Office is responsible for employment programmes within Northern Ireland.

It is not possible to give figures for the number of people who have found work through NDDP who are still in employment. However, of all NDDP clients who have found work to date, 1,400 have achieved sustained employment—defined as remaining in paid work for 26 weeks out of a 39 week period.

ONE Programme

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of lone parents participating in the ONE programme have obtained employment; and if he will make a statement. [85987]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* Under ONE, all people claiming working age benefits are now required to have a work-focused meeting with a personal adviser. All ONE pilot sites are due to become integrated Jobcentre Plus offices by spring 2003.

From June 1999 to October 2002, 78,028 lone parents participated in the ONE pilots. Of these, 3,282–4.2 per cent.-have so far obtained employment.

We are using the information gained from the ONE pilots and applying the valuable lessons learnt in the development of our Jobcentre Plus service.

Pensions

Dr. Jack Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people were unemployed in Copeland in *(a)* May 1997 and *(b)* at the latest date for which figures are available; what proposals he has to reduce that number; and if he will make a statement. [87142]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* Economic stability and active labour market programmes have helped people move from welfare to work in all parts of the country. As a result of our policies the number of people in work is at record levels and unemployment has fallen to levels not seen since the 1970s.

In my right hon. Friend's constituency, between May 1997 and October 2002 the number of people unemployed and claiming benefit fell from 2,784 to 1,382 (a reduction of 50 per cent.) and long term unemployment has fallen by 75 per cent. Over the same period the New Deal has helped over 1,800 people in Copeland into jobs.

We know that even within areas of prosperity there are pockets of persistent unemployment. That is why we have introduced additional measures—such as Action Teams for Jobs and Employment Zones—targeted on the most employment-deprived wards in the country.

Pneumoconiosis

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many men have been awarded incapacity benefit and have successfully claimed payments due to pneumoconiosis since 1962; [81961]

(2) how many men have been awarded incapacity benefit and have successfully claimed payments due to pneumoconiosis since 1992. [82721]

Malcolm Wicks: Information on the number of men receiving incapacity benefit who also receive industrial injuries disablement benefit due to pneumoconiosis is only available from 1 October 1997. We estimate that during the period 1 October 1997 to 31 March 2002 around 100 men who were awarded incapacity benefit with a diagnosis of pneumoconiosis also successfully claimed industrial injuries disablement benefit on the same grounds, and that a further 400 men with other medical conditions who were awarded incapacity benefit successfully claimed industrial injuries disablement benefit on the grounds of pneumoconiosis[1]. These figures are based on a small sample of cases and should be taken only as a general indication of the position.

[1] *Source:* merges between 5 per cent. samples of the incapacity benefit computer system and 100 per cent. samples of the industrial injuries disablement benefit computer system.

Incapacity benefit replaced sickness benefit and invalidity benefit on 13 April 1995. Figures for sickness benefit and invalidity benefit awards by diagnosis are not available prior to 1971–72. The available information is in the table.

Sickness/invalidity/incapacity benefit awards, due to pneumoconiosis and related diseases, for men in the periods shown

Thousand	*Number of awards*
1971–72	4
1972–73	4
1973–74	4
1974–75	5
1975–76	n/a
1976–77	3
1977–78	3
1978–79	[1]2
1979–80	[1]2

Sickness/invalidity/incapacity benefit awards, due to pneumoconiosis and related diseases, for men in the periods shown

Thousand	*Number of awards*
1980–81	[1]1
1981–82	[1]1
1982–83	[1]1
1983–84 to 1994–95	[2]—
1995–96	[1]0.1
1996–97	[1]0.1
1997–98	[1]0.1
1998–99	[1]0.1
1999–2000	[1]0.1
2000–01	[1]0.1
2001–02	[1]0.1

[1] Figures are based on very few sample cases and are therefore subject to a high degree of sampling error. They should be used as a rough guide to the situation only.

[2] From 1983–84 to 1994–95 figures are either nil or negligible.

Notes:

1. Figures from 1971–72 to 1994–95 are rounded to the nearest thousand. Figures from 1995–96 are rounded to the nearest hundred.
2. Figures for 1975–76 are not available.
3. Figures include cases where the person receives national insurance credits only.
4. If a person has more than one medical condition only the primary diaghosis is recorded.
5. Figures are for Great Britain but include a small number of cases where the claimant is resident overseas.

Sources:

Up to 1974–75 based on 2.5 per cent. sample of cases.

From 1976–77 to 1977–78 based on 2 per cent. sample of cases.

From 1978–79 to 1994–95 based on 1 per cent. samples of cases.

From 1995–96 5 per cent. samples of the benefit computer system, which excludes a small number of IB cases that are handled clerically.

Poverty (Definition)

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what definition of poverty will be used to measure success in the joint Public Service Agreement with the Treasury on reducing child poverty by a quarter by 2004. [86736]

Malcolm Wicks: The Public Service Agreement target technical note contains full details of how the target will be monitored. A copy has been placed in the Library.

Workplace Health and Safety

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what projections he has made of likely trends in the number of *(a)* work-related accidents and *(b)* work-related diseases in the next three years. [85418]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Health and Safety Executive has made no projections on the overall levels of work-related accidents and diseases. The Government and the Health and Safety Commission have committed to delivering its Public Service Agreement targets on health and safety and will do this by working with other organizations, particularly on its priorities in construction, agriculture, the health services and to tackle musculoskeletal disorders, stress, falls from height, workplace transport and slips and trips.

ENVIRONMENT

Agri-environmental Schemes

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the development of an entry-level agri-environment scheme; and what consultation there has been on the proposed scheme. [87864]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 18 December 2002]*: Work is currently in progress to develop a pilot entry-level scheme which will be used to test the concept in four areas of the country, each with a different range of farming systems. Subject to the success of this pilot, the Government plans to make an entry-level scheme available to farmers across England from 2005.

The development of this pilot scheme was informed by the responses to a consultation exercise run as part of a wider review of agri-environment schemes, to which over 130 responses were received from a wide range of organisations and interested individuals. A working group with membership drawn from a variety of environmental and agricultural organisations has also been closely involved in developing the pilot scheme.

In the past few weeks, the first draft of the pilot scheme has been subject to a pre-pilot exercise. Through the working group members, over 100 farmers have been asked for their views on this draft. The responses are currently being analysed and will be used to revise the scheme before it is launched next spring.

The pilots themselves will also be closely monitored, and the results used to inform the design of the main scheme.

Agricultural Co-operatives

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many agricultural co-operatives are registered in England and Wales representing *(a)* arable farms and *(b)* livestock farms; and how many members of those co-operatives there are. [87296]

Mr. Morley: The information on agricultural co-operatives is not available from the June Census. Defra have plans to run a pilot in 2003 to test the possibility of collecting fuller information on how holdings are linked and working together.

Appointments

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to which bodies her Department makes appointments; how many members there are *(a)* in total and *(b)* in each body; and how many of those appointed are *(i)* businessmen, (ii) businessmen in SMEs and (iii) businessmen in micro-businesses. [87389]

Alun Michael: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office on 16 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 607W.

CHP Plant

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry about the contribution of CHP to Britain's future energy needs; [86196]

(2) what discussions she has had with interested parties about extending the Energy Efficiency Commitment to offer further support to CHP. [86199]

Mr. Morley: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is in regular contact with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on a wide range of matters that affect the business of both their Departments. CHP is among the energy issues that have been discussed at those meetings. We are considering the future of the Energy Efficiency Commitment after 2004 and, subject to the outcome of the Energy White Paper, intend to consult on our proposals next year.

Climate Change

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact of farming on the Government's climate change strategy. [87267]

Mr. Meacher: The UK's climate change programme sets out the policies and measures in each sector of the economy that the Government have put in place or have planned to meet and move beyond its Kyoto Protocol target. On current projections, greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture—mainly methane from enteric fermentation in livestock and nitrous oxide from agricultural soils—will be an estimated 14 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2010. This is mainly due to reductions in cattle numbers from yield improvements, and reductions in synthetic fertiliser usage—although, because emissions in other sectors are also falling, agriculture's share of total UK emissions is expected to remain at the present level of around 7.5 per cent.

Action that the UK Government and the devolved Administrations are taking to reduce emissions from agriculture includes encouragement of biomass including renewable energy crops, application of the climate change levy to agricultural businesses (with some discounts for energy intensive horticultural businesses), agri-environment schemes and set-aside.

Climate Change Levy

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will place in the Library copies of *(a)* information supplied to her by sector associations party to climate change levy umbrella agreements under part 2 of schedule 3 of those agreements and *(b)* other information held by her relating to the reasons for sector or facility targets not being met. [82814]

Mr. Meacher: Information which is supplied under part 2 of schedule 3 to the umbrella agreements will relate to production and energy data for individual industrial sites or groups of sites The Secretary of State is intending to consult with sector associations about whether they have objections to its disclosure and if so to justify their objections. Officials are currently considering the responses to a consultation exercise on the proposed implementation of the Aarhus Convention and a draft EC Directive on Access to Environmental Information—the proposals included machinery for reviewing decisions taken by public authorities when handling requests for environmental information.

Departmental Logo

Diana Organ: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total cost was to the Department of the introduction of the new logo. [87306]

Alun Michael: The cost of designing the new Defra logo was £24,000. The logo is only one element of the total corporate identity, and further costs have been incurred in introducing it across the Department.

To date, these costs including the above amount total £137,510. This includes costs for project scoping, stimulus material, research, brand architecture, specifications, legal checks and briefing material which are necessary in developing and introducing a fresh identity to a large, new Government Department. On-going costs will be minimised by a phased implementation, only replacing any branded communication material when it runs out.

The re-branding exercise is necessary to establish a new identity, which will assist in explaining the role and purpose of the new Department among staff, stakeholders, other partners and the public.

Further implementation costs will be incurred in due course as guidelines are developed and used by external suppliers, other organisations and staff. The new guidelines will show how the new identity should be applied to all communication items such as letterheads, the website, publications and reports etc.

The findings of extensive research with staff, stakeholders and the public has helped Defra develop a better understanding of what our customers expect from us. This will enable us to streamline our communications and improve clarity. The final design proved popular with all groups. It will play a key role in building the new Department. As a symbol it is modern, professional and forward looking and provides a pivotal point for helping us to build a new customer focus internally.

Energy Efficiency

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will place in the Library copies of information supplied to her indicating that the proportional improvements in energy efficiency required by Climate Change Levy agreements have been maintained. [82870]

Mr. Meacher: The information supplied to the Secretary of State indicating that the proportional improvements to energy efficiency have been maintained is in the form of corrected energy consumption and production data for the baseline period. Targets are recalculated on the corrected baseline using the same principles on which the original targets were calculated. The Secretary of State is

intending to consult with the sector associations about whether they have objections to its disclosure and if so to justify their objections.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what targets she has on improving energy efficiency; and how she intends to achieve these targets. [86302]

Mr. Morley: The UK's Climate Change Programme details the policies and action we are taking to meet our target under the Kyoto Protocol to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 12.5 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2008–12, and move towards our domestic goal to reduce carbon dioxide emissions 20 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2010. Energy efficiency measures are an integral means of meeting these targets, several of which have their own targets as follows.

The Fuel Poverty Strategy has a PSA target to reach 600,000 low income householders between 2001 and 2004. There are various measures in place that will help deliver this including the Warm Front Scheme and the Energy Efficiency Commitment (EEC). The EEC's will result in a reduction in carbon emissions of an estimated 400,000 tonnes a year by 2005.

Combined Heat and Power (CHP) has a 2010 target of at least 10,000 megawatts of installed Good Quality CHP capacity. Government consulted on a draft CHP Strategy to 2010 earlier this year setting out the measures thought sufficient for the target to be met.

All Government Departments have an interim target to contribute to the target of a 1 per cent. per annum on-going reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from Government Estate buildings. Longer-term targets on energy efficiency are due to be set as part of the Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate, the first parts of which were published in July 2002.

Decisions about future targets and policies to improve energy efficiency will be considered as part of the Energy White Paper process, which the Government aims to publish in the new year.

EU Sugar and Dairy Regimes

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on reform of the EU *(a)* sugar and *(b)* dairy regimes. [87568]

Mr. Morley: The Government strongly supports reform of the CAP sugar regime, particularly in view of the increasing access for developing countries already agreed as part of the Everything But Arms initiative. The Council of Ministers is committed to a further review of the regime next year and we will be pressing for early decisions to allow for orderly adaptation to these more liberal trading arrangements, which will make the regime unsustainable in its present form. We also want the future regime to take account of the wider CAP Mid Term Review process on which negotiations are currently taking place.

With regard to the dairy regime, there have already been some moves towards reform under Agenda 2000—a 15 per cent. cut in support prices phased in from 2005 to 2007, with direct aid as compensation. However, this still leaves dairy support prices well above world levels, distorting both internal and external markets, and resulting in a continuing need for milk quotas (a financial burden to producers which rigidifies farming structures and the market) to contain budgetary expenditure.

The UK and other like-minded member states managed to secure a mid-term review of the milk quota system as part of the Agenda 2000 Agreement, under which Commission was charged with writing a report 'with a view to letting the current quota arrangements run out after 2006'. One of the four options in the report, which the Commission published in July, is for quota abolition in 2008.

We are now calling upon the Commission to come forward with a legislative proposal based on this option, which is the only one to fully meet thecommitments set out in the Agenda 2000 Agreement. In order to bring support prices closer to world levels, in preparation for quota abolition, we would favour bringing the Agenda 2000 price cuts forward to 2004, deepening them, and phasing them over four years, to 2007–08.

European Markets

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when there will be full and immediate access to European markets for exports from the least developed countries through the Everything But Arms Agreement; and if she will make a statement. [87574]

Mr. Morley: Least Developed Countries already have full duty and quota-free access to European markets for all goods except sugar, rice and bananas under the Everything But Arms Agreement. Duty and quota-free access for these three products is being phased in by 2006 in the case of bananas, and 2008–09 in the cases of sugar and rice.

Farm Products Levy

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the Government's policy is towards reintroduction of a levy scheme on agricultural farm products on a *(a)* compulsory and *(b)* voluntary basis. [87124]

Mr. Morley: The Government have no current plans to introduce new levies on agricultural farm products. However, the Government are preparing proposals for an animal disease levy as part of its consideration of how to achieve the right balance between partners in animal health as to how the costs are met.

CAP

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total annual cost of the common agricultural policy was to *(a)* consumers and *(b)* taxpayers in the United Kingdom in the most recent year for which figures are available; what estimate she has made of the cost per person per week; and if she will break down the total cost to consumers by product. [86991]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 12 December 2002]:* The consumer cost of the CAP can be estimated by considering the difference between UK prices and world prices on agricultural food products purchased by consumers. In 2000, the latest year for which UK figures

are available, we estimate that the CAP cost UK consumers around £3.5 billion through higher prices. In the same year the UK taxpayer contribution to the CAP was approximately £3 billion.

The UK population in 2000 was 59.8 million, implying that the average cost of the CAP of £6.5 billion in total equates to just over £2 per person per week, or £8 to £9 pounds a week for a notional family of four.

The following table shows an approximate breakdown of consumer support between agricultural commodities. These estimates have, in the main, been compiled using the methodology utilised by the OECD to produce their estimates of the consumer support estimate. It should be noted that the aggregate estimates will be more robust than estimates for the individual commodities. It is particularly difficult to determine the appropriate gap between UK and world prices for products whose specification varies, such as fruit and vegetables, or pigs, eggs and poultry. Although there is no significant internal regime governing the production of pigs, eggs and poultry, the EU has import tariffs in place, leading to increased costs for consumers.

Breakdown of consumer support between agricultural commodities

Commodity	*Cost (£ million)*
Cereals	50
Sugar beet	300
Milk	980
Beef and veal	580
Sheep	90
Pigs, eggs and poultry	920
Fruit and vegetables	430
Others	150
Total	3,500

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many farmers received total payment from the common agricultural policy of less than £500 in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [87297]

Mr. Morley: In the 12 months ending June 2002, 20,000 claimants received less than £500 each in total direct grants and subsidies under the common agricultural policy in England. The payment of direct grants and subsidies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland was the responsibility of the devolved Authorities in that period. In addition, 35,000 claimants throughout the UK each received payments of less than £500 in total as part of the market support measures of the CAP, for which traders as well as farmers are eligible. The figures exclude any compensation received for animals slaughtered during the FMD crisis for reasons of disease control or animal health. We are unable to identify the total payments received by any individual or business making applications using more than one name.

Fisheries

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many licences were granted for bass fisheries in south west waters in *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2001 and *(c)* 2002; and how many have been granted for 2003. [87494]

Mr. Morley: Separate licences are not issued for bass. It may be caught and landed by any fishing vessel with a Category A, B or C licence, subject to compliance with the catch restrictions set out in the licence. There are some 1,200 vessels with such licences currently based in the south west.

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what *(a)* the total number of days at sea and *(b)* the total kilowatts of engine power was for vessels over 10 metres in length targeting *(i)* cod, haddock and whiting, (ii) plaice and sole, (iii) hake, (iv) megrim and anglerfish and *(v)* sand eel and Norway pout in (A) North Sea, (B) West Scotland (C) Irish Sea and (D) ICES sub-area VII in (1) 1998, (2) 1999 and (3) 2000. [87808]

Mr. Morley: The information requested is not readily available and can only be produced through the compilation of data held separately on computer systems operated by UK fisheries departments. As such an answer at the current time could be obtained only at inappropriate cost and effort. However, a separate larger exercise is currently being carried out to combine these sets of information, which will allow an answer to be provided by mid-January 2003.

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will invite the Fishermen's Association Ltd. to participate in future discussions on fisheries. [87809]

Mr. Morley: The European Commission proposed that, under the current review of the Common Fisheries Policy, new Regional Advisory Councils will set up to advise on fisheries issues. It is too early to say who will be represented on these bodies.

Flooding

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action she *(a)* has taken and *(b)* will be taking to prevent flooding in the Hatch End area of the Harrow, West constituency; and if she will make a statement. [87884]

Mr. Morley: Defra provides funding to operating authorities for flood and coastal defence capital works that meet technical, economic and environmental criteria and achieve an appropriate priority score. However responsibility for deciding which projects to promote and their timing rests with the operating authorities, in this case the Environment Agency.

I understand the Agency has completed a review of the original study for the Hatch End area and plans to carry out a flood alleviation scheme starting in 2004 subject to planning permission and land agreements being secured. The Agency has yet to submit an application for funding to Defra.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assistance she will give to the Environment Agency in the event of large-scale floods. [88298]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA has policy responsibility for flood and coastal defence in England. Operational responsibility for flooding from main rivers and the sea rests with the Environment Agency. The Agency is also responsible for flood warning arrangements and exercises a general supervision over all matters relating to flood defence.

The Environment Agency takes the lead in the case of large scale flooding and manages the response in conjunction with local authorities and the police. Should a request be made for additional funding, this would be considered in the light of the circumstances pertaining and a decision made accordingly.

Following the Autumn 2000 floods, additional funding was given to the Agency.

Food Imports

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what was the *(a)* volume and *(b)* value of processed food imported from developing countries into the UK in each of the last three years for which figures are available. [87265]

Mr. Morley: The table shows the UK imports of *(i)* lightly processed foods (goods that retain their raw recognisable form, such as meat, cheese and butter, powdered milk, flour, sugar etc.) and (ii) highly processed foods (goods such as confectionery, canned meats, jams, alcoholic drinks, ice cream etc.) from developing countries for the years 1999–2001.

UK imports of processed foods from developing countries[1] 1999–2001

Degree of processing/country of despatch	*1999*		*2000*		*2001*	
	000 tonnes	*£ million*	*000 tonnes*	*£ million*	*000 tonnes*	*£ million*
Lightly processed						
Brazil	788	142	820	188	1,068	252
Argentina	703	54	433	48	337	41
Mauritius	473	176	373	138	511	198
Malaysia	312	61	400	65	440	73
Indonesia	238	92	241	95	260	93
India	165	164	228	178	244	181
Fiji	188	64	205	65	155	51
Guyana	199	66	176	55	166	52
Papua New Guinea	154	57	185	47	196	38
Pakistan	169	34	147	30	156	40
Others	1,704	1,031	1,649	1,041	1,701	1,103
Total	5,094	1,941	4,859	1,950	5,234	2,121
Highly processed						
Chile	55	83	63	91	79	109
South Africa	55	67	60	79	79	102
Brazil	66	89	60	83	67	96
Peru	52	17	70	21	55	19
Thailand	25	40	30	54	36	66
China	29	19	24	20	23	23
Argentina	28	33	29	36	19	33
Czech Republic	23	12	25	15	26	20
Bulgaria	22	20	14	11	14	11
Poland	6	13	12	24	25	35
Others	76	96	97	99	96	108
Total	438	490	484	533	519	622
Grand total	5,532	2,431	5,343	2,483	5,753	2,743

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[1] List of developing countries obtained from World bank website.

Note:

The data includes an estimate of below threshold data, but excludes an estimate for non-response.

Source:

HM Customs and Excise

Data prepared by Statistics (Commodities and Food) Accounts and Trade, ESD, DEFRA.

Green Ministers

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which Minister in her Department is the nominated Green Minister; how often she has attended meetings of the Green Ministers; and which official has responsibility for the Defra rural proofing check-list in her Department. [88460]

Mr. Meacher: My right hon. Friend the Minister of State for rural affairs and urban quality of life represents Defra on the Ministers' committee ENV(G), which I chair. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment Food and Rural Affairs, is not a member of ENV(G).

Policy responsibility for rural proofing lies in Defra with Rural Economies and

Communities Directorate.

Illegal Meat Imports

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what additional

measures she has installed at United Kingdom ports of entry to prevent the illegal importation of illegal meat products since January 2000. [87326]

Mr. Morley: Extra funding this financial year has been used for additional enforcement officers to perform checks on imports at a number of ports and airports. We have increased the number of targeted checks carried out this year, especially to provide additional information to assist the disease risk assessment.

Legislation was amended in May 2002 to provide enforcement officers with additional search powers, and written guidance was provided to them on the use of these powers, especially with regard to checks for illegal meat imports in passenger baggage.

Enforcement officers have improved access to intelligence to aid them in deploying anti-smuggling measures. Notably they receive monthly reports of products seized and notified to Defra. This is then entered on the central computer database which was established in April 2001.

We are carrying out a six-month pilot using detector dogs to find illegal animal products in passenger baggage and freight. The pilot is proving valuable in determining the attributes and level of training required for both dogs and their handlers and the back up services we need to support the dog teams.

Trials of x-ray equipment to detect illicit material hidden in commercial freight are taking place at two major seaports.

Public awareness is being increased through penalty posters and information leaflets at airports and seaports. New information on personal import allowances was issued in May 2001, and then refreshed in February 2002. This is being updated to highlight changes on personal import allowances which come into effect on 1 January 2003 as a result of UK pressure on the European Commission to tighten the rules.

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many successful prosecutions were instituted in the United Kingdom against persons accused of the importation of illegal meat in each year from 1995 to 2001. [87328]

Mr. Morley: Figures on prosecutions for the illegal importation of meat are not collected centrally. Responsibility for prosecutions lies with local authorities. We are however aware of one successful prosecution this year, which was brought by Crawley borough council in July. The Corporation of London Port Health Authority issued six cautions in October.

Dr. Richard Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the measures being taken to detect small quantities of meat being imported illegally by tourists and visitors; and how many sniffer dogs are available for this purpose. [87726]

Mr. Morley: New European rules on personal imports come in to force on 1 January 2003, from when personal imports of meat, milk and their products will be prohibited for travellers entering the UK from outside the EU and certain European countries. Posters displayed at ports and airports have been revised to reflect the new rules and will be in place by 1 January. These posters form part of our ongoing campaign to educate travellers about the import rules.

Extra funding this financial year has been used for additional enforcement officers to perform checks on imports at a number of ports and airports. We have increased the number of targeted checks carried out this year, especially on passenger bags.

A six-month pilot using two detector dogs to find illegal animal products in passenger baggage and freight is under way. The pilot is proving valuable in determining the attributes and level of training required for both dogs and their handlers and the back up services we need to support the dog teams. Evaluation will take place at the end of the six months, with a view to increasing the number of dogs if they compare favourably to other detection methods. Decisions on this now also need to be seen in the context of Customs' future responsibility for anti-smuggling measures, as announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 6 November.

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the use of dogs in enforcing restrictions on meat imports; and what plans she has to increase this. [87621]

Mr. Morley: A six-month pilot using detector dogs to find illegal animal products in passenger baggage and freight is under way. The pilot is proving valuable in determining the attributes and level of training required for both dogs and their handlers, and the back up services we need to support the dog teams. Evaluation will take place at the end of the six months, with a view to increasing the number of dogs if the cost-benefit analysis compares favourably to other detection methods. Decisions on this and the detector dogs will be taken forward as part of the work to transfer anti-smuggling activity to Her Majesty's Customs and Excise, as announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 6 November.

Import Controls

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what rules exist to ensure that airlines inform passengers of import controls. [87622]

Mr. Morley: There are no statutory rules which require airlines to inform passengers of the restrictions on import of meat and other animal products. However, the European Commission Decision on controls on personal imports of animal products requires member states, from 1 January 2003, to ensure that the rules are brought to the attention of travellers by display of information at ports and airports and by making arrangements with international passenger transport operators, which we are doing.

Milk Quotas

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the effect of the European Court of Justice ruling relating to non-producing milk quotas on UK milk quota holders. [88146]

Mr. Morley: The effect of the Thomsen European Court of Justice judgment is now clear in that it means non-producing quota holders will no longer be able to lease out their milk quota indefinitely, which will mean that they will have to sell it, resume production, or otherwise face its confiscation. We have been discussing with the European Commission how, and to what timescale, we take forward implementation of this new interpretation in the UK and will make an announcement on next steps as soon as possible.

Ministerial Engagements

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many engagements were undertaken outside London *(a)* by her or her predecessor and *(b)* by Ministers in her Department in January *(i)* 2000, (ii) 2001 and (iii) 2002. [87356]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 16 December 2002]*: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office on 16 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 608W.

Morecambe Coastal Protection Scheme

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the state of the Morecambe Coastal Protection Scheme. [87589]

Mr. Morley: Defra provides funding to local authorities for coast protection capital works that meet technical, economic and environmental criteria and achieve an appropriate priority score. However responsibility for deciding which projects to promote and their timing rests with the local authorities, in this case Lancaster city council.

I understand that the proposed works will have a significant effect on the Morecambe Bay special protection area and candidate special area of conservation. For such a scheme to proceed and in the absence of alternative options the council will be obliged to provide compensatory measures in accordance with the requirements of the Conservation (Natural Habitats etc) Regulations 1994 (as amended). I understand that the council are investigating options for compensatory measures as a matter of urgency, prior to submitting their application for funding to Defra.

Parrett Catchment Project

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what provision is contained in the constitution of the Parrett Catchment Project to remove the Chairman if he does not meet targets. [87380]

Mr. Morley: The Parrett Catchment Project is an independent body, the Department has no role in such matters which are for the project board to determine.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what notification she has received from the Chairman of the Parrett Catchment Project of his plans to go overseas on business relating to the project in 2003. [87381]

Mr. Morley: The Parrett Catchment Project is an independent body, the Secretary of State has received no such notification of any visits and would not expect to do so.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many bodies similar to the Parrett Catchment Project have been set up in England and Wales. [88299]

Mr. Morley: The Parrett Catchment Project is a forum for stakeholders with an interest in flood management and related matters in the area. Various other stakeholders have been set up on either a long term or short term basis in response to flooding problems in other parts of the country. They have a variety of different structures and forms of organisation and it is likely that many have not made themselves known to the Department.

Pigmeat

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of the United Kingdom retail pigmeat market was supplied from *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* Denmark, *(c)* the Netherlands and *(d)* other countries in each year from 1990 to 2001. [87290]

Mr. Morley: Information on the proportions of the retail market for pigmeat in the United Kingdom which are supplied from the United Kingdom, Denmark, the Netherlands and elsewhere, is not available. However, information is available on the amounts of home production and supplies of pork, and of bacon and ham, in the United Kingdom. These are given in the tables.

No data is available on the uses to which the supplies of pork and of bacon and ham are subsequently put. These uses may be for retail as meat or for catering or for foodstuffs which require further processing, some of which may subsequently be exported.

More detailed production and supplies tables may be found on the DEFRA website at http://www.defra.gov.uk

Thousand tonnes product weight

Table 1 UK Supplies of Pork[1]

	1990	*1991*	*1992*[2]	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*[2]	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Home production	762.4	804.6	810.4	812.8	836.4	791.3	801.2	887.6	931.2	831.2	724.5	610.1
Imported[3]	81.0	75.2	90.6	113.6	115.8	168.7	199.6	177.4	190.3	234.8	273.8	261.2
Of which imported from:												
Denmark	42.1	35.7	43.1	47.2	45.4	54.5	70.2	59.9	72.3	77.6	95.1	117.2
Netherlands	7.5	5.0	4.7	20.0	11.0	24.4	29.8	21.6	24.8	53.1	51.7	39.9
Others[4]	31.4	34.5	42.7	46.4	59.5	79.3	99.5	95.8	93.2	104.0	127.0	104.1

Thousand tonnes product weight

Table 1 UK Supplies of Pork[1]

	1990	*1991*	*1992*[2]	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*[2]	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Exported[3,5]	78.3	108.1	133.4	130.6	154.2	188.3	194.9	247.8	292.4	235.1	207.9	39.3
Total new supply[6]	785.1	771.7	767.6	795.8	798.0	771.8	805.9	817.2	829.1	830.9	790.5	832.1
Estimates of proportion of total new supplies (percentage)												
United Kingdom	100	104	106	102	105	103	99	109	112	100	92	73
Of which for the UK market[7]	89	90	88	86	85	78	75	78	77	72	65	69
Denmark	6	5	8	6	6	7	9	7	9	9	12	14
Netherlands	1	1	1	3	1	3	4	3	3	6	7	5
Others	4	4	6	6	7	10	12	12	11	13	16	13

[1] Does not include meat offals or trade in preserved or manufactured meat products (eg. canned meat).
[2] 1992 and 1998 home-fed production figures were collected on a 53-week (14 week 4th quarter) basis but have been adjusted to a 52-week year (13 week 4th Quarter) for comparability.
[3] All trade figures include an estimate for unrecorded trade.
[4] Includes meat from finished pigs imported live from the Republic of Ireland.
[5] Includes estimated dressed carcase weight of live exports of pigs other than pure bred.
[6] Home-cured production and imports, less exports and stock adjustment
[7] Production minus exports as a percentage of total new supply. It has been assumed that exports are of UK produced pork although it is known that a small proportion of exports is imported that is cut and packed in the UK and then exported.
Note:
Figures have been rounded individually and totals will not necessarily agree with the addition of separate figures.

Thousand tonnes product weight

Table 2 UK supplies of bacon and ham[1]

	1990	*1991*	*1992*[2]	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*[2]	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Home cured production	190.6	192.5	189.4	215.7	232.5	244.6	240.6	238.8	236.3	232.7	208.9	196.7
Imported[3]	259.9	253.8	234.4	238.0	224.4	227.9	261.2	240.1	231.1	230.4	267.9	281.3
Of which imported from												
Denmark	116.4	129.6	117.5	125.406	113.6	113.5	106.8	117.3	106.5	96.4	95.7	112.2
Netherlands	112.5	96.4	89.0	84.5	87.6	87.9	130.4	99.8	105.0	113.1	147.6	135.4
Others	31.0	27.8	27.9	28.1	23.2	26.5	24.0	22.9	19.7	20.9	24.6	33.8
Exported[3]	5.0	4.9	5.6	3.2	5.5	5.2	5.3	8.0	8.4	6.2	9.2	7.3
Total New Supply[4]	445.5	441.4	418.2	450.4	451.4	467.3	496.5	470.9	459.1	456.9	467.6	470.7
Estimates of proportions of total new supplies												
United Kingdom	43	44	45	48	52	52	48	51	51	51	45	42
of which for the UK market[5]	42	43	44	47	50	51	47	49	50	50	43	40
Denmark	26	29	28	28	25	24	22	25	23	21	20	24
Netherlands	25	22	21	19	19	19	26	21	23	25	32	29
Others	7	6	7	6	5	6	5	5	4	5	5	7

[1] Does not include meat offals or trade in preserved or manufactured meat products (eg. canned meat).
[2] 1992 and 1998 home-fed production figures were collected on a 53-week (14 week 4th quarter) basis but have been adjusted to a 52-week year (13 week 4th quarter) for comparability.
[3] All trade figures include an estimate for unrecorded trade.
[4] Home-cured production and imports, less exports and stock adjustment.
[5] Production minus exports as a percentage of total new supply. It has been assumed that exports are of UK produced bacon and ham although it is known that a small proportion of exports is imported that is cut and packed in the UK and then exported.
Notes:
Figures have been rounded individually and totals will not necessarily agree with the addition of separate figures.

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of total United Kingdom pigmeat sales were sold through supermarkets in each year from 1990 to 2001. [87293]

Mr. Morley: The percentages of household expenditure through supermarkets in the United Kingdom on pigmeat since 1994–95 are shown in the table. The percentages are survey estimates and subject to sampling errors. Percentages before 1994–95 are not available. Percentages based on quantities of sales through supermarkets are not available.

	Percentage of household expenditure through supermarkets		
	Pork[1]	*Bacon and ham*[1]	*Sausages*[1,2]
1994–95	62	70	65
1995–96	68	75	71
1996–97	67	77	73
1997–98	69	78	73
1998–99	73	80	74

	Percentage of household expenditure through supermarkets		
	Pork[1]	*Bacon and ham*[1]	*Sausages*[1,2]
1999–2000	66	77	72
2000–01	70	77	72

[1] Uncooked
[2] Includes all types of sausages
Source:
Family Expenditure Survey, Office for National Statistics

Pigs

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the rate of piglet death in *(a)* farrowing crates and *(b)* non-crate systems. [87056]

Mr. Morley: We have, for a number of years, funded research directly or indirectly related to the welfare of the sow and her piglets, from farrowing to weaning. A key issue emerging is that changes in farrowing systems to improve sow welfare can lead to an inerease in the death rate of the piglets. As a result, we are not yet able unreservedly to recommend free-farrowing systems for widespread commercial adoption.

Our research, and that of others, continues. Our aim is to reach a position where it is possible to avoid the close-confinement of all sows.

Pollution Targets

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list her Department's policies that have as one of their objectives helping the UK meet its Kyoto carbon dioxide emissions targets. [87734]

Mr Meacher *[holding answer 19 December 2002]*: The UK's emissions reduction target under the Kyoto Protocol is to reduce its emissions of a basket of six greenhouse gases to 12.5 per cent. below 1990 levels over the commitment period 2008–12. Carbon dioxide, which is the most important greenhouse gas, is one of the six gases in the basket and although the UK does not have a specific carbon dioxide emissions reduction target under the Protocol, the Government and the devolved administrations have set themselves a domestic goal of a 20 per cent. reduction in the UK's carbon dioxide emissions below 1990 levels by 2010. The policies and measures set out in the UK Climate Change Programme (CCP) therefore focus mainly on reducing carbon dioxide emissions.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is responsible for the following policies and measures in the CCP: the domestic greenhouse gas emissions trading scheme; the climate change agreements; the Energy Efficiency Commitment; the New Home Energy Efficiency Scheme; community heating; and the Government's combined heat and power (CHP) strategy. Other policies and measures in the CCP are the responsibility of the devolved administrations or other government departments including, the Department for Transport, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the Department of Trade and Industry, Her Majesty's Treasury, and the Forestry Commission.

Rare Animal Breeds

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action she takes to ensure that rare breeds of animals do not die out. [87756]

Mr. Morley: The Government have made a commitment under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) to conserve genetic resources for food and agriculture in the UK. The UK National Co-ordinator for Farm Animal Genetic Resources (FAnGR) in Defra has responsibility for co-ordinating the activities of NGOs, breed societies, research institutes and Government to ensure that appropriate action is being taken to save breeds at risk and to avoid duplication of effort. Defra is in the process of publishing a UK country report on FAnGR which makes several recommendations on the conservation and utilisation of the UK's breeds at risk, including the creation of a national steering committee to oversee a national action plan for the maintenance of our native breeds. (See Defra website for a copy of the final draft of the report, www.defraweb.science.publications.)

Recycling

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps are being taken to increase recycling rates from *(a)* household and *(b)* business and industry waste. [87131]

Mr. Meacher: Waste Strategy 2000 set a national target of recycling or composting at least 25 per cent. of household waste by 2005, 30 per cent. by 2010 and 33 per cent. by 2015. To underpin these targets, we set statutory performance standards for recycling for all local authorities in England. Authorities are required, on average, to double recycling by 2003–04 and triple it by 2005–06.

However, we do not expect local authorities to do this alone. The Environmental, Protective and Cultural Services (EPCS) spending block, which includes waste management, will be increased by £671 million by 2005–06. An additional £355 million of future PFI credits for waste projects over the same period have also been provided. The National Waste Minimisation and Recycling Fund of £140 million has distributed funds to a wide variety of schemes aimed at increasing household recycling rates.

We have taken steps to ensure an increase in the amount of commercial and industrial waste recycled. Base line figures given for 1998–99 placed the rate of recycling for industrial and commercial waste at 37 per cent. This compares with the figure of 9 per cent. for household waste at the same time. In order to encourage businesses to further reduce waste and to put to better use any waste that is produced the Government have set the target to reduce by 2005 the amount of industrial and commercial waste sent to landfill to 85 per cent. of that landfilled in 1998. Producer responsibility is

another tool we have to encourage increased reduction, recycling and recovery from producers (and those involved in the distribution and sale of goods)

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proposals she has to develop a market for recycled plastic; and if she will make a statement. [87343]

Mr. Meacher: The Government established the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) to promote more sustainable waste management by working to create more stable and efficient markets for recycled materials and products, and through tackling the barriers to increased reuse and recycling.

WRAP has identified plastics as a priority area in its business plan to 2003–04. WRAP'S priorities in this area include marketing existing recycled plastic products and removing discriminatory standards. One of WRAP'S aims is to achieve a 20,000 tonne increase in the mixed plastics processing for industrial products by 2003–04.

Another source of investment into markets for recycled plastic is PRN and PERN revenue raised from businesses which are obligated to recover and recycle packaging waste under the Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997 (as amended).

The revenue accredited reprocessors receive for PRNs and PERNs is invested in three principal areas: collection capacity, end use markets and reprocessing capacity. In 2001, just over 10 per cent. of the £70 million PRN and PERN revenue was invested in end use markets. In particular, PRN and PERN revenue for plastic in 2001 was £8,591,128 of which £1,194,532 was spent on developing end use markets and £36,140 has been allocated for future investment.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what schemes exist to recycle *(a)* Christmas trees and *(b)* Christmas wrapping paper; what incentives exist to encourage such recycling; and what guidance Government Departments and non-departmental public bodies have been given under the Government sustainability initiatives to recycle such trees and paper. [87583]

Mr Meacher: DEFRA does not run schemes or provide specific guidance to Government bodies or others on the recycling of Christmas wrapping paper and Christmas trees. However, I am aware that some local authorities report the number of Christmas trees they recycle to the environmental charity EnCams. Figures for 2002 show that nearly two million trees were recycled by the authorities in England and Wales that reported their performance. We would expect those authorities that carry out collection and recycling of waste paper would recycle Christmas wrapping paper along with the rest of the waste paper they collect.

While there is no special provision made for the recycling of Christmas wrapping paper and Christmas trees, we have provided significant additional funding to local authorities to increase the proportion of waste that they recycle through the Environmental, Protective and Cultural Services (EPCS) spending block, which includes waste management services, through Private Finance Initiative funding for waste and through the Waste Minimisation and Recycling Fund.

The New Opportunities Fund will also distribute £38.75 million to expand community sector waste reuse, recycling and composting in England and £3.25 million for similar schemes in Wales.

Refuse Collection

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much funding has been allocated by central Government to promote kerbside collection of refuse in each of the last 10 years. [87156]

Mr. Meacher: The Government distributes money for refuse collection through the environmental protective and cultural services standard spending assessment (EPCS SSA) which covers a wide range of services including waste. SR2002 announced an increase in EPCS of £671 million by 2005–06. This is on top of the £1.1 billion announced in SR2000.

The Government do not specify how funds distributed via EPCS SSA should be spent. It is for each local authority to decide how much of its funding it allocates to any particular area. The information requested is therefore not available.

Rural Affairs

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many applications there have been for the *(a)* Community Service Fund, *(b)* fund to refurbish rural sub-post offices, *(c)* Rural Housing Enablers, *(d)* Rural Transport Partnership Fund, *(e)* Parish Transport Fund, *(f)* Rural Bus Challenge, *(g)* Leader plus Fund, *(h)* Extension of Redundant Buildings Grant Scheme, *(i)* Local Heritage Initiative, *(j)* fund to help rural communities prepare plans and *(k)* Community Rail Partnerships in rural areas since the launch of each; how many have been accepted; and what the average amount spent on each bid has been to date. [88145]

Alun Michael: The information requested will take a little time to collate. I will write to the hon. Member with the data, together with an explanation of the figures, as soon as the information is available. I will also place a copy of my letter in the House of Commons Library.

Sheep Exports

Mr. Prosser: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many live sheep were exported from Dover to continental Europe on *(a)* 21 November, *(b)* 24 November and *(c)* 30 November; when and where health certification was carried out in respect of the sheep; how many of the sheep were rejected as unfit for the intended journey *(i)* during inspection for health certification purposes and (ii) at Dover docks; and to where those sheep were taken; and what the address was of the final destination given on the route plan for each of the consignments. [87030]

Mr. Morley: The information requested is as follows:

Date	Total animals	Where consignments were certified	Animals rejected at certification	Animals rejected at Dover docks	Destination
21 November	2,327	Wales	15	0	France
24 November	1,642	England and Wales	25	0	France
24 November	417	Wales	0	0	Germany
30 November	2,471	England and Wales	169	0	France

The sheep for the consignments listed above were certified within 48 hours prior to export. These consignments went to approved slaughterhouses apart from the sailing on 30 November which were fattening animals transported to holdings. The animals which were rejected at certification remained in Great Britain.

Suffolk Punch

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to protect Suffolk Punch from extinction. [87755]

Mr. Morley: The conservation management of breeds at risk, especially those that are numerically rare such as the Suffolk Punch, is carried out by non-Governmental organisations such as the Rare Breeds Survival Trust and breed societies. There is no need for Government intervention at the present time because of the ongoing conservation plan.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many Suffolk Punch breeding *(a)* herds and *(b)* mares there are in the United Kingdom. [87773]

Mr. Morley: The Defra maintained UK National Database of Farm Animal Genetic Resources shows that the most recent survey of the Suffolk Horse breed (known locally as the Suffolk Punch) was in 1997 when the number of mares stood at 69. It is therefore on the critical list of rare equine breeds maintained by the Rare Breeds Survival Trust who are responsible, with the Suffolk Horse Society, for managing an ongoing conservation plan using frozen semen.

Sustainable Agriculture

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will, in consultation with the Sustainable Development Commission, develop a range of indicators to assess progress towards more sustainable agriculture. [87269]

Mr. Morley: On 12 December the Government published the "Strategy for Sustainable Farming and Food: Facing the Future". This was accompanied by "Farming and Food's Contribution to Sustainable Development: Economic and Statistical Analysis" which contains a draft set of indicators for assessing the impact of the strategy. In developing a final set of indicators, Government will consult with a range of stakeholders, and this will include the Sustainable Development Commission. The documents are available in the Library of the House.

Sustainable Produce

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to promote demand for sustainable produce. [87271]

Mr. Morley: On 12 December, the Government published "The Strategy for Sustainable Farming and Food: Facing the Future". The strategy sets out how Government will work with the whole of the food chain to secure a sustainable future for our farming and food industries, as viable industries contributing to a better environment and healthy and prosperous communities. It includes a number of initiatives relevant to the promotion of demand for sustainable produce, including action on regional and local food: on an entry level agri-environment scheme for farmers; on organic farming; on whole farm regulation; on sustainable public procurement of food; on strengthening, with industry, farm assurance schemes; and on informing consumers and schools about the way that food is produced. The document is available in the Library of the House.

Trade Discharge Consents

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of trade discharge consents was reviewed by the Environment Agency in each region of England in each of the last five years. [86315]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 18 December 2002]:* The information requested is not held centrally. I have asked the Environment Agency to provide the information requested and I will write to my hon. Friend when it is available.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what budget allocation she has made to the Environment Agency in respect of reviewing trade discharge consents in each of the next three years. [86316]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 18 December 2002]:* No specific budget allocation is made to the Environment Agency to review trade effluent discharge consents to controlled waters. This is one of a range of regulatory activities funded by the Agency's Discharges to Controlled Waters charging scheme.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact of technological developments on the adequacy of the Environment Agency's programme of reviews of trade discharge consent to watercourses. [86317]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 18 December 2002]:* I have made no formal assessment. As part of their brief, both the Department and the Environment Agency maintain surveillance of technological developments pertinent to effective regulation, as well as sponsoring research and development in areas of need. The information from the surveillance and research and development is in the public domain and is disseminated within the Department and Agency by a variety of methods, according to the focus and potential impact of the technological development.

Warm Front Scheme

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in relation to the Warm Front Scheme administered by Eaga partnership, how many applications have been received; how many are outstanding, awaiting *(a)* survey, *(b)* completion of works and *(c)* 'snagging'; how many are outstanding in total; what has been the *(i)* average wait for completion of work, (ii) longest wait for completion of work and (iii) longest period someone has been waiting for work yet to be done; what its (A) highest and (B) average cost has been; what criteria are used to decide what equipment should be chosen; for what reason operatives from the North East, Midlands and south coast are employed in London; and if she will make a statement. [83846]

Mr. Morley: Eaga Partnership is the Scheme Manager appointed to administer the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme—now marketed as Warm Front—in three of the four 'lot' areas of England: London and the South East; the North East and North West; and the South West and West Midlands. All answers that follow relate only to the area managed by Eaga Partnership.

In the last financial year Eaga Partnership Ltd. received over 236,000 eligible referrals. At 29 November 14,538 surveys were outstanding. In addition, 49,768 households were awaiting completion of at least one of their recommended measures.

Snagging is not a requirement of the contract with Eaga Partnership, however the Scheme does require quality installation checks on all gas central heating systems and a proportion of insulation works. If remedial work is required, following the quality inspection, the installers are contracted to undertake that work within 28 days of being contacted by Eaga Partnership Ltd.

The waiting time for completion of works can be extended by a number of factors. These include the shortage of central heating installers, awaiting landlord permission, changes to measures specified and the installation of gas to properties. The average waiting time for completion of heating work is 72 working days and for insulation 51 working days from the time of survey. The longest wait for completion of a job was 345 working days. The longest period of work currently awaiting completion is 521 working days. These delays came about through a combination of factors including the skills shortage and the development of equipment to meet the requirements of the scheme.

The highest cost of an individual job funded by Warm Front is the current grant maximum—£1,500 for Warm Front and £2,500 for Warm Front Plus. The average grant value in 2001–02 was £454.

Warm Front is designed to tackle fuel poverty among those most vulnerable to cold-related ill health—older householders, families with children and the disabled or those with long-term illness. The range of measures offered to a property is determined by the existing standard of the property. We are currently carrying out a review of Warm Front to assess the effectiveness of the Scheme including consideration of the eligibility criteria and measures offered.

The Scheme Managers have responsibility for appointment of installers to work under the Scheme. To ensure the scheme gets good value for money, appointments are carried out through a competitive tendering process, with companies free to tender for work in any area. Additionally, a number of installation companies work nationally and so carry out work across several different areas.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Westminster Hall

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission pursuant to his answers of 5 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 981W, what the *(a)* capital costs and *(b)* gross and net annual budgeted running costs have been of the visitor catering facilities off Westminster Hall since December 2000. [87866]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: The information requested is as follows:

(a) The investment to construct, equip and furnish the Jubilee Cafeteria off Westminster Hall was £2.14 million including fees and VAT. The project also included the installation of a lift to provide lavatory facilities for visitors to the House and access for people with disabilities to the second chamber in Westminster Hall and to the meeting rooms in Westminster Hall Annexe (the "W" Rooms).

(b) The Jubilee Visitor Café opened in May 2002. The running costs of the Jubilee Visitor Café are included within the overall operating budget for the House of Commons Refreshment Department. Payroll budgets and some other operating costs are not disaggregated and so are not available for specific services.

However, in agreeing the Refreshment Department's operating budget for the year April 2002 to March 2003, the Finance and Services Committee endorsed a target for the Jubilee Visitor Café to serve 49,600 customers in its first year of operation. Assuming this level of business, the forecast gross running cost for the year would be £165,600; after a contribution from sales of £124,000, the net running cost would be £41,600.

Progress will be reported to the Finance and Services Committee.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Green Minister

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which Minister in her Department is

the nominated Green Minister; how often he has attended meetings of the Green Ministers; and which official has responsibility for the DEFRA rural proofing check list in her Department. [88451]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. and noble Friend Baroness Blackstone is Green Minister for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. She has attended every meeting of the Green Ministers committee held since her appointment.

The DCMS official responsible for the DEFRA rural proofing check list is the Head of the Performance and Innovation Unit.

Soccer Academy (Christchurch)

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what action he is taking in response to the representations of the Mixer Soccer Academy in Christchurch about the restrictions on school students from Korea being able to participate in FA youth teams; and if he will make a statement. [88184]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* Mr. Michael Swift, who runs the Mixer Academy, recently brought FIFA's regulations governing overseas footballers under the age of eighteen to my attention. I have advised him that these are matters for the Football Association and the sport's international governing bodies, and asked him to keep me informed of the progress of his discussions.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Centres of Vocational Education

Stephen Hesford: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of industry support for Centres of Vocational Education. [88286]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) focus on meeting employers' intermediate skills needs. Employer engagement is central to their success.

An evaluation of the programme is under way and its initial findings will be available next year. However, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) is impressed by the level of employer support so far.

At a strategic level the Sector Skills Development Agency and the newly created Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) are providing strong employer leadership on the skills priorities CoVEs should address and on the shape of the final CoVE network. Individual SSCs are advising the LSC on the network of CoVEs they need to meet the skills needs of their sector.

At an operational level SSCs and local employers are increasingly involved in planning, designing and delivering training provision. CoVEs are reporting greater employer interest and involvement. This is resulting in:

donations of equipment (one CoVE has received over £1.4 million of state of the art equipment over the last few months in recognition of its new status),

increased demand for level 3 provision places (the Further Education Pathfinder CoVEs have seen increases of between 5 per cent. to 100 per cent. over the last year),

increased demand for courses offered by CoVEs (nine of the first 16 Further Education Pathfinder CoVEs have seen increases of between 3 per cent. to 20 per cent. over the last year),

increased demand for short customised provision for which employers meet the full cost, and more effective use of labour market information and employer partnership in planning, developing and delivering CoVEs

Construction Industry (Levy)

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when he last met representatives of the plant hire industry to discuss the Construction Industry Training Board's training levy; and when the working of the training levy was last reviewed. [88228]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I have not had any meetings with representatives of the plant hire industry but one of my officials met John Coyne, Managing Director of the Hire Association Europe, on 27 November 2002.

The levy rates imposed by the Construction Industry Training Board are reviewed annually in consultation with the industry and are subject to parliamentary approval. The definition of the industry to which the levy applies is reviewed if proposals for a change are made by the industry. The last review took place in 1992.

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action he intends to take as a result of the judgment in Gibbon Equipment Hire and the Construction Industry Training Board. [88258]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The judgment by Mr. Justice Keith concluded that the definition of "contractor's plant" in the Industrial Training (Construction Board) Order 1964 (Amendment Order) 1992 was clear, unequivocal and unambiguous. Also that Gibbon Equipment Hire was an employer in the construction industry and therefore required to pay the CITB levy.

However I have agreed to consider whether the hiring out of plant and equipment should continue to be included in the definition of the construction industry and am awaiting proposals from the hire service sector.

Further Education Colleges

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many 14 to 16-year-olds spent one day per week or more at a further education college in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03; how many will do so in 2003–04; and what research has been carried out to ascertain these figures. [87955]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* In the academic year 2001–02 there were 5,500 students with academic ages 14 or 15, funded by the Learning and Skills Council, attending FE colleges part time. (Students with academic ages 14 and 15 have

actual ages between 14 and 16.) Data on the number of local education authority funded 14 to 16-year-olds in FE colleges is not collected centrally.

From September 2002, the Increased Flexibilities Programme enables schools, in partnerships with FE colleges, to offer pupils the opportunity of vocational learning through new GCSEs and part time placements in colleges. About 30,000 14 to 16-year-olds are participating in this programme for academic year 2002–03, the majority of whom will be spending some time in an FE college,

Money to fund a similar cohort is being made available for 2003–04 and 2004–05 as part of Success for All.

As part of the planned evaluation of the Increased Flexibilities Programme a baseline data collection exercise has been undertaken to ascertain the numbers of 14 to 16-year-olds on the programme, and the proportion of them spending time in FE colleges. Data on numbers of young people on the programme for 2002–03 will be available in February 2003.

Individual Learning Accounts

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on outstanding Individual Learning Accounts, with special reference to *(a)* the sums cleared for payment, *(b)* the sums still in dispute on each investigation, *(c)* the number of providers still unpaid and *(d)* the number of fraud investigations under way or concluded. [88330]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Since closure of the Individual Learning Account programme on 23 November 2001 to 31 November 2002, £11.5 million has been paid to 3,407 registered learning providers. A total of 698 providers have been subject to review, of these claims totalling £15.7 million have been withheld from 253 registered learning providers. Following completion of preliminary reviews, we are discussing repayment of £97 million of potentially irregular payments with 623 providers. The individual provider figures are not quoted as these are commercial in confidence.

The Department's Special Investigations Unit has been asked to investigate 153 learning provider organisations. Of the 153, the police are investigating 100 learning providers. To date, there have been 60 arrests, which have resulted in 10 people accepting cautions and charges being brought against 14 individuals. Charges have since been dropped against two individuals investigated by the National Crime Squad because of the small amounts of money involved. 11 others are awaiting court appearances. One person has been convicted. The precise extent of fraudulent activity will not be known until all investigations are complete.

Online Centres

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many hours per week each UK online centre is used for community use; and if he will list each UK online project in Luton, South. [88308]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The DfES does not specifically collect such information, however findings from recent evaluation on UK online centres funded by the Capital Modernisation Fund (CMF) stated: There is a strong community based feel to most centres.

A large proportion of centres are based within target communities such as those in the 2,000 most deprived local authority wards; rural areas with significant transport and deprivation problems.

A table showing all UK online centres in the Luton, South constituency follows.

Centre name	*Address 1*	*Address 2*	*Town*	*Postcode*
The Luton Health and Training Centre	179a-b Dunstable Road		Luton	LU1 1BT
The Dale ICT Centre	127 Dunstable Road		Luton	LU1 1BW
Luton Foyer	63 Inkerman Street		Luton	LU1 1JD
Outset Ltd.	Telemax House	15 New Bedford Road	Luton	LU1 1SA
Luton Lives	28a Chapel Street		Luton	LU1 2SE
Barnfield College—Rotherharn Avenue Site	Rotherharn Avenue		Luton	LU1 5PP
Barnfield College—Charles Street	Charles Street		Luton	LU2 OEB
CYCD ICT Centre	94–106 Leagrave Road		Luton	LU4 8HT
KHIDMAT ICT Centre	47a Leagrave Road		Luton	LU4 8HT

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many UK online centres there are; how many hours on average they are used per week; and if he will list the location of each centre. [88309]

Mr. Charles Clarke: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister officially announced the achievement of 6,000 UK online centres open across England on 19 November 2002, six weeks ahead of schedule.

Due to the diversity of centres an average of hours they are used per week is not applicable. UK online centres range from voluntary and community centres (including mobile centres) to, libraries, colleges and high street cyber-cafés some can be in a church or post office.

The DfES website includes information on all UK online centres, individuals can find their nearest centre at www.dfes.gov.uk/ukonlinecentres or call free on 0800 77 1234.

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the *(a)* number of participants, *(b)* numbers receiving qualifications at each level, *(c)* socio-economic status of each participant and *(d)* cost per participant of DfES-funded UK online courses. [88313]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The following information is taken from the Management Information the DfES collect from centres funded by the CMF which represents 2,840 of the over 6,000 figure. These figures are representative of 1,589 centres which were open for

use as at the end of September 2002. I have included a breakdown of stats in my hon. Friend's regional Government Office East (GOE) along with national stats for each question.

(a) Number of Participants

The number of users recorded nationally at CMF funded UK online centres between July and September 2002 was 115,250.

The number of users recorded within the same period for GOE was 9,379. This represents 8 per cent. of the national figure.

(b) Numbers receiving qualifications at each level

The DfES do not collect information for qualifications at each level; however
the numbers of users that have gone onto further learning are as follows:

Nationally a total of 21,916 users of UK online centres have progressed onto further learning.

GOE represents 8 per cent. of the national figure with 1,790 users going onto further learning.

(c) Socio-economic status

UK online centres specifically target those in deprived communities. I have listed the numbers of users that fall in UK online centres target groups.

	Number
National	
Basic Skills Needs	18,684
Lone Parents	5,682
Disabled	10,036
Over 65	14,593
Unemployed	22,930
Ethnic Minorities	22,316
GOE	
Basic Skills Needs	773
Lone Parents	560
Disabled	748
Over 65	1,430
Unemployed	2,505
Ethnic Minorities	1,210

(d) Cost per participant of DfES-funded UK online courses

£199 million was made available from the CMF to help fund UK online centres in deprived communities. There are no funded UK online courses that have been developed by the DfES.

UK online centres offer an introduction to the internet and e-mail, with learner support to help new users. Centres may wish to develop their own learning material to achieve this.

Public Schools

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to amend the charitable status given to public schools; and if he will make a statement. [86834]

Beverley Hughes: I have been asked to reply.

The Strategy Unit report, "Private Action, Public Benefit", was published on 25 September 2002. Its 61 recommendations set out a package of measures which aim to modernise charity law and enable a wide range of organisations to be more effective and innovative.

The report recommends that in future all charities should have to demonstrate public benefit. Part of the report considers what happens now with those charities that charge fees which serve to exclude large sections of the population in terms of their having to make provision for wider access for those who would be excluded because of the fees. The report cites the example of independent schools.

At present there is no systematic programme in place to check the public character of charities. The report recommends that an on-going review programme run by the Charity Commission should check the public character of such organisations. It is proposed that the Commission would identify charities likely to charge high fees (such as independent schools), and undertake a rolling programme to check that provision was made for wider access. This programme will be designed to minimise red tape and will not focus on any particular sector. Short returns will be issued which ask charities what they do in terms of widening access, such as making provision for sharing facilities. It is envisaged that for the majority of cases no further inquiry will be necessary beyond the initial return.

It is proposed that the Charity Commission, in consultation with charities likely to be affected and their umbrella bodies, would issue guidelines as to the level of access appropriate in particular circumstances.

Of course at the moment these are only proposals. The report was out for consultation until 31 December 2002, and we shall consider the responses to this, and all the other matters addressed in the report, very carefully.

Pupil Profiles (Leeds)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many children in Leeds, West aged *(a)* 0 to 5, *(b)* 5 to 11, *(c)* 11 to 16 and *(d)* 16 to 18 were diagnosed as having *(i)* severe learning difficulties and (ii) moderate learning difficulties at the latest date for which figures are available. [83473]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The information requested is not collected centrally at the moment.

There is currently no requirement for schools to submit information in the Annual Schools Census on the nature of such pupils' disability or learning difficulty. However, in June 2001, the Department carried out a pilot study involving a sample of 200 mainstream and special schools to assess whether it would be possible to collect data from schools on a broad range of types of Special Education Needs (SEN). It is likely that schools and local education authorities will be asked to provide this information from January 2004.

The available information on the total number of pupils with SEN in Leeds, West parliamentary constituency is shown in the table.

Number of pupils with special educational needs (SEN)—January 2002—Leeds, West parliamentary constituency

	Under 5	Aged 5 to 10	Aged 11 to 15	16 and over	Total
Pupils with statements of SEN					
Maintained primary schools	15	157	1	0	173
Maintained secondary schools	0	0	190	6	196
Maintained special schools	6	30	134	24	194
Total maintained schools	21	187	325	30	563
SEN pupils without statements					
Maintained primary schools	161	1,495	2	0	1,658
Maintained secondary schools	0	0	841	20	861
Maintained special schools	0	0	0	0	—
Total maintained schools	161	1,495	843	20	2,519

Source:
Annual schools census.

Spending Statistics

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills by how much *(a)* central and *(b)* local government spending will increase, on average, per child in *(i)* primary and (ii) secondary education in (A) England and (B) Devon in the next three years. [87313]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 17 December 2002]:* As a result of our drive to give extra resources to the front line, there will be no increase in central government spending per pupil but a national average increase of over £540 per pupil in our plans for local government spending over the next three years.

It is not possible to set out now Education Formula Spending Shares (EFSS) for Devon for 2004–05 and 2005–06: they will depend on pupil numbers and indicator data at January 2003 and 2004. However, we have provided local authorities with increases in total Education Formula Spending for 2004–05 and 2005–06, together with forward projections at national level of pupil numbers for those years. We have also said that there will be minimum and maximum increases for authorities as we introduce the new LEA funding system. Indicator data will be averaged over three years to provide further stability and predictability in future Formula Spending Shares. Authorities will be able to use this data—together with local knowledge about pupil numbers and indicators—to form a good estimate of what their EFSS might be in those years. That will in turn allow them to provide schools with indicative budgets for the next three years.

The balance of spending between primary and secondary education is determined by local decisions made in each LEA, both in respect to local government spending and, for the most part, support from central government.

Statutory Instruments

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many Statutory Instruments subject to negative procedure made by his Department *(a)* came into force and *(b)* were considered by a delegated legislation committee in each of the last three Sessions. [88025]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The totals are as follows:

Session commencing 17 November 1999 *(a)* 164 *(b)* 3

Session commencing 6 December 2000 *(a)* 94 *(b)* 7

Session commencing 20 June 2001 *(a)* 189 *(b)* 19

TREASURY

Christmas Expenses

Mr. Djanogly: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer how much will be spent on *(a)* entertaining, *(b)* Christmas decorations and *(c)* other festive activities this Christmas season by his Department and Government agencies answerable to his Department; and of this sum how much will be spent in ministers' *(i)* private offices and (ii) official residences. [88127]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* The information requested is not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, expenditure incurred on entertainment, decorations and other festive activities is strictly for official purposes only, and is made in accordance with the departmental guidance on financial procedures and propriety, based on the principles set out in Government accounting.

Productivity

Matthew Taylor: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer when he plans to publish the paper on public services productivity to which paragraph 1.13 of Productivity in the UK: The Evidence and the Government's Approach refers; and if he will make a statement. [87961]

Mr. Boateng: The paper will be published shortly.

DEFENCE

Absent without Leave

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel have been reported absent without leave in each of the last five years. [87854]

Dr. Moonie *[holding reply 17 December 2002]:* The information provided is captured in different ways for each of the three services, therefore the figures given are not directly comparable on a Tri-Service basis. All figures are based on both trained and untrained personnel.

Naval Service

The Naval Service figures given are for the period 1 January-31 December for all years with the exception of 2002 where the figures relate to the period 1 January-16 December.

Royal Navy[1]

Year	*Number reported AWOL*
1998	29
1999	34
2000	57
2001	91
2002	108

[1] A warrant is issued on the 7th day of absence unless it is known that an individual will be absent before the 7th day, in which case a warrant is issued sooner. Once a warrant is issued the individual is classed as AWOL.

Royal Marines[2]

Year	*Number reported AWOL*
1998	4
1999	1
2000	2
2001	4
2002	4

[2] The above figures relate only to Royal Marines on land and not those deployed on seagoing duties. They will be recorded in the Royal Navy figures.

Army[3,4]

Financial year	*Number reported AWOL*
1997–98	1,357
1998–99	1,419
1999–2000	1,673
2000–01	1,834
2001–02	1,567

[3] Only one officer was found to be AWOL during the period 1 April 1997–31 March 2002. Subsequently, the above table only shows other ranks.

[4] A person is classed as AWOL if he/she does not report for duty on a particular day. On the 6th day of absence, a signal is sent, if the person has still not reported for duty after 21 days, a Board of Inquiry will meet to investigate the absence. This will report by the 29th day of absence; it will then decide whether to class the person as AWOL. This will then be backdated to start from the first day of absence.

Royal Air Force[5,6,7]

Financial year	*Number reported AWOL*
1997–98	24
1998–99	32
1999–2000	35
2000–01	28
2001–02	20

[5] An individual who is reported AWOL on more than one occasion within the same calendar year is counted once in the year they were reported absent.

[6] An individual who reported AWOL in one calendar year and is still absent in the following year is counted in the year they were reported absent.

[7] The table does not address certain specific categories within AWOL. An AWOL person is classed as someone who did not report for duty on a particular day. However, after they have failed to report for duty for 23 days a Board of Inquiry can declare the individual "illegally absent". (There has been only one illegal absentee in each of the financial years and they are included in the above figures). Service personnel do not become deserters until either it is known they are not going to return voluntarily and/or are subsequently arrested and found guilty of desertion at court martial.

Appointments

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence to which bodies his Department makes appointments; how many Members there are *(a)* in total and *(b)* in each body; and how many of those appointed are *(i)* businessmen, (ii) businessmen in SMEs and (iii) businessmen in micro-businesses. [87385]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 16 December 2002]*: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office on 16 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 607–08W.

Armed Forces Leavers

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of *(a)* the Army, *(b)* the Naval Service, *(c)* the RAF and *(d)* the Welsh Guards have applied to leave the armed forces in *(i)* the last three months, (ii) 2002, (iii) 2001 and (iv) 2000; and if he will make a statement. [87925]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 19 December 2002]*: Details of applications for Premature Voluntary Release (PVR) are shown in the tables:

Table 1: PVR Applications as at 1 October 2002

Date	*Rank*	*Naval service*	*Army*	*RAF*
Last 3 months	Officers	47	65	49
	O/Ranks	456	1,679	518
2002 to date	Officers	143	367	163
	O/Ranks	1,470	5,184	1,499
2001	Officers	200	536	242
	O/Ranks	1,909	7,833	2,174
2000	Officers	232	564	305
	O/Ranks	1,533	7,569	1,957

Notes:

1. Of all the notices given by Naval Service personnel approximately 17 per cent. are withdrawn at a later date

2. Of all the notices given by Army personnel approximately 30 per cent. are withdrawn at a later date.

3. Of all the notices given by RAF personnel approximately 20 per cent. are withdrawn at a later date.

Table 2: Welsh Guards Other Ranks—PVR applications

Year	*Notice Given*
Last 3 months	25
2002 to date	68
2001	117
2000	114

Note:
Details of PVR applications for officers in the Welsh Guards are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Catterick Barracks

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many persons constitute the capacity of Catterick Barracks; how many *(a)* self-inflicted deaths and suicides and *(b)* other deaths have occurred in each year since 1990; and how many of these incidents were firearms-related. [88232]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Chemical and Biological Weapons

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement on the development of chemical and biological detection technologies to deal with the threat posed by chemical and biological weapons. [87928]

(2) what recent improvements have been made in capabilities to detect chemical and biological weapons. [88391]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence continually researches and develops technologies to improve our ability to detect chemical and biological warfare agents. The principal lead for this work is the Defence Science and Technology Laboratories (Dstl), which in turn works closely with a number of industrial partners and overseas governments through international collaboration.

A range of new chemical detectors will be brought into service in 2003. The Man-portable Chemical Agent Detector (MCAD) and the Lightweight Chemical Agent Detector (LCAD) will replace the existing Nerve Agent Immobilised Enzyme Alarm and Detector (NAIAD). They have been developed to provide the armed forces with a comprehensive warning capability for vapours of chemical warfare agents. A new chemical agent monitor for use in collective protection is also expected to enter service.

Developments in the detection of biological warfare agents include the vehicle-mounted Integrated Biological Detection System (IBDS) which is due to enter service from November 2003. It will supersede the existing Prototype Biological Detection System (PBDS). Additionally, consideration is being given to fitting HM ships with a new Maritime Biological Detection System (MBDS) from 2007 to supersede the Interim Naval Biological Detection System (INBDS) currently in service.

Responsibility for the defence of the United Kingdom civil population and infrastructure is vested in the Home Office and the Cabinet Office.

Civil Contingencies Reaction Force

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the Civil Contingency Reaction Forces to be ready for deployment. [88388]

Mr. Ingram: Recruiting is now under way for the Civil Contingency Reaction Forces, whose establishment was announced on 31 October 2002. Our aim is that all 14 CCRFs should be available for deployment by the end of 2003, once they are fully recruited and have undergone an annual training cycle.

Civil Servants and Spending

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many civil servants are employed by his Department; and how much money was spent by his Department in the last 12 months, broken down by local authority area. [87180]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 16 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 608W by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office.

Information on financial performance in 2001–02 was published in the Ministryof Defence Consolidated Resource Accounts on 21 November 2002 (HC 47). Copies have been placed in the Library of the House. A breakdown of resource consumption by local authority area is not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Convicted Servicemen

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 9 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 20W, how many persons have been permitted to remain or return to service in HM armed forces following conviction for *(a)* murder, *(b)* rape or serious sexual assault, *(c)* serious crimes of violence and *(d)* drugs-related crime; in each case what rank the offender held at the time of conviction; and how many years elapsed before each subsequent promotion. [88419]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Devonport Dockyard

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the nuclear refit complex at Devonport has received its certification for the Nuclear Installation Inspectorate. [86710]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 31 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 499W. With such large and complex nuclear facilities, there is no requirement for an overall approval. However, safety is paramount and no individual facility will be used without the appropriate regulatory approval.

Since January 2002, approval has been given for the use of 9 Dock for the refit of HMS Vanguard; 14 Dock for the de-fuel of HMS Valiant; the Low Level Refuelling Facility for the storage of new nuclear fuel; and the rail link for the movement of nuclear fuel within the licensed site.

Dockyard Development (Portsmouth)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department has claimed back from the developers at the *(a)* HMS Vernon and *(b)* Gunwharf sites in Portsmouth since its original sale because of the change in the level of development on the site since its sale was first agreed; when the money was paid, and if he will make a statement. [87795]

Dr. Moonie: To date the Ministry of Defence has received one payment in August 2002, rising from the clawback provisions in the disposal agreement for the Gunwharf Site (which incorporates the former HMS Vernon) and a further payment is under active discussion between the parties.

I am withholding the specific amounts in accordance with Exemption 13 (Third Party's commercial confidences) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Financial Dynamics

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when his Department directed UBS Warburg to hire Financial Dynamics; whether *(a)* he and *(b)* officials from his Department met employees of Financial Dynamics in the past two weeks; whether his Department is paying fees to UBS Warburg; and what discussions Sir Robert Walmsley has had during the past two months with senior officials from General Dynamics. [88354]

Mr. Hoon: The Government retained the services of UBS Warburg in early December to provide specialist financial advice. Financial Dynamics was retained for a short period as part of this arrangement. Ministry of Defence officials attended two meetings with officials of other Government Departments in December at which Financial Dynamics representatives were present.

Sir Robert Walmsley's only meetings with senior officials from General Dynamics in the past two months took place on 6 and 7 November during the ceremonies to mark the opening of the company's new facility at Oakdale and the related Bowman radio programme review.

Fire Brigades Strike

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the impact on *(a)* the general readiness of the armed forces for military operations and *(b)* the seagoing readiness of individual warships of the Royal Navy resulting from the diversion of armed services personnel to train for and provide cover for services withdrawn by the fire brigades. [87860]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 17 December 2002]:* The provision of emergency fire cover has been carefully balanced with other demands on the services allowing the maintenance of maximum flexibility for contingency tasking and operational deployments, as well as protection of public safety during firefighter's strikes.

Nevertheless, as I stated in the House on 4 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 16:

> "there must be knock on effect for the training regime, and the longer the strike runs the greater the effect will be. We must constantly review the situation; over time it will create problems for effective delivery and for other missions in which we may be called on to participate".

Specifically for the Royal Navy, the dispute has led to the removal of frigates from NATO's Standing Force Atlantic and from the South Atlantic. Royal Navy and the Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessels remain deployed in the Caribbean, the Gulf, the Far East, the Mediterranean and the North and South Atlantic.

While we will be able to maintain a balance between key operational deployments and emergency cover, the longer service personnel are required to provide emergency firefighting cover the greater the penalty to other activities is likely to be.

Future Aircraft Carrier

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of a hybrid solution allowing both vertical and conventional landing aircraft to operate simultaneously in deciding on a platform for the future aircraft carrier. [87688]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 17 December 2002]:* Such a solution was considered before we announced our decision, on 30 September last year, to proceed with the Adaptable carrier design. There are concerns about the viability and safety of a design configured to operate STOVL and CV aircraft simultaneously. Indications are that such a design would not be able to meet our sortie generation and simultaneous launch and recovery requirements without a significant increase in ship size. This would impact on construction and through life operations, as well as affordability.

Fylingdales and Menwith Hill

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent increases in security there have been at *(a)* Fylingdales and *(b)* Menwith Hill in Yorkshire. [88400]

Mr. Hoon: I am withholding the information requested in accordance with Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. Security at RAF Menwith Hill and RAF Fylingdales is kept under review, and action to improve security is taken as appropriate.

Iraq

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he plans to use the advanced short-range air-to-air missile as part of the UK's commitment to monitor the no-fly zones over Iraq. [87979]

Mr. Hoon: The Government are committed to providing our armed forces with the best possible equipment. The Advanced Short Range Air-to-Air Missile (ASRAAM) is carried by RAF Tornado F3 Air

Defence aircraft that form part of the United Kingdom's contribution to the international coalition monitoring the No-Fly Zones.

Landing Craft Utility Mk10

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the contract with BAE Systems for the 10 Landing Craft Utility Mk10 will be completed; what the outturn cost of this contract against the tender price is; and if he will make a statement. [87797]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Laser Target Locator Systems

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to procure laser target locator systems. [87930]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence is currently in the process of procuring Target Locating Equipment to allow Royal Artillery Forward Observers to be equipped with the same type of laser rangefinder as the Infantry's Mortar Fire Controllers. Target Location Equipment is also being procured as part of enhancements to the Warrior Armoured Infantry Fighting Vehicle and CVR(T) reconnaissance vehicle fleets.

Logistics Stocks (Gulf)

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what logistics stocks are *(a)* in and *(b)* in transit to the Gulf region. [87920]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 18 December 2002]:* The logistic stocks that are currently held in the Gulf are maintained at a level commensurate with current operational commitments, and replenished as necessary to ensure that our armed forces can continue to meet those tasks.

Management Costs

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost was of Ministry of Defence *(a)* head office and *(b)* other management costs in *(i)* 1997 and (ii) in the last 12 months; and what the difference was expressed in percentage terms. [88367]

Dr. Moonie: Taken together, the total cost of the Ministry of Defence head office and the other high-level management costs within the Ministry of Defence in the last financial year (2001–02) has been broadly estimated to be around £0.7 billion, although work is currently in hand to produce a more refined figure. The head office element of this figure (based on personnel costs) is around £140 million. The MOD has a target to achieve a 13 per cent. reduction in the overall head office and other management costs by 31 March 2006.

Comparative figures for head office and management costs for 1997 are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Ministerial Engagements

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many engagements were undertaken outside London *(a)* by him or his predecessor and *(b)* by ministers in his Department in January *(i)* 2000, (ii) 2001 and (iii) 2002. [87358]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office on 16 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 608W.

Nimrod and Astute Contracts

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions *(a)* Sir Robert Walmsley and *(b)* other Defence Procurement Agency officials have had with BAE Systems relating to monetary amounts connected to resolving issues on the Nimrod and Astute contracts; and whether the Defence Procurement Agency made agreements with BAE Systems concerning the Nimrod and Astute contracts. [88353]

Mr. Hoon: As my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence indicated in his answer on 10 December 2002, *Official Report*, columns 222–23W to the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) officials have been in urgent discussions with BAE SYSTEMS to examine the consequences of the slippage to the first flight of the Nimrod MRA4 and to explore how best to proceed. The present contract has not been amended and no contractual undertaking of any kind has been made by either party as to how to proceed. Officials are also in discussion with BAE Systems on a range of issues concerning the Astute contract.

No assurances have been given regarding the outcome of these discussions and as yet no agreements have been reached. We are, however, prepared to explore those areas where the scope of the contracts could be varied, where this would offer value for money for the taxpayer and where it would be in the nation's defence interest.

As a major supplier to MOD, BAE Systems officials have many and regular meetings with Sir Robert Walmsley on a range of projects, including Astute and Nimrod.

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether Sir Robert Walmsley negotiated with officials of BAE Systems about issues arising from the Nimrod and Astute contracts; and how many meetings Sir Robert Walmsley attended with BAE Systems officials to discuss the Nimrod and Astute contracts in the last two months. [88427]

Mr. Hoon: BAE Systems is a major supplier to the Ministry of Defence. Representatives of the company have many and regular meetings with Sir Robert Walmsley on a range of projects, including Astute and Nimrod.

Overseas Postings

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the average time for notice of new addresses given to service families on posting has been over the last 12 months. [87969]

Dr. Moonie: Between December 2001 and November 2002, the average time from registration of an application, to the offer by the Defence Housing Executive of a new address for service family accommodation to take effect on post, was 28 days.

Procurement Projects

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which major procurement projects are behind schedule; and what the costs of the over-runs are *(a)* expressed as a percentage of the original estimated budget and *(b)* in real terms. [88410]

Dr. Moonie: Information as to the time and cost of 30 major defence procurement projects is published annually in the National Audit Office report on the Ministry of Defence's Major Projects Reports (MPR). The latest report, "MPR 2002", was published on 4 December 2002. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

Records Service

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if *(a)* he and *(b)* his Ministers and officials have met the British Legion and ex-servicemen and women's organisations to discuss his Department's proposal for a PFI scheme for the Ministry of Defence records service. [88489]

Mr. Ingram: No Defence Ministers or officials have met the Royal British Legion and ex-servicemen and women's organisations to specifically discuss the Department's plans for the Ministry of Defence record service.

However, the Minister for Veterans, Dr. Moonie, wrote to the General Secretary of the Royal British Legion on 12 December, to confirm that the relationship between the Department and his organisation will not be affected by this proposed scheme.

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what organisations he has consulted on his Department's proposals for a private finance initiative scheme for the Ministry of Defence records service. [88490]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence consulted widely within Government on the proposed scheme. The result of that consultation is a pan-Government scheme which if approved, will include provision of record services to the following Departments or public bodies:

Court Service
Public Record Office
Lord Chancellor's Department
Department for International Development
Department for Trade and Industry
Public Guardianship Office
Parliamentary Commissioner
Crown Prosecution Service
Home Office
Metropolitan Police Service
Food Standards Agency
Veterinary Medicines Directorate
Energy Watch

The proposed scheme has no impact on external non-government organisations, who will continue to deal with the Department in accordance with current practice.

Sea Harrier

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the Sea Harrier FA2 in providing air supremacy protection for the Harrier GR7/9 when conducting ground attack missions against land targets. [86439]

Mr. Ingram: Air supremacy involves the complete denial of airspace to an opposing force, allowing operations to continue unhindered, which involves immense effort beyond the scope of any single aircraft type. The Sea Harrier can effectively contribute to the achievement of air supremacy as part of a larger coalition effort.

Air superiority is the suppression of effective enemy use of the air environment, usually within time and space limitations, and can be achieved by a variety of Air Defence aircraft, depending on the strength of the opposing forces. The ability of the FA2 to offer air superiority and protection for the Harrier GR7/9 while conducting ground attack missions is assessed as effective, either in isolation or with other Air Defence aircraft types.

Service Accommodation

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on Project SLAM. [87973]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to my Written Ministerial Statement of 18 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 58WS.

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of the Army's single living accommodation is in need of modernisation; what progress has been made with modernisation; when he expects modernisation to be completed; and what he expects the cost to be. [87975]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Surplus Barracks

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what barrack accommodation is surplus to requirements in Scotland and awaiting disposal; and if he will estimate the potential *(a)* married and *(b)* single accommodation capacity of these barracks if modernised. [86062]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 10 December 2002]*: The Ministry of Defence currently has no barrack accommodation in Scotland surplus to requirement and awaiting disposal.

Territorial Army

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he plans to increase the number of TA soldiers equipped and trained for nuclear, chemical and biological warfare. [88389]

Dr. Moonie: There are no current plans to increase the number of TA soldiers equipped and trained for nuclear, chemical and biological (NEC) warfare. All TA units hold training stocks of equipment and all TA soldiers undertake basic NEC training as part of their recruitment training and annual Individual Training Directives.

Terrorist Incidents

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many more reservists need to be recruited to allow the reserves to play a role in dealing with a major terrorist incident. [88383]

Dr. Moonie: The volunteer reserves are a capable, integrated and usable part of the armed forces. They are able to play a role in military operations of all types at home and overseas, including those undertaken in response to requests to assist the civil authorities in the event of incidents in the United Kingdom. Additional measures are being put in place as a result of the Strategic Defence Review New Chapter to enhance the capability of the armed forces in general, and reserves in particular, to provide assistance in civil contingencies. These include the establishment of some 700 new Territorial Army posts, principally to give the regional command structure the capacity to sustain 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week working, and to provide a headquarters component for the 14 new Civil Contingency Reaction Forces.

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what extra training reserve forces have received over the past 12 months in dealing with a terrorist incident involving *(a)* chemical, *(b)* biological and *(c)* radiological agents. [88384]

Dr. Moonie: None. The training plans for the new Civil Contingency Reaction Forces in relation to chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear incidents are still being developed. They will be aligned with existing volunteer reserve training and, in due course, with the requirements of specific regional contingency plans as these are developed in conjunction with local authorities and emergency services.

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the number of brigades with full personnel protective equipment which would be needed to deal with a major terrorist incident using chemical or biological agents. [88390]

Mr. Ingram: Terrorism in the United Kingdom is criminal activity. The police and the Home Office consequently have responsibility for preventing and responding to the threat. According to the nature of the event, lead responsibility for managing the consequences of an attack from a chemical or biological agent would fall to a number of Departments, and in particular, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural .Affairs or the Department of Health. Other Departments and Agencies provide support as appropriate.

The armed forces may be called upon to provide support, from available resources, using specific military skills. The extent of assistance would, of course, be dependent on many factors, and in particular, the precise nature and scale of the incident. Most elements of the armed forces are, however, trained to operate in an environment where chemical or biological agents have been released, and they could, if necessary, provide support to the civil authorities using standard armed forces NBC equipment. As a result of work undertaken during the SDR New Chapter, NBC training will also be provided for those reserve personnel forming Civil Contingencies Reaction Forces, again using standard NBC equipment.

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent training the Territorial Army has been given to deal with a major terrorist incident. [88393]

Dr. Moonie: No specific training has been given to the Territorial Army to deal with major terrorist incidents. Additional training for volunteer reserves for operations in support of civil contingencies (including terrorist attacks) was one of the New Chapter decisions announced on 31 October 2002. The arrangements for its implementation, for the Territorial Army generally and for those who volunteer to join the new Civil Contingency Reaction Forces, are being made by Headquarters Land Command at the moment.

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what training has been conducted in the last 12 months in each of the armed forces in dealing with a terrorist attack involving chemical or biological agents. [88401]

Mr. Ingram: The armed forces are not responsible for dealing with a chemical or biological attack in the United Kingdom. The Home Office, Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs and the Department of Health would take the lead and could, if appropriate, call upon the limited skills of the armed forces. These skills are subject to constant refinement through training and exercises.

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement on the stock of equipment to deal with a chemical or biological incident; and what plans he has to increase this stock; [88403]

(2) what equipment is available to deal with a terrorist attack using chemical or biological agents. [88402]

Mr. Ingram: The primary responsibility for dealing with the consequences of a chemical or biological terrorist incident in the United Kingdom rests with Civil Departments. They are able to call upon the resources of the Ministry of Defence if they are available and are thought to be relevant. There are sufficient stocks of chemical and biological protective equipment for those members of the armed forces so called upon. The MOD stocks of protective equipment are geared towards military requirements.

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consultations he has had with the Department of Health about the response to a terrorist attack using biological agents. [88404]

Mr. Ingram: Regular consultation takes place at both ministerial and official level about the threat from terrorism, the resilience to attack, and managing the consequences of an attack. These mechanisms were outlined in a joint memorandum by the Home Office, Ministry of Defence and Cabinet Office to the Defence Select Committee on 22 May 2002 (House of Commons 518-II page Ev258, dated 24 July 2002).

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures have been taken to ensure that the communications between the armed forces and emergency services are compatible in the event of a terrorist attack. [88405]

Mr. Ingram: A procurement initiation is in train to provide 2 (National Communications) Signal Brigade with AIRWAVE equipment compatible with communications being procured by the police and other emergency services. This will provide the regional chain of command and deployed force elements with communications to support all operations undertaken in response to requests for assistance from the civil authorities. An interim solution is being put in place now to provide an improved mobile network capability in advance of the introduction into service of AIRWAVE.

Training Review

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the independent training review programme; and what actions he intends to take on the decisions of the programme. [87974]

Dr. Moonie: I assume the hon. Member is referring to the outcome of the Defence Training Review (DTR), which was announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on 27 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 545W. Work is now complete on over a third of the DTR recommendations. Key achievements have included the formation of the Defence Academy of the United Kingdom on 1 April 2002 and, more recently, the establishment of the Director General Training and Education organisation to provide the central policy focus for defence individual training and education. The programme to rationalise a number of specialist training streams, about which my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces last updated the House on 25 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 2WS, is also proceeding as planned. Implementation of the remaining DTR recommendations is continuing.

Warship Deployments

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when *(a)* HMS Albion and *(b)* HMS Bulwark will be ready for active deployment in the Royal Navy; what the original contract dates were; and if he will make a statement. [87798]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Warships

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent trials have been conducted on warship hulls in respect of blast-cleaning techniques. [88193]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence is not aware of any trials in respect of blast-cleaning techniques on warship hulls since July 1996.

Two systems (including Mr. Farrow's) were demonstrated during 2000. Although the demonstrations were not on hulls, it was shown that the techniques employed could be used for that purpose.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on discussions between his Department and Mr.Nigel Farrow in respect of blast-cleaning techniques for warship hulls. [88194]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence had a meeting with Mr. Farrow at the Defence Procurement Agency in Bristol on 25 November 2002. The Ministry of Defence fully explained its position in relation to Mr. Farrow's UK patent 2344348 in respect of alleged infringement activities at Portsmouth dockyard. The Ministry of Defence considered that the activities at Portsmouth did not infringe that patent.

At the meeting Mr. Farrow raised further allegations concerning another patent and activities at other dockyards. The Ministry of Defence undertook to investigate the further allegations. It was made clear that the investigation would take some weeks, and would cover alleged patent infringement and validity issues. It will also consider possible contractual responsibilities in the matter. Mr. Farrow is aware that these investigations are on-going.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what *(a)* the differences and *(b)* the similarities are between blast-cleaning techniques for warship hulls *(i)* employed by his Department and (ii) patented by Mr. Nigel Farrow. [88195]

Mr. Ingram: Following an approach from Mr. Farrow concerning alleged use of his patents, the Ministry of Defence has undertaken to investigate the cleaning techniques in use in naval dockyards. The Ministry of Defence indicated that this investigation would take some weeks and is well under way. The outcome is expected early in the new year.

Techniques relating to blast cleaning of ships are well known and used extensively. Mr. Farrow has proposed particular parameters for use in such systems and it is the alleged use of the particular parameters that is the subject of the investigation.

Fleet Support Ltd. of Portsmouth has already stated that grit used at Portsmouth falls outside the range specified by Mr. Farrow. This has already been reported to Mr. Farrow.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what legal costs have been incurred by his Department in consequence of its disagreement with Mr. Nigel Farrow in respect of his claim of breached patent rights for blast cleaning techniques for warship hulls. [88196]

Mr. Ingram: No external legal costs have been incurred by the Ministry of Defence. Investigation has been by the Ministry of Defence's intellectual property group, and is overseen by a chartered patent agent. Approximately two man weeks of internal effort have been expended on investigation and searches.

Wind Farms

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his Department's objections to wind farm proposals 18 kilometres from the RAF Odiham base; and if he will make a statement. [88212]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence deals with every wind energy proposal individually and each one is given a full and thorough appraisal by at least seven separate Technical Advisors, each with their own specialism including Radar, Low Flying, Communication Links and Met Office Radar. Changing the location by less than a mile could, in some cases, make the difference between the MOD raising an objection or not. From information supplied by the proposed developer, such an appraisal was conducted for the site near to RAF Odiham. Objections have been raised to avoid a compromise of safety.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the time taken by his Department to object to a proposal for a wind farm in the Nunney area in Somerset; and if he will make a statement. [88211]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence deals with every wind energy proposal individually and each one is given a full and thorough appraisal by at least seven separate Technical Advisors, each with their own specialism including Radar, Low Flying, Communication Links and Met Office Radar. The number of proposals received, in excess of 1,000 this year compared to some 340 last year, impacts on the speed with which the experts involved are able to produce advice.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

CDC Offices

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when CDC Capital Partners offices will close in each country in *(a)* South Asia, *(b)* South east Asia, *(c)* Africa and *(d)* Latin America; and whether the proposed re-organisation of CDC Capital Partners will result in job losses in *(i)* South Asia, (ii) South east Asia, (iii) Africa and (iv) America. [85497]

Clare Short: In the Americas region the Miami office will be closed during 2003. No other closures are planned. The proposed reorganisation of CDC may result in the creation of additional jobs in CDC's overseas offices.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much third-party capital is under the management of CDC Capital Partners, broken down by *(a)* investment and *(b)* country. [85498]

Clare Short: The information is as follows:

Investment	*Countries*	*Third party capital (invested and committed) (£ million)*
CGU-CDC China Investment Company	China	32.2
South Asia Gateway Terminal	Sri Lanka	8.1
Southern Cone Power	Argentina, Chile, Peru	52.8
Aureos Capital funds	[1]—	92.1
CPU Funds		
(i) South Asia Regional Fund	India	38.8
(ii) Commonwealth Africa Investments	[1]—	30.0

[1] Aureos operates in Zambia, Kenya, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Ghana, Papua New Guinea, Mauritius, Sri Lanka, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Tanzania. It also manages two regional funds targeting Central America and one targeting the Indian Ocean region. The Commonwealth Africa Investments Fund is invested in Tanzania, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, and Zambia.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what CDC's *(a)* investments and *(b)* disposals have been since June. [85512]

Clare Short: The value of CDC's investments and disposals since June 2002 have been:

£ million

Month	*Investments*	*Disposals*
June	21.3	3.1
July	4.5	3.1
August	1.1	4.5
September	7.6	6.4
October	5.9	0.9
November	22.6	6.0
Totals	63.0	24.0

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many CDC Capital Partners offices closed in each country in *(a)* South Asia, *(b)*, South East Asia, *(c)* Africa and *(d)* Latin America since 1997; and whether office closures are anticipated in 2003. [85518]

Clare Short: Since 1997, CDC has closed one office in South Asia (Bangladesh), two offices in South East Asia (Philippines and Fiji), two offices in Africa (Malawi and Uganda) and five offices in Latin America (Peru, Mexico, Trinidad, Jamaica, Barbados). It is anticipated that the Miami office will be closed in 2003.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the *(a)* opening and *(b)* running costs were of CDC Capital Partners offices operating in *(i)* Asia, (ii) Africa, (iii) Latin America and (iv) Central and North America in the last year for which figures are available. [85519]

Clare Short: For last the CDC financial year, ie the calendar year 2001, *(a)* there were no material costs relating to the opening of CDC offices *(b)* the running costs for CDC's offices were: *(i)* Asia—£5.3 million (ii) Africa—£2.8 million (iii) Latin America—£1.4 million (iv) Central and North America—£6.4 million.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the costs are of *(a)* opening and *(b)* closing CDC offices in *(i)* South Asia, (ii) South East Asia, (iii) Africa and (iv) Latin America. [85611]

Clare Short: Since 1997, there have been no material costs relating to the opening of CDC offices and the costs of the closure of CDC offices have been i) in South Asia—none; ii) in South East Asia—£216,000 (awaiting confirmation about Phillippines—actual figure might be higher); iii) in Africa—£35,000; iv) in South America and Caribbean, including an estimate for closing the Miami office—£800,000.

Famine (Africa)

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when her Department received information from NGOs warning of the famine in Ethiopia; and which NGOs gave the information. [87074]

Clare Short *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* There are a number of regular forums between Government, donors and NGOs around humanitarian issues in Ethiopia. The UN World Food Programme plays a key role by providing early warning and on-going assessment of needs to donors, Government and NGOs. The DFID Addis office has been closely engaged with these groups.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Hague Conference

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department whether the Government will be making a contribution to the Hague Conference Supplementary Budget XLVIII (2002–2003) for the conference's continuing work on international child abduction; and if he will make a statement. [88185]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Government will not be making a contribution towards the Hague Conference Supplementary Budget XLVIII (2002–2003). The Hague Conference Supplementary Budget came into being last year XLVII (2001–2002) when member states of the Hague Conference were invited to make a voluntary contribution towards the additional funding needed to reinforce the administration, monitoring and support for existing conventions, particularly the Children's Conventions. Last year XLVII (2001- 2002) the UK was in a position to make a voluntary contribution to the Supplementary Budget and arranged for contributions of €30,600.42 (England and Wales) and €1,601.28 (Northern Ireland) to be made over and above the standard UK contribution of €110,290.62. After the Netherlands the UK was the leading donor of supplemental payments during that year.

The Hague Conference carried forward the Supplementary Budget into year XLVIII (2002–2003). Again this was based on voluntary payments since the budget had not been submitted to the Council for approval. The expected UK budgetary contribution of £117,580.65 was paid in full in early August but this year we are not in a position to make any additional voluntary payment.

The Government supports strongly the work of the Hague Conference and the expansion of its activities. The Supplementary Budget will be assumed into the standard contributions for the next financial year and the appropriate arrangements have been made to ensure that the UK will be in a position to make its full contribution.

King Edward VIII

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what progress she is making on the review of releasing the records relating to King Edward VIII. [88227]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I refer the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside to the written statement I made on 18 December 2002, *Official Report,* column 64W.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Humfrey Malins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he will answer the questions from the hon. Member for Woking of 20 November (refs.82097, 82096), on the night session at Bow Street Magistrates Court. [87998]

Yvette Cooper: The questions were answered on 16 December 2002, *Official Report,* column 644W.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Corporate Killing

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with ministerial colleagues on the introduction of health and safety legislation to deal with corporate killing; and if he will make a statement. [88047]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* We have a manifesto commitment to legislation and will do so when parliamentary time allows. I have discussed our proposals for increasing the liability of corporations to manslaughter with colleagues and will continue discussions in the light of the outcome of the regulatory impact assessment we are at present conducting.

CABs

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the publications produced by his Department that refer people to the Citizens Advice Bureau Service for advice and assistance; and whether Citizens Advice Scotland is informed of such referrals prior to publication. [84156]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* The Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) Service in England and in Wales, and in Scotland is a valuable source of independent advice and information on a wide range of

issues that affect and concern the citizen. This includes a number of areas of concern to the Home Office, such as immigration and crime. Given the CAB Service's knowledge and expertise, the Department makes frequent reference to CABx as a source of information and advice in its publications, websites, and press-notices and in its replies to correspondence from a number of interested parties.

The Home Office is committed to working with the Department of Trade and Industry, and other Government Departments with a working relationship with the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureau (NACAB) and Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS), to ensure a productive partnership between Government and the CAB service, and the sharing of information and policy developments relevant to work of the service.

Immigration

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the French and the United Kingdom Governments will conclude a formal legal agreement to enable United Kingdom immigration officers at Calais to operate full United Kingdom border controls; what arrangements are being made for asylum seekers to claim asylum in the United Kingdom at Calais; and how they will have access to legal advice. [88214]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* The United Kingdom (UK) and French Governments are currently engaged in detailed negotiation on the agreement, which we hope will be concluded early in the new year. I am unable to provide information about the specific content of the agreement at this stage, but I can confirm that UK officials operating the current juxtaposed controls at Coquelles and the Gare du Nord in Paris do not accept asylum claims. Where such applications are made they remain the responsibility of the French authorities to consider. There are no plans to adopt different procedures at Calais. The current procedure operated at Coquelles and the Gare du Nord is in accordance with the requirements of the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention and the Dublin Convention. We will be consulting relevant organisations, including the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), in finalising these arrangements.

Peter Foster

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what discussions Home Office officials other than those referred to in the Home Office Statement on Peter Foster had with *(a)* the Chief Immigration Officer at Luton Airport and *(b)* the IND Removals Process Team on *(i)* 2 and (ii) 3 December on the subject of Peter Foster; [87461]

(2) what gave rise to the discussion between the Chief Immigration Officer at Luton and the Removals Process Team on 3 December referred to in the Home Office statement on Peter Foster; [87462]

(3) in relation to the Home Office Statement on Peter Foster, what discussions the Immigration and National Directorate officials who had contact with Ministers about the case had with the officials in the Immigration and Nationality Department Removals Process Team; who alerted Immigration and Nationality Department officials to media interest in the case, and why they did so; what discussions the Chief Immigration Officer had with the Removals Process Team prior to his arguing that there was no need to delay removal until 18 December; and what factors had led Immigration and Nationality Department officials to conclude that the removal did not need to be delayed until 18th December. [87374]

Beverley Hughes: As my earlier statement on the events of 31 August to 4 December 2002 indicated, the only contact between Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) officials involved in the case and ministerial staff was the request for, and provision of, a factual account for Ministers of where the case stood by officials in the IND Removals Process Team. The acknowledgement in response to this asked for further updates as appropriate.

The IND Removals Process Team was alerted to media interest in the case by the Home Office Press Office who requested information to enable them to respond to enquiries from the media.

The Removals Process Team contacted the Chief Immigration Officer at Luton Airport to obtain the necessary information. In the second such conversation, on 3 December, the Chief Immigration Officer indicated that for the reasons given in the statement of events, i.e. that with the application for judicial review refused there was no reason to delay removal, he intended to set removal directions for the first available flight on or after 6 December.

Prison Service

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the IT developments within the Prison Service completed in the past two years; what developments are in production stage; and what his priorities are for development over the next five years. [81214]

Hilary Benn: The Prison Service outsourced its IT with effect from 1 July 2000. A major infrastructure upgrade is under way that will for the first time give the Prison Service a modern, networked IT system and provide 18,600 personal computers at over 170 sites in England and Wales. By early November 2002, implementation was about 50 per cent. complete and work is well under way at remaining sites. Completion is on target for 31 March 2003.

In addition, the development and rollout of the Offender Assessment System (OASys) will enable the electronic exchange of information between the Prison and Probation Services and the electronic completion of documents that assist with offender risk assessments and the provision of information on reoffending and the risk of harm to others. This is on target to go live progressively from April 2003.

Priorities for development over the next three years will be agreed later this year. The main projects which are likely to be developed over the next five years are:

a system to improve occupancy at establishments through the provision of accurate and up to date accommodation information;

a comprehensive replacement of the system for managing prisoner information; and

new finance and management information systems.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 7 January 2003

ADVOCATE-GENERAL

Devolution

20. **Mr. Carmichael:** To ask the Advocate-General what devolution issues have been raised since 26 November 2002. [89155]

The Advocate-General for Scotland: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave today to the hon. Lady the Member for the Vale of York (Miss McIntosh), *Official Report*, 7 January 2003, column 10.

22. **Ann McKechin:** To ask the Advocate-General what devolution issues she has considered since 1 December 2002. [89157]

The Advocate-General for Scotland: Since 1 December 2002, 32 devolution issue cases have been intimated to me, all but one relating to criminal law. All of these have concerned human rights issues, a substantial number concerned undue delay in criminal proceedings, others included cases on the fixing of the punishment part of the sentence of a life prisoner to replace the old system of serving an indeterminate length of sentence and the powers of the Crown to use surveillance tapes from prison visiting rooms as evidence in a trial. The one civil case involved delay in an appeal from the application of a children's panel reporter to the sheriff for an interim exclusion order.

Human Rights

21. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Advocate-General in how many cases she has intervened since 1 October 2002 on human rights issues. [89156]

The Advocate-General for Scotland: Since 1 October 2002, I have not intervened in any new cases on human rights issues. However, I did appear in person before the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council on 15 to 17 October 2002 in the case of R *v.* Her Majesty's Advocate and the Advocate-General. This case involved delay in bringing criminal proceedings and breach of Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Clerks

Keith Vaz: To ask the honourable Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission how many *(a)* Clerks of the House and *(b)* Clerks of Committees are *(i)* black and (ii) Asian. [89325]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: The House of Commons Commission currently employs 303 individual members of staff (including part-timers) in the Department of the Clerk of the House. Of these, 241 (approximately 80 per cent.) have completed ethnic monitoring forms, which are voluntary. The figures for members of staff in post on 31 December 2002 were:

Of staff in the Department of the Clerk of the House, 3.31 per cent. declared themselves to be from ethnic minorities, of whom:

1.24 per cent. declared themselves to be black

2.07 per cent. declared themselves to be Asian

Of Committee staff, 5.18 per cent. declared themselves to be from ethnic minorities, of whom:

2.59 per cent. declared themselves to be black

2.59 per cent. declared themselves to be Asian

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Judicial Appointments

31. **Vera Baird:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary Lord Chancellor's Department what steps the Lord Chancellor is taking to amend the appointments system to increase the diversity of the judiciary. [89166]

Yvette Cooper: Since taking up office in 1997 the Lord Chancellor has introduced many improvements to the judicial appointments process aimed at promoting equality of opportunity and greater diversity within the judiciary, as follows:

Establishing the Commission for Judicial Appointments to oversee the procedures and deal with complaints

Piloting an assessment centre

Removing lower and upper age limits for most appointments

Setting up a work shadowing scheme

Arranging events about judicial appointments to talk openly about the appointments procedures and encourage applications

Publicising criteria and appointments procedures, including on diversity, in booklets, on the LCD website and in a video

Publishing the Judicial Appointments annual report since October 1999, which includes statistical information about the appointment of women and people of minority ethnic origin

Liasing with the legal profession on diversity issues, for example, through the Joint Working Party on Equal Opportunities in Judicial Appointments

Introducing a salaried part-time working facility and flexible part-time sitting arrangements for those who have had career breaks for family reasons

Abolishing the system of appointments to the High Court bench by invitation only

Involving judicial and lay members in more aspects of the selection process

Amending the appointment criteria following recommendations by the Joint Working Party on Equal Opportunities in Judicial Appointments

Confirming publicly that homosexuality is not a bar to appointment

Confirming that advocacy experience is not a prerequisite for judicial appointment

Supporting appraisal and mentoring schemes

Improving application and consultation forms and guidance

Researching factors that affect (especially) women and ethnic minority lawyers in deciding whether to apply to be judges

Opening opportunities to become recorders to blind people.

Access to Children (Germany)

Keith Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will take steps to contact parents who have reported prevention of access to their children in Germany to the Child Abduction Unit, to determine if their problems remain and offer them assistance as appropriate; and what progress has been made on Lady Meyer's case. [89055]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Child Abduction Unit discharges the Lord Chancellor's functions as Central Authority under the 1980 Hague and European Conventions. Article 21 of the Hague Convention enables applications via the designated Central Authorities to make arrangements for organising or securing the effective exercise of rights of access, and the European Convention enables a person who has obtained in one Contracting State a decision on rights of access to apply via the Central Authorities for the purpose of having the decision recognised or enforced in another Contracting State. Any parent resident in England and Wales whose child is resident in Germany may apply to the Child Abduction Unit; but there are no plans to contact parents who have reported difficulties but have not made such an application.

No such application has been made in Lady Meyer's case.

Access to Children (Overseas)

Keith Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will take actions against countries that deny British parents reasonable access to their children held abroad. [89054]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Lord Chancellor is designated as the Central Authority for England and Wales and Northern Ireland under the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction and European Convention on the Recognition and Enforcement of Decisions concerning Custody of Children and on the Restoration of Custody and Children. Should there be clear evidence of countries which are contracting states to those conventions holding children of British parents and denying those parents reasonable access to their children in breach of their obligations under the conventions, consideration would of course be given to all appropriate courses of action to rectify the situation.

Child Abduction

Keith Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if the Lord Chancellor's Department will produce a yearly report presenting the results of legal proceedings abroad sought to settle disputes related to child abduction. [89053]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Child Abduction Unit, which discharges the functions of the Lord Chancellor as Central Authority under the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction and European Convention on the Recognition and Enforcement of Decisions concerning Custody of Children and on the Restoration of Custody and Children, maintains statistics on applications under those conventions in respect of children brought to and taken from England and Wales.

A summarised version of those statistics appears as part of the annual report of the Official Solicitor and Public Trustee, the latest version of which was published in October 2002. A copy is in the Libraries of both Houses and is also available on the OSPT website.

Domestic Violence

Margaret Moran: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will list legislation involving protection for survivors of domestic violence which has not been brought into force, stating the reasons in each case. [88311]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Section 60 of Part IV of the Family Law Act 1996 has not been implemented. This section would give the Lord Chancellor the power to make rules to allow a prescribed person, or category of person, to act on behalf of survivors of domestic violence.

It was not implemented in 1997 with Part IV in order to give the courts, police, practitioners and others time to become familiar with the new law and gain experience in its operation before considering the introduction of new procedures and responsibilities of this nature.

The Lord Chancellor's Department commissioned research to assess the effectiveness of current remedies for domestic violence and understand the practical impact on individuals of third party applications. The research report has now been considered by our Domestic Violence Advisory Group, which includes representation from the police, voluntary sector, judiciary and others. The group concluded that the problems identified in the research would not be most effectively addressed by implementing section 60. A sub-group of the advisory group will now consider these problems and recommend how best to tackle them.

E-voting

Margaret Moran: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what measures the Lord Chancellor intends to take to ensure e-participation is included in e-voting pilots. [89165]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

The local e-voting electoral modernisation pilot programme is the responsibility of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. In conjunction with the Electoral Commission, the Office of the e-Envoy and local authorities, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is exploring what more can usefully be done—before, during and after the electoral process—to ensure the e-voting pilot programme takes full advantage of the opportunities afforded by the advent of new technologies. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's aim is to engage with and better inform voters and other key stakeholders of the electoral process, increase the opportunity for voting and maintain the integrity and security of the ballot.

Immigration Appellate Authority

Keith Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the average length of time was from explanatory statement receipt to the

fixing of a hearing date by the Immigration Appellate Authority in the last year for which figures are available. [88566]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Information is not kept on the average length of time from the explanatory statement receipt to the fixing of a hearing date by the Immigration Appellate Authority (IAA). However, for immigration and asylum cases received in the 12 months period ending 30 June 2002 the average time from receipt was:

six weeks for First Hearing; and

15 weeks to the Substantive Hearing.

Land Tribunal

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many cases have been brought before the Land Tribunal in each of the last three years; and if she will make a statement. [89326]

Ms Rosie Winterton: In the last three years, 1,421 cases have been brought before the Lands Tribunal. 501 were for the year ending December 2000; 515 for the year ending December 2001 and 405 for the year ending December 2002.

Returning Officers

Mr. Drew: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what regulations there are on the supply by returning officers of labels containing electors' details to political parties or other interested parties. [88276]

Yvette Cooper: Current regulations do not provide for the supply of labels which include details of electors to authorised users. Such supply was discontinued because electoral registers are now available in data form.

Small Claims Court

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans the Lord Chancellor has to review the *(a)* rules governing and *(b)* guidance offered to judges presiding in the Small Claims Court concerning their conduct to litigants in person; and if he will introduce independent assessors to monitor the observance of such rules and guidance. [88238]

Ms Rosie Winterton: There are no rules relating specifically to judges in small claims cases dealing with litigants in person, and the Lord Chancellor has no current plans to introduce any.

The Judicial Studies Board, an independent body, provides guidance to judges on the conduct of small claims cases in its Civil Bench Book and on the particular needs of litigants in person in its Equal Treatment Bench Book. Both publications are available on the JSB's website (www.jsboard.co.uk).

The Lord Chancellor expects judges to uphold the highest standards of probity, impartiality, courtesy and consideration in dealing with all litigants. Where it is alleged that a judge has failed to meet these standards, the Lord Chancellor, as Head of the Judiciary, is able to consider any complaint that is made about the judge's conduct. He has no plans to introduce independent assessors to monitor the Judiciary's dealings with litigants in person.

Weekend Voting

Stephen Hesford: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment she has made of the feasibility of weekend voting. [88560]

Yvette Cooper: We plan to assess the feasibility of weekend voting after 31 January in the light of responses to the consultation paper "Combining English Local Authority, Greater London Authority and European Parliament Elections in 2004" (issued jointly with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister), which (among other things) also seeks views on weekend voting.

PRIVY COUNCIL

Divisions

38. **Ms Drown:** To ask the President of the Council what plans he has to propose steps to reduce time taken to record votes in the House. [89175]

Mr. Bradshaw: In his memorandum of December 2001 to the Modernisation Committee, my right. hon. Friend asked the question whether views in the House on electronic voting have changed since Members were consulted in the last Parliament. He stressed that any form of electronic voting should require Members to attend Divisions in person, but could remove the need for multiple Divisions.

House of Lords Reform

Sir Nicholas Winterton: To ask the President of the Council if he will make a statement on proposals for further reform of the House of Lords. [89172]

Mr. Robin Cook: I refer the hon. Member to my reply today to my hon. Friend the Member for the City of York (Hugh Bayley), *Official Report*, 7 January 2003, column 19.

Parliament

Mr. Allen: To ask the President of the Council (1) if he will bring forward proposals for changing the arrangements for the recall of Parliament; [88909]

(2) if he will bring forward proposals to improve the legal advice available to Parliament. [88911]

Mr. Robin Cook: I have no plans to do so.

Parliamentary Accountability

Mr. Allen: To ask the President of the Council if he will bring forward proposals for enhancing the role of Parliament in decisions to deploy British forces in armed conflict overseas. [88910]

Mr. Robin Cook: I have no plans to do so. The Government have repeatedly given Parliament the opportunity to debate decisions about the deployment of British forces in armed conflict overseas.

Pre-legislative Scrutiny

Mr. Allen: To ask the President of the Council what steps he is taking to alert Departments to the new opportunities for pre-legislative scrutiny of Bills for next session's legislative programme. [88930]

Mr. Robin Cook: The Government want to ensure that more Bills are published in draft and can receive pre-legislative scrutiny, and I am working closely with other Departments to achieve this aim.

SCOTLAND

Employment

7. **Gregory Barker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment she has made of the benefits for employment and enterprise in Scotland arising out of the Copenhagen summit. [89142]

Mrs. McGuire: Scotland is well placed to take advantage of the new opportunities which enlargement of the European Union will create.

Business Insolvency (North-East Scotland)

11. **Mr. Baron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment she has made of the trend in small business insolvencies in north-east Scotland. [89146]

Mrs. McGuire: The Scotland Office does not routinely compile insolvency data. The latest official figures on company liquidations in Scotland were released by the Department of Trade and Industry on 1 November 2002. The data is not published on a regional basis within Scotland.

Broadband

12. **Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions she has had with small business representatives in Scotland regarding the development of broadband services in rural areas. [89147]

Mrs. McGuire: My right hon. Friend and I meet regularly with the small business representative organisations in Scotland. Our discussions cover a wide range of concerns, including the development of broadband services. The small business community will be taking an interest in the outcome of the Scottish Executive programme to roll out pilot projects in the Highlands and Islands and Dumfries and Galloway areas.

Shipbuilding

13. **John Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on shipbuilding on the Clyde. [89148]

Mrs. Liddell: I recently announced the publication of the Government's response to the Scottish Affairs Committee report on shipbuilding on the Clyde. I recognise the significance of the shipbuilding industry within Scotland's manufacturing base and to the West of Scotland in particular. The Scotland Office maintains extensive contacts with the shipyard management at the most senior levels to discuss opportunities and I am specifically committed to supporting and promoting export opportunities for the Clyde shipyards.

The Clyde yards currently benefit from significant Government orders and have the opportunity to compete for work on the Future Carrier programme from a position of strength.

European Union Business

14. **Angus Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what efforts she is making to ensure that the *(a)* Scottish Executive and *(b)* Scottish Parliament are fully informed of European Union matters. [89149]

Mrs. Liddell: The Government involves the Scottish Executive as fully as possible on European Union matters touching on devolved areas of responsibility, in accordance with "The Memorandum of Understanding and The Concordat on Co-ordination of European Union Policy Issues".

It is the responsibility of the Scottish Executive to inform the Scottish Parliament of relevant European Union matters. Explanatory Memoranda on European Community documents prepared by Whitehall departments are copied to the devolved Administrations. The Scottish Executive routinely pass these to the Scottish Parliament, which can request further explanation from the Executive in the form of a Scottish Covering Note.

Postcomm

15. **Mr. Alan Reid:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions she has had with Postcomm regarding deregulation of postal services in Scotland. [89150]

Mrs. McGuire: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 26 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 166W.

Manufacturing Sector

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action she is taking in conjunction with business and industry interests to tackle the problems faced by the manufacturing sector in Scotland. [89144]

Mrs. Liddell: I will continue to work closely with the Scottish Executive and with my colleagues in Government to ensure that the interests of the manufacturing sector in Scotland are understood.

Scotland Office

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she will announce the proposed operating costs of the Scotland Office for the financial year 2003–04. [89145]

Mrs. Liddell: Details of my Department's expenditure in 2003–04 will be published with the Main Supply Estimates, in the spring.

CABINET OFFICE

Millennium Bug

Dr. Cable: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office (1) how much was spent on the Millennium Bug Campaign in each year from 1990; and if he will make a statement; [88811]

(2) what evaluation has taken place of the Millennium Bug Campaign; who undertook the consultation; what the overall costs were; and if he will make a statement. [88813]

Mr. Alexander: The total spend on the Millennium Bug public information campaign was £16million.
The estimated cost of the work to prepare central Government IT systems for the century date change was £380million.

The Government's Millennium Bug preparations were a huge success, with the UK almost untouched by the bug. The work also had wide reaching benefits to the entire modernising Government agenda. These were drawn out in the command paper 'Modernising Government in Action: Realising the benefits of Y2K', which was placed in the Library of the House on 18 April 2000.

Paper Purchases

Sue Doughty: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how the Cabinet Office defines sustainably managed sources, in relation to purchasing paper supplies. [88705]

Mr. Alexander: Cabinet Office defines 'sustainably managed sources', in relation to purchasing paper supplies, as forests supplying paper mills with wood which are typically managed in accordance with ISO14001 environmental management systems (EMS) and Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) programs.

Postcodes

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what use the Cabinet Office and its agencies makes of postcode areas for *(a)* the collection and publication of data, *(b)* devising formulae for the distribution of grants and awards and *(c)* the delivery of services; and when usages were last reviewed. [87770]

Mr. Alexander: The information is as follows:

(a) The Office of the e-Envoy in the Cabinet Office is responsible for running and maintaining the UK online website. Postcode information is collected from those registering for consultations with a view to better understanding user requirements and tailoring future services accordingly.

UK Online Interactive does not currently routinely collect postcode information from users. However, Somerset County Council have been collecting postcode information through UK Online Interactive in order to present locally tailored information back to the user. A project is currently being planned which will extend this facility to the rest of the service, collecting postcode information derived from the set top box or entered by the user.

The Office of the e-Envoy also uses postcode area data to map the availability and take-up of online technologies. These maps are used in the development of the Government's policy aimed at reducing the 'digital divide'.

(b) The Cabinet Office currently makes no use of postcode data in devising formulae for the distribution of grants and awards.

(c) The Government Car and Despatch Agency operates two services. The InterDespatch Service makes use of postcodes as a building identifier for its delivery and collection services. The Government Car Service uses postcodes in conjunction with an autoroute system to identify addresses for the pick up/set down of passengers. Both these uses are under constant review.

Staff Bonuses

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office (1) how much each Government Department has paid in bonuses to staff who achieved personal targets in this financial year; [88303]

(2) how many Departments which have failed to achieve Government targets have paid staff bonuses. [88304]

Mr. Alexander: Responsibility for pay, outside of the senior civil service, is delegated to Departments and agencies. What bonuses are paid to these staff is therefore a matter for individual Departments and agencies. This Information is not held centrally.
The new pay and performance management arrangements for the senior civil service are designed to reward and provide incentives for high performance. Under these arrangements all Departments awarded non-consolidated bonuses to their top performers.
Performance bonuses totalling £6 million were paid to those who contributed most to their Department's objectives. Bonuses were paid to around 55 per cent. of senior civil service staff.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

ARC Scheme

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when a decision will be made on preserved rights and beneficiaries of the ARC scheme. [89113]

Dr. Howells: The Government have made clear their intention to introduce preserved rights for existing beneficiaries of the Accommodation for Residential Care (ARC) concessionary television licence scheme, when the social mix or the level of warden cover in their sheltered housing change. The regulations governing the ARC scheme are complex and the structure of the proposed changes remains under consideration, but we shall bring forward amending regulations as soon as is compatible with the need to avoid creating new anomalies or unnecessary administrative burdens.

BBC (Production Quota)

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) if she will reform the

independent production quota for the BBC to *(a)* minimise exclusions to qualifying hours and *(b)* calculate the quota per channel by *(i)* qualifying hours and (ii) spending; [88695]

(2) she intends to announce the Government's response to the Independent Television Commission's Programme Supply Review. [88668]

Dr. Howells: The Government's response to the ITC's UK Programme Supply Review will be announced within the next two weeks. This response will include details of the amendments we intend to make to the Communications Bill and the BBC's Agreement, including in relation to the independent productions quota.

Children's Hospices (Lottery Funding)

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the progress of allocating Lottery funding for children's hospices. [88631]

Mr. Caborn: The New Opportunities Fund children's palliative care programme was launched in March 2002 and closed in August 2002. Applications for all three strands of the programme (children's hospice provision, home based teams and bereavement services) are currently in assessment. A decision making committee will meet in January 2003 to consider which applications to fund. Applicants will then be informed whether or not their bid has been successful. Details of all the awards made will be announced shortly after this.

Licensing Bill

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she made of the compatibility of the objectives of the Licensing Bill with Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, with particular reference to the prevention of nuisance. [88532]

Dr. Howells: On the face of the Licensing Bill, my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for the Arts stated under section 19(1)*(a)* of the Human Rights Act that in her view the provisions of the Bill are compatible with the Convention rights.

Lottery Funds (West Cumbria)

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what Lottery funds have been given to the towns of Workington and Maryport in West Cumbria. [88842]

Mr. Caborn: Information on Lottery awards is provided from the National Lottery awards database, which is based upon information provided to us by the distributing bodies. While it is possible to search the database for information relating to specific towns, it is not mandatory for this information to be included in the dataset. This means that some awards relating to a specific town may not appear in the total figure shown.

The database shows that Lottery awards totalling a minimum of £8,455,887 have been made to Workington and totalling a minimum of £1,060,968 have been made to Maryport.

Museums and Galleries

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport pursuant to her answer of 2 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 539W, on museums and galleries, if she will place the efficiency review of national museums and galleries sponsored by her Department in 1999–2000 in the Library. [88932]

Dr. Howells: A copy of the Efficiency Review of national museums and galleries was placed in the House of Commons Library following its publication in September 1999. It can also be viewed on my Department's website at www.culture.gov.uk

Sporting Events

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she has plans to increase the number of major sporting events which must be shown on terrestrial television; and if she will make a statement. [88305]

Dr. Howells: There are no immediate plans to review the list of sporting and other national events. However, the Government aim to keep the list under regular review, and if significant changes take place either in the public perception of what events are of national importance, or in the economics of sports rights, the Government would look at the matter again.

Sustainable Procurement

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how her Department defines sustainable procurement, in relation to its Environmental Management System. [88704]

Dr. Howells: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave her on 7 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 544W. That answer is in complete agreement with the requirements of the Departmental Environmental Management System, an initiative which has the whole hearted support of the Green Minister (Baroness Blackstone), the Department's Environmental Champions, senior officials and staff.

TV Licences

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she plans to change the cost of a TV licence for students; and if she will make a statement. [88273]

Dr. Howells: The Government have no plans to change the cost of television licences for students. Students pay the standard licence fee and are subject to the normal licensing requirements. We have received representations calling for concessions for students but it would be difficult to justify giving priority to students over the many other groups with a case for special treatment.

DEFENCE

Appointees

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list current appointees on the *(a)* board of the

RAF Museum, *(b)* board of the Royal Marines Museum, *(c)* board of the Royal Navy Submarine Museum, *(d)* Advisory Committee on Conscientious Objectors, *(e)* Review Board for Government Contracts, *(f)* board of the National Army Museum and *(g)* Defence Scientific Advisory Council. [89052]

Dr. Moonie: The information requested is as follows:

(a) Board of the RAF Museum

Chair

Air Chief Marshal Sir Richard Johns GCB CBE LVO FRAeS RAF (Retd.)

Trustees

The right hon. Baroness Blatch CBE

Mr. L. A. Edwards (Anthony) BSc MBA CEng FRAeS

Sir Neil Cossons MA FSA FMA FRSA CBE

Sir Gerald Hosker KCB QC

The right hon. Sir Geoffrey Pattie BSc PhD

Sir R. H. Evans CBE

Dr. Judith Rowbotham

Air Vice Marshal David Crwys-Williams CB (MD SSVC)

Lord Clarke of Hampstead

Mr. Victor Gauntlett FRSA FIMI FINSTPET

Mr. Alastair Stewart

His Excellency Air Marshall I. D. McFadyen CB OBE FRAeS RAF (Retd.)

Professor R. J. Overy MA PhD FRHists

Mr. D. E. Young

Sir Roger Jackling

Mr. Michael Dale CBE

Lord Evans of Watford

(b) Board of the Royal Marines Museum

Sir Henry Beverley KCB OBE

Captain Brian Gibbs RM Retired

Councillor M. Geddes

Lt Col Andrew Noyse RM Retd.

Colonel M. Sturman OBE

WO1 (RSM) J. Forster RM

Councillor M. Hancock CBE MP

(c) Board of the Royal Navy Submarine Museum

Vice Admiral Sir Roy Newman KCB JP DL

Rear Admiral Niall Kilgour

Dr. Martin Copp

Rear Admiral Paul Hodinott CB OBE

Captain Terry Meadows CBE

Mr. Tim Schadla-Hall

Mr. Louis Shermer-Smith OBE

Mr. Tom Walters BEM

Councillor Mike Geddes

Mr. Robin Webb

(d) Advisory Committee on Conscientious Objectors

His Honour Judge Harris

Mr. C. M. Lake

Mr. A. G. Corless

Mrs. L. L. Phipps

Mr. K. N. Walton

(e) Review Board for Government Contracts

George Staples CB QC

Fraser Ashman

Sir Alan Bailey KCB

Dr. Alan Fox

Chris Melrose

(f) Council of the National Army Museum

Field Marshal Sir John Chapple GCB CBE DL

The Hon. David McAlpine

Mr. Richard Marriott

Sir Nigel Mobbs JP

The Rt. Reverend Peter J. Nott

Professor Hew Strachan MA Phd FRHistS

The Lady Vaizey

General Sir John Waters GCB CBE JP DL

(g) Defence Scientific Advisory Council

Professor A. Ledwith

Professor R. Needham

Dr. D. J. Price

Mr. P. J. Stein

Dr. A. L. Mears

Dr. L. V. Bennett

Professor P. G. Blain

Professor A. J. Kinloch

Professor R. Voles

Air Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup

Lt Gen R C Menzies

Mr. G. H. B. Jordan

Mr. M. Earwicker

Mr. P. Roper

Mr. P. D. Ewins

Professor D. King

Dr. A. Keddy

Brave Millennium

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the recommendations arising out of the 1999 Integrated Contingency Planning exercise Brave Millennium have been accepted by his Department; what money has been spent to cover the cost of these commitments since 1999; what recommendations have not been accepted by his Department; what the basis was of such decisions; and if he will make a statement. [87796]

Mr. Ingram: Exercise Brave Millennium examined high-level aspects of integrated contingency planning, improving awareness of the key issues affecting the Ministry of Defence's ability to respond quickly and efficiently to any request for assistance from civil authorities.

As a result of the exercise 57 areas for further work were highlighted, some of it involving other Government Departments/agencies, such as the Home Office, the Police, and the Department of Health.

Most of that work has been completed and a number of actions taken. Many of these entailed the modification of existing processes and procedures. Work is in hand on a small number of outstanding

issues. The expenditure involved is not recorded centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The second Brave Millennium, held in March 2002, confirmed that improvements to integrated contingency planning processes had been made, while further improvements will result from the Strategic Defence Review New Chapter.

British Nuclear Tests (Compensation)

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been paid in compensation to ex-servicemen and medical auxiliaries who attended British nuclear tests and have suffered consequent illness. [89019]

Dr. Moonie: The Department's consistent line is that we have every confidence in the independent studies carried out by the National Radiological Protection Board and the Imperial Cancer Research Fund that showed veterans' participation in the nuclear test programme has not had a detectable effect on their expectation of life, or on their risk of developing cancer or other fatal diseases. Consequently no compensation has been paid to British nuclear test veterans.

Challenger 2

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made with the development of camouflage nets for the Challenger 2 tank; what estimate he has made of the costs of development; and what trials have been carried out. [87045]

Mr. Ingram: Challenger 2 already has an effective counter-surveillance capability. We are investigating ways to further improve this capability. I am withholding specific details of the developments under Exemption 1 (defence, security and international relations) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Cruise Missiles

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Cruise missiles are available for operations; what logistics and support operations are required; and if he will make a statement. [89276]

Mr. Ingram: I am withholding this information in accordance with Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information (Defence, Security and International Relations).

Hostage Taking

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 9 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 16W, if the considerable and compelling evidence of systematic and continuous grave breaches of the fourth Geneva Convention included considerable and compelling evidence of the crime of hostage taking; whether anyone was named in the report as being suspected of the crime of hostage taking; and what recommendations were made in the report for further action on the issue of *(a)* hostage taking and *(b)* war crimes referred to in the report. [88513]

Mr. Ingram: As I explained in my answer of 27 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 335W the report itself is a summary of evidence drawn from the statements of individuals who witnessed or were subject to alleged acts of Iraqi brutality during the Gulf War. The Ministry of Defence has a duty to protect the confidentiality of those who co-operated with the Royal Military Police.

The Royal Military Police were tasked with determining the facts alone. Their final report makes no recommendations.

Iraq

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of Iraq is covered by no-fly sanctions; and if he will make a statement. [88530]

Mr. Ingram: The no fly zones cover all the area of Iraq north of 36th parallel and south of the 33rd parallel. The purpose of our patrols of the Iraqi no fly zones is entirely humanitarian. They are conducted in support of UN SCR 688, which demanded that Saddam Hussein end the brutal repression of his own people.

MOD Land (Inglis Barracks)

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to put on the market MOD land used by BFPO on its two sites at Inglis Barracks; what arrangements will be made for the role of the land, to take account of the needs of the local community; and if he will make a statement. [88615]

Dr. Moonie: Marketing of the site is expected to commence mid 2005.

The current intention is that the site would be sold with the benefit of a development brief and, or, an outline planning approval which I understand will be the subject of detailed negotiations with the Planning Department of the London Borough of Barnet and where necessary, the Greater London Assembly and Transport for London. These negotiations should address the needs of the local community by taking into account the policies contained within the Borough's Unitary Development Plan.

Operation Fresco

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the *(a)* weekly and *(b)* total cost of Operation Fresco has been, since it began. [89281]

Mr. Ingram: Information on the weekly costs of Operation Fresco is not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

In the run up to the strike the MOD incurred expenditure of around £8 million associated with the initial purchase of the urgent operational equipment such as protective clothing, breathing apparatus and hydraulic cutting equipment. No other detailed costs are yet available.

Organophosphates

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will take steps to ensure that British service

personnel are not exposed to organophosphate pesticides when on operations in the Middle East.
[88056]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* The use of pesticides remains an essential component of force protection against the threat of insect borne disease. It is the policy of the Department only to procure pesticides approved under the Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986 or to seek approval from Pesticides Safety Directorate (PSD) of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) to store items in United Kingdom, for use in overseas locations. Those pesticides are only supplied to and used by trained personnel, who are fully equipped with the appropriate personal protective equipment.

QinetiQ

Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the plans of the Sea Technology Group and their impact in relation to the funding, operation and staffing levels of QinetiQ.
[88697]

Dr. Moonie: The Sea Technology Group is part of the Defence Procurement Agency which is an Executive Agency of the Ministry of Defence.

The Group is responsible for providing technical standards, advice and safety regulation for maritime platforms and places a wide a range of contracts with the commercial sector, including QinetiQ, and with other Government agencies to fulfil this role.

There are no plans to change the role of the Sea Technology Group or its relationships with existing suppliers. Contracts are placed with QinetiQ and other suppliers on the basis of the capabilities they offer and the support requirements of the MOD. We maintain a dialogue with QinetiQ and other suppliers about our forward plans but it is a matter for the company to determine the appropriate funding, operation and staffing levels based on the work it wins or expects to win from the MOD and others.

Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the recent funding decisions by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Sea Technology Group which affecting QinetiQ.
[88698]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence continues to determine its requirements as a customer for support from industry, including QinetiQ, in the normal way.

In common with other defence suppliers, it is a matter for QinetiQ to determine the appropriate staffing and resource levels it needs to meet any requirements placed upon it by MOD.

I refer my hon. Friend to the additional information I have provided today in answer to her question on the relationship between the Sea Technology Group of the Defence Procurement Agency and QinetiQ.

Royal Navy Vessels

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent IT upgrades have been made to Royal Navy vessels; how this improves capability; and if he will make a statement.
[86299]

Mr. Ingram: The Navy Star Programme provides key IS support to RN vessels. A common IT infrastructure is being progressively deployed across the fleet. With the exception of two vessels, the programme will be complete by 2005. The rate of deployment is constrained by the availability of suitable fitting opportunities. All ship's staff have access to the system, which supports a comprehensive range of administrative and operational support applications, as well as standard OA facilities. An e-mail capability provides connectivity to shore users, including families and friends for welfare purposes. The system is refreshed on a cycle of upgrades to sustain and improve capability.

A significant number of Royal Navy Command Support Systems, used for the planning and execution of maritime and amphibious operations, have been deployed operationally (39 ships and 10 shore units). An incremental rollout programme delivers regular capability enhancements. The most recent of these enhancements has been to upgrade the hardware in 2001 and 2002 to provide the latest commercial off-the-shelf systems, giving better performance and reliability. Software has also recently been improved with the release of Version 7 software. This will give direct benefit to the new Landing Platform Dock (Replacement) amphibious ships and also the aircraft carriers in their role as NATO High Readiness Force (Maritime) Commander.

In addition to the above, the Ship Command System in the aircraft carriers and TYPE 42 destroyers, including the Landing Platform: Helicopter—HMS Ocean, is undergoing a programme to replace obsolescent display screens. The Endurance and Archer class inshore training vessels have also had electronic planned maintenance systems fitted to improve availability.

A large proportion of the electrical/electronics systems fitted within RN vessels and their weapons systems use computers or incorporate software or firmware to support their specific functionality. Such equipment is not considered to fall within the heading of 'information technology, and accordingly, has not been included in this answer.

Subcontractors (Prompt Payment)

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements are in place to guarantee prompt payments to subcontractors working on Defence Estates projects.
[88597]

Dr. Moonie: Defence Estates is bound by the statutory requirements of the Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1998 that imposes an obligation on it and its contractors to pay all valid invoices within 30 days.

DEFRA

Agriculture and Fisheries Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the outcome was of the Agriculture and Fisheries Council held in Brussels on 16–19 December; what the

Government's stance was on the issues discussed, including its voting record; and if she will make a statement. [89057]

Mr. Morley: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I represented the United Kingdom at the meeting of the Agriculture and Fisheries Council in Brussels on 16–20 December 2002. The Scottish Minister for Environment and Rural Development and the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State with responsibility for Agriculture and Rural Development in Northern Ireland also attended.

The Council, after lengthy negotiation, reached conclusions by qualified majority on the linked matters of Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) reform, urgent measures to bring about the recovery of cod stocks and the setting of total allowable catches (TACs) and quotas for 2003.

On CFP reform, the Council's conclusions were embodied in three new regulations, one addressing the conservation and sustainable exploitation of fishing resources and redefining the basic framework of the CFP, one permitting an emergency Community measure for scrapping fishing vessels, and one amending the provisions concerning Community structural assistance in the fisheries sector. Key features, including some points which the UK fought hard to secure, are:

renewal for a further 10 years of the regime confining access to the 6 to 12 mile zones to fishing vessels which have traditionally fished there;

renewal of the Shetland Box pending a Commission review during 2003 of all such access restrictions to determine whether their continued application is justified in conservation terms;

retention of the principle of relative stability for allocating fishing opportunities among member states on the basis of historical fishing patterns, explicitly including the Hague Preference arrangements which can provide additional fishing opportunities to the UK and Ireland when TACs fall below determined trigger levels;

confirmation, in relation to the access which Spain, Portugal and Finland gain to the North Sea from 1 January 2003 under their Treaties of Accession, that there has been no adjustment to allocations of regulated stocks in favour of these member states, which may fish only for unregulated stocks. There is also a commitment to monitor any consequential impact on regulated stocks;

commitment to a multi-annual approach to stock management based on recovery plans, involving effort limitation where necessary, for stocks which are outside safe biological limits, and management plans for other stocks. Recovery plans will be developed during 2003 for southern hake, sole in the Western Channel and Bay of Biscay, Rockall haddock, and nephrops in the Cantabrian Sea and off the Iberian peninsula;

provision to establish Regional Advisory Councils to improve the participation of fishermen and other stakeholders in the process of managing fisheries;

the ending of public aid for the building of fishing vessels at the end of 2004. In the meantime such aid will be restricted to member states who have met national limits on fleet capacity and to vessels under 400 GT. Entry of vessels to the fleet will have to be balanced by the removal of tonnage without aid, in accordance with an entry/exit ratio. Where a vessel of over 100 gross tonnes built with grant aid enters the fleet, vessels equivalent to 135 per cent. of its tonnage must be removed;

aid for modernising fishing vessels will be available only for vessels that are at least five-years-old to improve safety, product quality or working conditions, to switch to more selective fishing techniques, or to equip vessels with Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS);

an increase in the maximum rate of EU scrapping grant was agreed, to help member states achieve the decommissioning of vessels whose fishing effort has to be reduced by 25 per cent. or more under the terms of a recovery plan;

aid for the permanent transfer of EU vessels to third countries will cease at the end of 2004 and be subjected to conditions in the meantime;

a range of improvements will be made to the coherence of enforcement and control arrangements and the imposition of sanctions, with the Commission taking a stronger monitoring and co-ordinating role and VMS being extended to vessels over 18 metres from 1 January 2004 and to vessels over 15 metres from 1 January 2005.

On TACs and quotas, the Council started by examining a Commission proposal whose central element was severe cuts, equating to an 80 per cent. reduction in fishing mortality, in the TACs for the cod stocks for which scientists recommended a fishing moratorium, together with the species (haddock and whiting) most closely associated with them, as well as substantial TAC cuts for other associated species. A solution was negotiated under which higher TACs than proposed by the Commission were adopted alongside an emergency recovery measure for cod based on a much simplified approach which the Commission brought forward in the course of the Council.

The recovery measure is incorporated as Annex XVII to the Regulation setting TACs and quotas for 2003, and will control effort from 1 February 2003 by limiting days which may be spent at sea by vessels which catch cod in the North Sea, West of Scotland and Skaggerak and Kattegat. Vessels under 10 metres in length are not subject to these controls. Different limitations (expressed as numbers of days absent from port per calendar month) are set according to the type of gear carried. Hence some vessels (eg pelagic trawlers) fall outside the scheme altogether, while nephrops vessels will be allowed 25 days per month. The number of days to be allowed for whitefish demersal trawlers was absolutely critical for the UK, given the unacceptable and devastating effect the Commission's opening suggestion of seven days per calendar month would have had on our industry. The eventual outcome was that we secured a commitment that under the terms of the various conditions attached to the limitations in the EU measure, UK whitefish demersal trawlers would be allowed a total of 15 days absent from port per month.

The measure allows for some flexibility to move days between months and between vessels. The operational details for these new arrangements will be worked up urgently, in close consultation with the industry. The Council and Commission envisage that, with this emergency measure in place, a more sophisticated regime will be developed for implementation from 1 July 2003, based on proposals to be brought forward by the Commission by 15 February and agreed by the Council by the end of March.

On this basis, the Council set TACs and quotas for 2003 which broadly maintain 2002 levels for pelagic stocks and nephrops but significantly reduce TACs for key whitefish species such as cod, haddock, whiting and anglerfish. Reductions of the order of 50 per cent. in the TACs for these latter species in the North Sea and West of Scotland represent a considerable gain in fishing opportunities compared with the Commission's original proposals, whilst significantly enhancing the prospects for the recovery of these stocks in the long term. The closure to sandeel fishing of the area off the north east British coast, as applied for the last three years, is renewed for 2003. For Irish Sea stocks, it was agreed that the 2002 cod recovery arrangements, which include a springtime closure of part of the Irish Sea, should continue for 2003 with reduced TACS for such stocks as cod, haddock and whiting.

The Council agreed a re-allocation of existing Spanish structural funds to provide financial support to Spanish fishermen and mussel and oyster growers affected by the Prestige oil spill.

The Council agreed the conclusions of the Commission's action plan for the Mediterranean, which envisages the development of specific management measures for the area.

The Commissioner also presented a draft regulation on the management of fishing effort in western waters. He explained that he considered this to be necessary to eliminate any legal uncertainty concerning the applicability of some of the measures to the activities of Spanish and Portuguese vessels, following the expiry on 31 December 2002 of the transitional period foreseen in the 1985 Act of Accession. No decisions were reached on this proposal, which will be examined by the Council in coming months.

The Council reached unanimous political agreement on measures to update food hygiene rules applying to products of animal origin. It also reached political agreement by qualified majority on measures to update EU rules on the use of additives in animal feed.

The Council also agreed conclusions on animal welfare in third countries and on mutual assistance between member states regarding animal welfare. The Commission reported progress on developing further proposals on the protection of animals in transport.

The Council was unable to reach agreement on a proposal for new rules governing feedstuffs for organic livestock. Under the relevant Comitology procedures, the Commission will adopt the new measure under its own powers in January. The Commission, having reported on the progress of its work to develop an EU level Action Plan for Organic Food and Farming, was remitted to continue its efforts and report further by the end of 2003.

The Council approved by qualified majority arrangements to protect the EU market from a surge in low priced cereals from Russia and the Ukraine. The Commission reported agreements reached with the US and Canada to establish reduced tariff quotas for certain cereals and the Council authorised the Commission to implement the deal from the beginning of 2003.

Over lunch, the Commission presented a paper which it proposes to submit to the WTO in the context of the Doha Round negotiations on agriculture. It proposed a number of specific reductions in tariff levels, export subsidies and domestic support. I welcomed the paper as an important first step in the process now leading up to the Cancun Ministerial meeting in September while warning that our negotiating partners were likely to press for a more ambitious outcome.

Under other business, Germany reported national action it had taken to reduce levels of acrylamide in food; and Italy raised concerns over the co-existence of GM and conventional agriculture.

Animal Welfare

Mr. Prosser: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) how many live sheep were exported from Dover to continental Europe on 11 December; when and where health certification was carried out in respect of the sheep; how many of the sheep were rejected as unfit for the intended journey *(a)* during inspection for health certification purposes and *(b)* at Dover docks, and to where those sheep were taken; and what the address was of the final destination given on the route plan for each of the consignments; [88569]

(2) how many live sheep were exported from Dover to continental Europe on 14 December; when and where health certification was carried out in respect of the sheep; how many of the sheep were rejected as unfit for the intended journey *(a)* during inspection for health certification purposes and *(b)* at Dover docks; and to where those sheep were taken; and what was the address of the final destination given on the route plan for each of the consignments. [88877]

Mr. Morley: The information requested is as follows:

Date	*Total animals*	*Where consignments were certified*	*Animals rejected at certification*	*Animals rejected at Dover docks*	*Destination*
11 December 2002	2,197	England, Scotland and Wales	14	1	France
14 December 2002	2,854	England	0	0	Italy

The sheep for the consignments listed above were certified within 48 hours prior to export. The consignments that sailed on 11 December were fattening animals and were transported to holdings. The consignments that sailed on 14 December went to approved slaughterhouses. The animals which were rejected at certification and at Dover docks remained in Great Britain.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent legislation ensures the protection of the welfare of

animals during transport abroad; and what penalties can be imposed against those who break these regulations. [88727]

Mr. Morley: The welfare of animals during transport is protected by EU Directive 91/628/EEC, as amended, which is implemented and enforced by each member state within its own jurisdiction. The Welfare of Animals (Transport) Order 1997, as amended, implements the directive in Great Britain and a breach of the Order is punishable on conviction by a fine not exceeding £5,000 (or £1,000 per animal if more than 10 animals are involved).

Bovine TB

Diana Organ: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many badgers have been slaughtered as a result of the Krebs' trial to investigate the relationship between badgers and bovine TB. [88970]

Mr. Morley: About 5,000 badgers have been culled in the course of the badger culling trial.

Further information on the number of badgers culled is updated at the end of each culling season. Therefore, information on the number of badgers killed up to and during the 2002–03 season will be made available after the next closed season commences on 1 February.

Fisheries

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether Her Majesty's Government funding under European Union Public Aid rules will be given to areas of the United Kingdom affected by reductions in UK fishing effort. [87632]

Mr. Morley: Funding is already available on a regional level for economic development. The needs of fishing communities will be assessed in the light of the December Agriculture and Fisheries Council.

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 10 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 193W, on fisheries, if she will calculate the total average number of days at sea multiplied by the total number of kilowatts of engine power for vessels in the under 10 metres sector capturing and landing cod in the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea, Sea Areas *(a)* North Sea, *(b)* Irish Sea, *(c)* West of Scotland, Waters and *(d)* Area VIId. [87807]

Mr. Morley: Vessels in the under 10 metre sector of the UK fishing fleet are not obliged to submit European Community logbook declarations covering their fishing trips. These submissions are required in order for accurate days at sea information to be available for individual vessels. As such the raw data required to calculate the information requested is not available.

Flooding

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what flooding studies were conducted by the Environment Agency in 1999; and of these studies, what recommended work *(a)* has been carried out and *(b)* remains to be carried out. [86986]

Mr. Morley: I understand that the Environment Agency conducted 262 flood defence feasibility studies during the 1999–2000 financial year. 166 works have been completed; 24 are under construction; 44 are to be carried out in the future and 28 were found to be unjustified.

Agency region	*Number of flood studies conducted*	*Number of works carried out*	*Number of works under construction*	*Number of works to be carried out in the future*	*Number that were unjustified*
Anglian	104	94	0	10	0
Midlands	36	18	5	0	13
North East	21	14	2	3 (2003–04) 2(2004–05)	0
North West	9	3	3	3	0
Southern	24	21	2	1 (dependent upon compensatory land acquisition)	0
South West	22	9	0	9 (within the 3 year plan 2003–06)	2 (2 remain under consideration)
Thames	27	7	12	8	8
EA Wales	19	0	0	16	3

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if the Government will provide flood insurance cover for those homes unprotected to the minimum standard of the Association of British Insurers from 2007. [87778]

Mr. Morley: The Association of British Insurers have stated that they will review the situation with Government on a regular basis. Insurance matters are for the Treasury, but there appear to be no grounds for Government intervention as insurance for flood risk is available to by far the majority of those properties situated on the floodplain. People must remember that the insurance industry is a competitive one and they may benefit from 'shopping around'.

The nature of the risk in undefended areas means that insurers cannot guarantee to maintain cover, but will examine the risks on a case by case basis, use their best efforts to continue to provide cover and will work with the owners of domestic properties and small businesses which they currently insure to see what action could be taken by the property owner, the Environment Agency and the local authority, which might make the property

insurable in some form. This action might include the use of accredited products, flood resilient materials and temporary defences to defend the property.

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in which of the areas affected by flooding in autumn 2000 the Government is recommending the removal of buildings on the flood plains. [88997]

Mr. Morley: Defra provides grant to local operating authorities for flood defence capital works that meet certain criteria. However responsibility for deciding which projects to promote and their timing rests with the operating authorities.

The information requested is not readily available from all operating authorities. The Environment Agency advise that they are not aware of any specific proposals, following the autumn 2000 floods, to buy properties in the floodplain and remove them as the solution to flooding.

However, some flood protection schemes involve property acquisition to allow defences to be built, and in some areas where effective flood alleviation is difficult then the long term solution may be relocation outside the flood risk area as buildings reach the end of their useful life.

Krebs Trial

Diana Organ: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether the Krebs' trial is being carried out in 10 triplet sites as originally planned. [88971]

Mr. Morley: The Krebs trial is being carried out in 10 triplets as originally planned.

Late Payments

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the policy is of the Rural Payments Agency in respect of interest payable on late payments; and if she will make a statement. [88900]

Alun Michael: Government Departments and agencies of Government Departments are bound by the rules of Government accounting. In accordance with long established Government policy, compensation is not payable for delays in payment due to industrial action. Payment of compensation for delays in payment not due to industrial action are considered on their merits, provided that the payees own conduct has not contributed to the delay.

In keeping with this policy the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) will be making compensation payments, subject to a de minimus level of £50 per producer, to those producers who have experienced delays beyond the regulatory deadline of 30 June 2002, in receiving their 2001 scheme year bovine balance payments, as a result of failure by either the RPA or the British Cattle Movement Service (BCMS). Details are on the RPA website.

Milk Quotas

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many milk quota holders there were in the UK in each of the last five years; and how many of those quotas were non-producing. [88147]

Mr. Morley: Details of the total number of quota holders for each year 1997–98 to 2001–02, and of those, the presumed number of non-producing quota holders (NPQHs), are contained in the table.

The 'quota holders' figure for each year in the table is the number of permanent quota holders at the end of the quota year. It is considered that the most representative figures on NPQHs, prior to 1999, are the number of quota holders who have leased out a high proportion of their quota in any given year. The figures given in the last three columns in the table are thus for the number of permanent quota holders who leased out the percentages of their quota shown, and might therefore be assumed to be NPQHs. The corresponding figures for 2002–03 will not be known until after the end of the quota year.

Quota year	*Quota holders*	*100 per cent.*	*95 per cent.*	*91 per cent.*
1997–98	37,090	5,309	5,783	5,855
1998–99	35,711	5,663	6,025	6,094
1999–2000	34,663	6,181	6,556	6,621
2000–01	33,106	5,778	6,412	6,529
2001–02	31,605	6,099	6,792	6,937

Pigmeat

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total weight was of pigmeat sales in the United Kingdom in each year from 1972 to 2001. [87295]

Mr. Morley: Information on the quantity of pigmeat sold in the United Kingdom is not available. However, information is available on the amount of pigmeat supplies, in the form of pork, and of bacon and ham, in the United Kingdom, and this is given in the table.

No data is available on the uses to which the supplies of pork and of bacon and ham are subsequently put. These uses may be for retail as meat or for catering or for foodstuffs which require further processing, some of which may subsequently be exported.

More detailed production and supplies tables may be found on the Defra website at http://www.defra.gov.uk/.

UK supplies of pork and bacon

000 tonnes

	Total new supply[1] of:	
	Pork	*Bacon and ham*
1972[2]	662	639
1973	687	565
1974	678	529
1975	582	482
1976	586	476
1977	652	506

UK supplies of pork and bacon

000 tonnes

	Total new supply[1] of:	
	Pork	*Bacon and ham*
1978	660	519
1979	715	517
1980	707	509
1981	720	496
1982	731	477
1983	747	477
1984	709	467
1985	712	468
1986	726	466
19873	775	459
1988	796	457
1989	759	458
1990	765	445
1991	772	441
19923	768	418
1993	796	450
1994	798	451
1995	772	467
1996	806	497
1997	817	471
19983	829	459
1999	831	457
2000	790	468
2001	832	471

1 New supply: production plus imports less exports.

2 Average of 1970–1972.

3 For comparability with other years, the figures have been adjusted from a 53-week to a 52-week basis where appropriate.

Sources:

1972–1984: 'A Hundred Years of British Food & Farming: A Statistical Survey', H F Marks.

1984–2001: Defra

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Child Soldiers

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps are being taken to reduce the numbers of children involved in armed conflict, following the report by the UN Secretary General of 16 December on child soldiers. [88678]

Clare Short: The UN Secretary General's report covered many aspects of the problems of children affected by armed conflict, including their direct involvement. The most effective way to reduce the impact of armed conflict on children, their families and communities, is to prevent, reduce and resolve armed conflicts. My Department is working with other Government Departments to intensify UK efforts to resolve conflict. In relation to children affected by armed conflict, my Department is supporting UNICEF through a multi-year capacity-building project to increase its ability to work with all concerned to decrease the impact of armed conflict on children and to support the disarmament, demobilisation and rehabilitation of child soldiers. We have also been supporting the work of the Secretary General's special representative on children and armed conflict. UNICEF's work on establishing national immunisation days (NIDs), mentioned in the report, is also supported by my Department.

Côte d'Ivoire

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the humanitarian situation in Côte d'Ivoire; what the Government's policy is on humanitarian aid to Côte d'Ivoire; and if she will make a statement. [88734]

Clare Short: Precise information on the extent of humanitarian needs remains incomplete. Large numbers of people, particularly among immigrant communities but also Ivorian citizens and refugees, have been displaced due to the conflict. There are real humanitarian needs and the situation could deteriorate quickly with scope for further conflict. In December, as an initial response to immediate needs, we released 2,000 tents, 30,000 blankets and 200 rolls of plastic sheeting from our emergency relief stockpile to boost UNHCR's regional stockpile in Accra, Ghana; also contributed towards an urgent airlift of UNHCR relief items to Liberia. I have also recently approved a contribution of £1 million towards appeals from agencies working in Cote d'Ivoire. We continue to monitor the humanitarian situation and are working closely with others in the international community to try to bring about a swift and peaceful resolution to the conflict.

Democratic Republic of Congo

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations she has made to the Committee for International Investment and Multinational Enterprises to consult with *(a)* NGOs and *(b)* others regarding the report of the UN Panel of Experts on the economic causes of conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo. [88702]

Clare Short: The UK, along with other members of the Security Council, has asked for more information on the claims made in the panel's latest report. We have asked specifically for information on the allegations made against UK companies and nationals. We have yet to receive this material. Once we do we will take a view on what further action to pursue, both nationally and through OECD channels.

Eritrea

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the food aid requirements of Eritrea. [88684]

Clare Short: The Eritrean Government, the UN and NGOs estimate that the crop figure for 2002 is just over 50,000 MT, which is about 20 per cent. of an average annual crop.

The Government's Appeal and the UN Consolidated Appeal, which was released on 19 November 2002, estimates that the drought-affected population is 1.4 million people out of a total population of 3.34 million. An additional 910,000 people are targeted for assistance comprising internally displaced people, returnees, soldiers to be demobilised and vulnerable urban dwellers. The Eritrean Government appealed for 477,000 MT of food aid for 2003, of which 290,000 is for the drought affected population.

Iraq

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what development projects her Department has supported in Iraq since the Gulf war in the rehabilitation of the country; and how much was financed for each project; [89122]

(2) what development projects her Department has supported in Iraq since the Gulf War for the rehabilitation of the country which have focussed on women and children; and how much was financed for each project. [89120]

Clare Short: Since 1991, my Department has provided funding solely for humanitarian assistance projects in Iraq. Total bilateral funding has amounted to just over £100 million. Several of the projects funded were specifically focused on women and children, although all the projects to some degree benefited women and children.

Specific data on each project is not available, except at disproportionate cost. Total annual bilateral programme expenditure for Iraq for each financial year during this period was as follows:

Programme Expenditure

	£
1991/92	34,283,000;
1992/93	4,135,000;
1993/94	9,115,000;
1994/95	7,654,000;
1995/96	6,954,000;
1996/97	6,282,000;
1997/98	3,351,000;
1998/99	5,749,000;
1999/00	6,585,000;
2000/01	9,545,000;
2001/02	7,760,000

Ivory Coast

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions her Department has had with the UNHCR on refugees fleeing the Ivory Coast into Liberia. [87092]

Clare Short *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* The UN launched an appeal on 11 November for humanitarian assistance as a result of the conflict in Cote d'Ivoire, including for support to Liberian refugees wishing to return home. We are still considering our response to the appeal.

As an initial response we have provided 2,000 tents, 30,000 blankets and 200 rolls of plastic sheeting from our emergency relief stockpile to boost UNHCR's regional stockpile in Accra, Ghana. We have also contributed towards an urgent airlift of UNHCR relief items to Liberia.

Malawi

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent discussions she has had on the humanitarian situation in Malawi. [89048]

Clare Short: I remain in regular contact with my officials in Malawi about the humanitarian situation there. A recent UN assessment concluded that 2.2 million people are currently in need of food assistance. This will rise to 3.25 million—a third of the population—between now and March, after which the 2003 harvest will begin. So far, the rains have been good.

DFID's emergency assistance to help deal with the food situation, now totals £34.5 million. This includes £4 million which I approved just before Christmas to support WHO/UNICEF disease surveillance and control, for supplementary feeding programmes and food distribution to people living in AIDS affected households.

Mozambique

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what potential there is for the replacement of maize by sorghum as the staple crop of southern Mozambique. [88681]

Clare Short: There has been a trend towards reintroduction of sorghum in southern Mozambique to promote resilience to drought. However, the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) recently held a meeting that concluded that sorghum is not an ideal alternative to maize in southern Mozambique.

Though sorghum resists drought a little bit better than maize, it is not a drought resistant crop, it is very labour intensive, has a long growing period and has high demands on soil fertility and moisture. Maize has also tended to experience steady market prices and an unlimited demand on the market as an export crop for Europe.

The FAO meeting concluded that the best solution for southern Africa would be to identify patches with the right conditions for either maize or sorghum, and that the success of the introduction of any new crop will depend on the prevailing economic and marketing prospects.

Palestine

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the total UK aid to the Palestinian Authority was in each year since 1999. [88612]

Clare Short: The total UK aid to the Palestinian Authority in each year is:

	£ million
1999–2000	8
2000–01	9
2001–02	14.5
2002–03	15 (estimated outturn)

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the recent report by Catherine Bertini on the level of UK development funds allocated to Palestinians. [88613]

Clare Short: Catherine Bertini's report, and the subsequent UN Humanitarian Plan of Action, stimulated a very useful debate in the international community on how best to respond to the growing humanitarian crisis in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. I agreed in October 2002 an additional £5 million DFID contribution to help meet most urgent needs of the Palestinian people. Total projected expenditure for support to Palestinians for this financial year is now £32 million. This comprises £15 million bilaterally and £17 million through UNRWA.

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what emergency funds are being made available by the UK to assist Palestinians impoverished by Israeli military actions. [88614]

Clare Short: We are providing support for a number of emergency programmes, including non-salary budgetary support, trauma counselling, special educational needs and UNRWA's emergency appeals. This year, out of estimated bilateral expenditure of £15 million, we anticipate that about £8 million will be for 'emergency' programmes. In addition, we have contributed £7 million to UNRWA's emergency appeal for 2002.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what contributions her Department has made to assist UNRWA in its work with Palestinians in the Occupied Territories; and if she will make a statement. [88693]

Clare Short: UNRWA's needs are urgent, and it is critical to ensure that it receives consistent and predictable levels of support. The UK is UNRWA's second largest bilateral donor. In addition to our funding for UNRWA's regular budget—£42 million over the last three years—we have contributed over £20 million for UNRWA's emergency appeals in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Peru

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether her Department selected the agencies to oversee the *(a)* management and *(b)* distribution of the recent grant to the Department of Health in Peru. [89043]

Clare Short: The management agency for this programme has not yet been selected. A decision on the short-listed agencies will be taken by participating Peruvian institutions and DFID.

Zambia

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent discussions she has had on the humanitarian situation in Zambia. [89046]

Clare Short: The humanitarian crisis in Southern Africa was discussed at the 18 November meeting of the EU Council of Ministers. I have written to my counterparts in OECD countries urging them to give greater support to help relieve the humanitarian crisis in Zambia. The situation in Zambia is extremely serious with about 3 million people in need of assistance. The UK has provided over £14 million of assistance in response to the humanitarian crisis in Zambia since September 2001.

Zimbabwe

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what impact fuel shortages are having on the transportation of food aid in Zimbabwe. [88685]

Clare Short: Fuel supplies have been erratic in Zimbabwe for the last three years. The problem is a direct consequence of economic mismanagement. Foreign exchange to pay for fuel is very scarce, yet it is still sold at controlled prices that do not cover costs.

Larger organisations such as the UN and International NGOs, and other Government missions including DFID, have contracted to purchase fuel direct from importers at world-market rates and pay in foreign currency. The WFP has buffer stocks, some of which are in the rural areas and their feeding programmes are not likely to be seriously disrupted.

Smaller organisations that rely on the commercial transport industry to distribute their food have been harder hit. However, these too are becoming more adept in covering short-term fuel problems, either through building up a reserve when fuel is available, or pre-positioning food supplies in rural areas. DFID's feeding partner organisations all pre-positioned food in the rural areas for the Christmas and new year period, and food distribution has continued.

The short-term impact of fuel shortages has therefore been minimal to date.

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent discussions she has had on the humanitarian situation in Zimbabwe. [89047]

Clare Short: The humanitarian crisis in Southern Africa was discussed at the 18 November meeting of the EU Council of Ministers. I have written to my counterparts in OECD countries urging them to give greater support to help relieve the humanitarian crisis in Zimbabwe. The situation in Zimbabwe is a disaster. Of the 15.5 million people in need of food in southern Africa, 6.5 million are in Zimbabwe. One in three adults in Zimbabwe are infected with HIV. The UK has provided £38 million of assistance in response to the humanitarian crisis in Zimbabwe since September 2001.

PRIME MINISTER

EU (Institutional Change)

Keith Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister what progress has been made on the proposals for EU institutional change pursued in his joint letter with Chancellor Schröder of 25 February 2002; and what steps he will take to ensure that these targets of institutional change are reached. [89026]

The Prime Minister: The European Council at Seville agreed a number of practical changes that do not require Treaty amendment but do improve the effectiveness and

transparency of the Council. These are now in place. They focus on improving the practices of the European Council, reform of the General Affairs Council, delivering more openness when legislating on dossiers subject to co-decision, and rationalising the number of sectoral Council formations from 16 to 9. These changes have already led to more effective preparation of European Council meetings during the Danish Presidency.

Heads of State and Government at Seville also agreed that the Council should consider further change in parallel with the Convention on the Future of Europe. The European Council at Copenhagen took note of a Presidency paper that set out possible models for Council reform. The Government will also continue to pursue these issues in the Convention.

EU Enlargement

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Prime Minister what his policy is on the further extension of European Union membership into Eastern Europe and North Africa; and if he will make a statement. [88803]

The Prime Minister: The European Union Treaty stipulates that any European State which respects the principles set out in the Treaty may apply to become a member of the Union. In addition, applicants have to meet the Copenhagen criteria, which relate to democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights and protection of minorities, a functioning market economy with the capacity to withstand competitive pressure in the EU, and the ability to take on the obligations of membership.

It is too early to say how far the EU might enlarge in the future. The EU has already recognised the countries of the Western Balkans as potential candidates. With UK support, the EU will be considering how it should further develop its relations with the countries to its east. The countries of North Africa are not European States.

EU Structure

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister to whom his speech of 28 November on the future structure of the European Union was distributed prior to delivery; and whether it has been presented to the Convention on the Future of Europe. [88710]

The Prime Minister: My speech was not distributed outside Government prior to delivery. After the speech, the text was passed to interested parties including members of the Convention on the Future of Europe, and as usual it is available on the No. 10 website.

Turkey (EU Accession)

Keith Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the European Council decision to postpone negotiations on Turkey's accession to the EU; and what steps he plans to take to assist Turkey's accession. [89022]

The Prime Minister: The Copenhagen European Council marked a step forward in Turkey's accession to the EU. It decided that if the European Council in December 2004, on the basis of a report and a recommendation from the Commission, decides that Turkey fulfils the Copenhagen political criteria, the European Union will open accession negotiations with Turkey without delay.

The new UK Action Plan for Turkey includes a wide range of bilateral reform initiatives, aimed at helping Turkey prepare for EU membership.

Written Constitution

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister what recent discussions he has had on establishing a written constitution for the UK. [88926]

The Prime Minister: None.

TRANSPORT

Aircraft Security

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to improve security checks on aircraft users from non-UK based airlines, flying into the UK; and if he will make a statement. [88444]

Mr. Jamieson: The UK supports the principle of host state responsibility, whereby each state is responsible for the security of civil aircraft leaving that state. This is enshrined in Annex 17 to the Chicago Convention 1944.

My Department liaises closely with international fora such as the International Civil Aviation Organisation, European Civil Aviation Conference and the European Union to improve aviation security standards across the world. The UK has contributed to the development of EU regulations which are about to be published, making basic security standards mandatory in the Union. In addition, there is also close liaison with the US Transport Security Administration, the Israeli Security Agency and equivalent bodies of other key international partners on aviation security issues.

Using the powers of the Aviation Security Act 1982, all non-UK carriers flying into the UK have been required since 11 November to ensure that all flight doors are locked while in UK airspace or on the ground while the engines are in operation, that the flight crew do not leave the flight deck other than for certain specified reasons, and that passengers cannot obtain access to the flight deck while in UK airspace.

As regards UK carrier operations from overseas airports, my Department issues guidance on the recommended security measures that should be implemented where the threat to those operations dictates. Departmental inspectors have been undertaking a programme of visits to particular locations to assess the security afforded to and carried out by UK carriers and, where appropriate, liaise with the relevant authorities to improve standards. The frequency and coverage of these inspections has been stepped up significantly in recent months.

My Department will shortly be establishing Regional Aviation Security Advisers in East Africa and the Middle East. Their role will be to advise and assist the relevant authorities to improve aviation security standards in those areas and to assess and influence how

flights to the UK are secured. Further appointments are planned for West Africa, South East Asia and the Indian sub-continent later in the year.

Airport Capacity

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the outside consultancy firms which have been appointed to undertake work in connection with his consultation on airport capacity in the South East, together with *(a)* the tasks assigned and *(b)* the value of the contracts awarded in each case; and if he will make a statement. [88280]

Mr. Jamieson: The following table lists the organisations that have carried out work on the South East and East of England Regional Air Services (SERAS) Study and have provided advisory support for the Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom (South East) consultation. Their areas of expertise are also indicated. The total cost of their work since the SERAS study began in January 2000 is approximately £5 million. This does not include NOP and Avia Solutions, as their costs cannot be broken down by region.

Organisation	*Area of expertise*
Civil Aviation Authority	Noise, airspace
Halcrow Fox	SERAS managing consultants, wide range of appraisal work
Ove Arup & Partners	Airport optioneering, land use and urbanisation
AEA Technology	Air quality
Scott Wilson	New airport site search, environmental appraisal
QinetiQ	Climate change
Crown Business Communications	Event management
Avia Solutions	Response analysis
NOP	Questionnaire analysis
NATS	Air traffic control
Booz Allen Hamilton	New south east airport: airline development

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many people have responded to his consultation on the future of airport capacity in the south-east in the form of *(a)* petitions, *(b)* letters, *(c)* questionnaires and *(d)* detailed submissions; [88493]

(2) if he will make a statement on the level of response which he has had to his consultation on airport capacity in the south-east. [88494]

Mr. Jamieson: By 18 December, for the south-east region, 33 petitions, over 25,000 letters (including a number of detailed submissions from both members of the public and organisations), and 11,000 completed NOP questionnaires in response to the consultation had been received.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport announced to Parliament on 28 November that the consultation on airports capacity will be kept open until we have consulted on options for new runways in relation to Gatwick. We aim to publish a further consultation document shortly.

Broadway-Honeybourne Railway

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take steps to ensure that no developments prejudice the re-opening of the railway line between Broadway and Honeybourne; and if he will make a statement. [88417]

Mr. Jamieson: This is a matter in the first instance for Wychavon district council as the local planning authority. I understand that a planning application has been made by SUSTRANS for a cycle track along a section of the Gloucestershire and Warwickshire railway line which also extends into Cotswold district. This is for the authorities to determine and it would not be appropriate for Ministers to become involved in this local matter.

As part of the planning application process, details of all developments close to railway lines (whether in use or disused) are referred to the Strategic Rail Authority who will comment as appropriate.

Certificates of Equivalent Competency

Mr. Prosser: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many certificates of equivalent competency have been issued to foreign seafarers by the UK maritime administration in each year since the scheme was established. [88903]

Mr. Jamieson: The Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) has issued the following number of certificates of equivalent competency in each year since the scheme began in 1997:

	Number
1997	37
1998	257
1999	363
2000	1,107
2001	2,337
2002	2,033

Commercial Aircraft (Terrorism)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of terrorist threats to British commercial aircraft from handheld ground to air missile launchers; and what advice has been issued by his Department. [88521]

Mr. Jamieson: Terrorist threats are assessed on a continual basis and appropriate advice issued. The Government do not believe that it is appropriate to disclose advice issued in relation to such matters for obvious reasons.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the British fleet of commercial aviation will be protected by electronic counter measures equipment over and above Goodrich video surveillance apparatus. [88520]

Mr. Jamieson: We are seeking specialist advice to establish the technical feasibility of fitting electronic counter measures to UK civil aviation fleets.

Community Transport Schemes

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representation he has received in respect of amending regulations relating to community transport schemes so as to facilitate their development. [88982]

Mr. Jamieson: We have had several discussions with the Community Transport Association and the Association of Transport Co-ordinating Officers about the regulations affecting community transport.

Regulations were brought forward in England, with effect from 1 May 2002, to extend the Bus Service Operators Grant (formerly Fuel Duty Rebate) to a wider range of community transport services. I understand that the National Assembly for Wales has introduced similar provisions with effect from 14 August 2002.

In addition we have recently consulted on proposals (affecting both England and Wales) to facilitate the registration of flexibly routed bus services, which should increase the scope for community operators (among others) to register such services. We are now analysing the responses.

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what provisions are in force for the exemption of community transport vehicles from vehicle excise duty when *(a)* they are used exclusively by disabled people and *(b)* they are used both by disabled and able bodied people. [88983]

Mr. Jamieson: The provisions governing the exemption from vehicle excise duty for vehicles used by or on behalf of disabled people are set out in schedule 2 of the Vehicle Excise and Registration Act 1994. Paragraph 20 of the schedule states that a vehicle used for the carriage of disabled people by a body recognised by the Secretary of State is exempt from vehicle excise duty. In practise this means that the body should be registered with the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee.

However, section 15(2) of the Vehicle Excise and Registration Act states that where a vehicle is used in a way which would render it liable to taxation at a higher rate, the higher rate is payable. This means that where a vehicle is used for both disabled and able-bodied people, vehicle excise duty is payable at the normal rate applicable to that vehicle.

Concorde

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the life expectancy of Concorde is; and if he will make a statement. [88956]

Mr. Jamieson: The service life of Concorde is a commercial decision, depending primarily on the rate of utilisation by the operator. The existing fatigue life of the aircraft can be extended by the operator carrying out an appropriate programme of modifications.

Consultants

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to the answer of 9 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 30W, who the specialist consultants in event management were who were commissioned to identify suitable venues to organise the public exhibitions on the airport options; and what their fee was. [87270]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* Crown Business Communications Ltd. were commissioned to organise the public exhibitions as part of the Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom consultation. Their fee for doing this work was £127,752.

Cycleways

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will meet representatives of SUSTRANS to discuss protection of the trackbed of disused railway lines for possible re-opening when planning cycleways. [88415]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department has a continuing dialogue with SUSTRANS on transport issues. On this issue it would be more appropriate for representatives of SUSTRANS to meet with the relevant officials of the Strategic Rail Authority.

Flying (DVT)

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what incentive airlines are offering their passengers to complete questionnaires on behalf of researchers involved in the WHO study into DVT and flying; [88847]

(2) how many seats on long haul flights airlines are offering free of charge to researchers to undertake clinical experiments on volunteers into the relationship between cabin atmosphere and the incidence of blood clotting as part of the WHO's study into DVT and flying; [88848]

(3) what help the researchers involved in the World Health Organisation's study into deep vein thrombosis and flying are getting from the airlines to obtain passenger lists of frequent flyers [88850]

(4) what co-operation researchers involved in the World Health Organisation's study into deep vein thrombosis and flying are receiving from airlines through the IATA medical group; and if he will make a statement [88852]

(5) what access researchers involved in the World Health Organisation's study into deep vein thrombosis and flying are getting to passengers on board aircraft through the IATA. [88851]

Mr. Jamieson: This is primarily a matter between the airlines and the researchers carrying out the World Health Organisation's study into DVT and flying, but I understand that:

(a) although the air travel costs of the researchers carrying out clinical studies have been included in the overall budget for the project, airlines have agreed to provide a number of seats free-of-charge on selected flights;

(b) airlines, through the IATA Medical Advisory Group, are cooperating in a pilot study of frequent flyers in order to test the methodology for the full-scale epidemiological study;

(c) for reasons of confidentiality airlines will not supply passenger details, but they have agreed to send out questionnaires to selected passengers and to forward the responses to the researchers;

(d) the epidemiological studies to be carried out in the first phase of the WHO project do not require access to passengers on board aircraft; and

(e) in order to maintain the integrity and the neutrality of the research the WHO decided that airlines should not be too closely involved with the study. For this reason they will not provide incentives to passengers.

Foreign Seafarers

Mr. Prosser: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many foreign seafarers have been employed on UK-registered merchant ships in each of the past five years. [88902]

Mr. Jamieson: Employment of seafarers is a matter for shipping companies and the Department does not maintain records of the nationalities of seafarers employed on UK registered ships.

In the past five years, 6,097 certificates of equivalent competency have been issued to foreign officers, and a further 10,574 have qualified for UK certificates of competency. These officers are eligible to serve on UK ships, although many serve on foreign registered vessels. (Most officers only apply for a certificate of equivalent competency when there is likelihood of employment on a UK ship).

Some limited information is available from returns of companies entered in tonnage tax, but in most cases, this only covers the last two years and does not cover all UK registered ships.

Green Ministers

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which Minister in his Department is the nominated Green Minister; how often he has attended meetings of the Green Ministers; and which official has responsibility for the DEFRA rural proofing check-list in his Department. [88459]

Mr. Jamieson: I represent the Department for Transport on the Green Ministers' committee ENV(G). It is established practice under exemption two of Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information not to disclose information relating to the proceedings of Cabinet Committees.

Policy responsibility for rural proofing lies in the Department for Transport with Regional Transport Directorate.

Illegal Minicabs

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many illegal minicabs have been stopped this year for *(a)* having no tax disc and *(b)* being unroadworthy; and what penalties were imposed; [89250]

(2) in what form and at what cost his Department, in conjunction with the Home Office, plan to advertise the undesirability of using illegal minicabs *(a)* this Christmas and New Year period and *(b)* next year. [89320]

Mr. Jamieson: It is for local enforcement authorities (district/borough councils, unitary authorities or Transport for London) and the police to publicise the undesirability of using illegal minicabs and to deal with breaches in the law by their drivers. Records are not kept centrally.

Local Bus Services

Dr. Richard Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take steps to increase the level of local bus services that are not profitable for bus operators. [88843]

Mr. Jamieson: Decisions on subsidy for local bus services that are not provided on a commercial basis are for individual local authorities, taking account of local priorities and the resources available to them in Revenue support grant and, for example, from my Department's rural bus subsidy grant scheme. I am aware there have been a number of commercial services withdrawn recently in Worcestershire and that the county council has taken action to replace a number of these with subsidised services.

M20

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what decibel level was predicted on the M20, junctions 8 and 9, at the time of the public inquiry prior to the construction of the motorway. [88346]

Mr. Jamieson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Mr. Tim Matthews, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Mr. Tim Matthews to Mr. Hugh Robertson, dated 7 January2003:

I have been asked by the Transport Minister, David Jamieson, to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about noise levels on the M20 Motorway between Junctions 8 and 9.

Regrettably, we no longer have the detailed records that were available at the public inquiry, which was held in 1986. The standard methodology used predicts noise levels based on the predicted volume of traffic together with other local factors.

The factor not taken into account at that time was the effect of the concrete surface and the significance of this emerged as soon as traffic began to use it. We have tried to prevent the problem occurring elsewhere and mitigation, in the form of noise insulation and financial compensation, was made available to those adversely affected by this section of M20.

The effects of the concrete surface on the M20 have been investigated along with 16 other roads built with this type of surface since 1988 and the Highways Agency is committed to resurfacing all of these as part of the Government's 10 Year Plan.

If you would like further information in relation to noise issues on the M20 Motorway the Area Manager, Mark Kumar, at our Dorking office would be pleased to help you. His telephone number is 01306 878115.

Marine Surveyors

Mr. Prosser: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many marine surveyors were employed by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency in each of the past five years. [88906]

Mr. Jamieson: The Maritime and Coastguard Agency have employed the following numbers of surveyors over the last 5 years.

Year	*Number*
1998	160
1999	160
2000	149
2001	157
2002	162

Open Skies Agreement

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans the UK has to denounce the open skies agreement with the USA in accordance with the recent European Court of Justice judgment. [88928]

Mr. Spellar: The UK does not have an 'open skies' agreement with the US. The ECJ judgment does not require the Government to renounce its bilateral air services agreement with the US, and the Government have no intention of doing so.

Port Developments

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations his Department has received on proposed port developments at *(a)* Southampton, *(b)* Shell Haven, *(c)* Felixstowe and *(d)* Harwich. [88581]

Mr. Jamieson: We have received a wide range of representations about these port developments, especially in respect of their potential impact on the environment, and public inquiries have either been held or have been announced in each of the cases.

Port State Control Inspections

Mr. Prosser: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many port state control inspections were carried out by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency in each of the last five years; how many ships were detained; what percentage were found with deficiencies; and how many inspections of UK ships were undertaken in each of these years. [88905]

Mr. Jamieson: The number of inspections carried out by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency in each of the last five years is as follows.

Port state control inspections of foreign ships

Year	*Number of inspections*	*Number of ships detained*	*Percentage of ships with deficiencies*
1997–98	1,890	179	73.0
1998–99	1,980	155	74.8
1999–2000	1,801	106	72.2
2000–01	1,803	116	70.1
2001–02	1,765	118	68.8

UK inspections

Year	*Number*
1997–98	3,289
1998–99	3,668
1999–2000	3,616
2000–01	4,367
2001–02	4,383

Rail Passengers (Security)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he is taking to ensure that there is clear responsibility and accountability for personal security design standards in new rolling stock to protect the public; and if he will make a statement. [88711]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department for Transport and the Strategic Rail Authority are jointly engaged on a project to improve the on-train security of both passengers and train staff. The project will identify good practice for the building, refurbishment and management of railway passenger rolling stock.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research *(a)* has been carried out in the past five years and *(b)* is in hand to identify issues connected with passenger personal security and perceptions about their surroundings on the railways; and if he will make a statement. [88713]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department is currently reviewing the personal security perceptions of public transport passengers, and has a joint project underway with the Strategic Rail Authority to improve the on-train environment for rail passengers and staff. We also undertook research three years ago to investigate the issues in developing a secure transport pilot route along the Manchester (Victoria) to Clitheroe rail route. As a result of this research, we are currently sponsoring a secure transport route co-ordinator to help implement the action plan to improve personal security. Analysing the perceptions of rail passengers has also been included in recent research projects to find out the transport needs of women, older people, and people from minority ethnic communities.

The Secure Stations Scheme is a national accreditation scheme recognising set standards of good practice in rail station, staff and passenger security. An independent survey of passenger perceptions is undertaken as part of the station's application process.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take steps to require future editions of the annual report, Railway Safety, to incorporate data and performance measures concerning the personal security of passengers during the year, and the outcomes of action taken. [88714]

Mr. Jamieson: The Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) annual report on railway safety does not contain data and performance measures concerning the personal security of passengers. The HSE does not record this information because it is not a legal requirement of the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations, 1995 (RIDDOR).

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will issue guidance to the Strategic Rail Authority that personal security is a key aspect of their responsibilities for safety; and if he will make a statement. [88712]

Mr. Jamieson: The Directions and Guidance to the Strategic Rail Authority, first issued by the Secretary of State on 11 April, state that the Authority should seek to promote the personal security of passengers travelling by rail. It should promote improved personal security at stations by encouraging accreditation under the Secure Stations Scheme and the Secured Car Park Scheme. It should also work with appropriate bodies to improve personal security on pedestrian routes to stations.

Road Tax

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what evaluation has been undertaken of pilot schemes to allow local authorities to fine and remove vehicles without a valid road tax certificate; and if he will make a statement. [89408]

Mr. Jamieson: The London Borough of Newham was the first local authority to take on devolved powers to clamp and impound unlicensed vehicles in partnership with DVLA.

During the 12 months of the pilot scheme 2,000 vehicles were wheelclamped. Half of these vehicles were released upon payment with the result that these vehicles are now correctly registered.

Surveys undertaken by Newham council before and at the end of the pilot scheme showed the level of evasion had reduced by 15per cent., the result of additional and visible enforcement in the borough.

Sandy-Bedford rail link and Bedford-Milton Keynes canal link.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what estimate he has made of changes to the annual net level of CO_2 emissions in the United Kingdom that would result from the operation of *(a)* the Sandy-Bedford rail link and *(b)* the Bedford-Milton Keynes canal link; [89405]

(2) what estimate he has made of the level of *(a)* lottery grant *(b)* landfill grant, and *(c)* other public money that would need to be made available to *(i)* bring into operation and (ii) maintain each year (A) the Sandy-Bedford rail link and (B) the Bedford-Milton Keynes canal link; [89406]

(3) what estimate he has made of *(a)* the volume of freight that could be carried by and *(b)* the number of passengers who would use *(i)* the Sandy-Bedford rail link and (ii) the Bedford-Milton Keynes canal link each year. [89404]

Mr. Jamieson: The Sandy-Bedford rail link and the Bedford-Milton Keynes canal link are possible schemes that have been considered within the London-South Midlands multi-modal study. The consultants are expected to report next month and will include an assessment of the impact on CO_2 levels for the preferred strategy across the study area as a whole. The three regional planning bodies whose areas the study relates to will then consider the recommendations of the study and pass their advice to Ministers. We would expect to announce our decisions on the study recommendations in the spring or summer of this year.

Speed Cameras

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment has been made of the effectiveness of speed cameras in reducing *(a)* speed and *(b)* accidents. [88552]

Mr. Jamieson: Speed enforcement cameras have proved to be highly effective at reducing speeding and crashes when placed at sites or along routes with a history of speed related crashes. In the first year of the safety camera pilot scheme the number of those killed and seriously injured has been reduced on average by 47 per cent. at camera sites. A full two year report of the cost recovery system for the eight pilot areas in the safety camera scheme will be published shortly, and will be made available in the Library.

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of how many speeding motorists have *(a)* been caught as a result of speed cameras and *(b)* caused accidents by sudden reduction of speed on approaching speed cameras in the last three years. [88553]

Mr. Jamieson: *(a)* The most recent year for which data are available is 2000. In 2000 733,500 drivers were either prosecuted or fined for speeding as a result of detection by camera in England and Wales. In 1999 and 1998 the numbers were respectively 498,600 and 403,800.

(b) There is no evidence that accidents are caused by motorists suddenly reducing speed at camera locations.

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions have been held with other relevant departments about the *(a)* guidelines for siting of and *(b)* design and visual acceptability of speed cameras. [88555]

Mr. Jamieson: Guidelines on camera deployment are contained in Circular Roads 1/93 that was subject to the normal consultation process. Where areas net off, additional guidelines and rules are in place. These have been approved by Ministers in consultation with the Safety Camera Project Board consisting of representatives of relevant Government Departments, the police and local authorities.

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many residents near and adjacent to speed cameras were consulted about the positioning of each camera on average in the last year for which figures are available. [88556]

Mr. Jamieson: No information is held centrally about the number of local residents that may have been consulted because there is no requirement to consult local residents on the positioning of speed cameras.

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what procedure is in place for consulting residents about siting of speed cameras. [88557]

Mr. Jamieson: There is no requirement to consult local residents on the siting of speed cameras. Highway authorities have powers under the Highways Act 1980 section 95 (A) to install and maintain on or near a highway structures and equipment for the detection of traffic offences. This includes speed camera housings and the camera equipment within.

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many speed cameras have been erected with authorisation by the Highways Agency. [88558]

Mr. Jamieson: This information is not held centrally.

Speed Cameras (Residential Areas)

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what redress is available to residents whose homes are situated adjacent to speed cameras which they deem visually unacceptable. [88554]

Mr. Jamieson: Fixed site speed cameras are structures and equipment for the detection of traffic offences. As such highway authorities have powers under the Highways Act 1980 section 95(A) to install and maintain speed cameras on or near a highway. Any resident concerned about the visual presence of camera installations may make representations to the highway authority concerned.

STCW 95 Convention

Mr. Prosser: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many seafarers have been detected by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency to be in breach of the STCW 95 Convention requirements since February 2002. [88904]

Mr. Jamieson: Inspectors from the Maritime and Coastguard Agency recorded 437 breaches of the STCW Convention between 1 February 2002 and 18 December 2002. Some of these breaches are recorded in relation to ships rather than individual seafarers.

Strategic Rail Authority (Consultants)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the technical and financial consultants employed by the Strategic Rail Authority, the nature of the assignment for each consultant, and the value of each contract. [87627]

Mr. Jamieson: The following table relates to contracts over £25,000 that have been awarded by the Strategic Rail Authority since April 2002.

Consultant	*Project*	*Contract value (£)*
AEA Technology	BR research report provision	Less than 50,000
AEA Technology	Study into why operational performance has failed to recover to pre Hatfield levels	240,000
AEA Technology	ELL Provision of timetable validation study	Less than 50,000
AEA Technology	Project Radar	Less than 50,000
Arups	Market study of coal market	Less than 50,000
Arups	Merseyrail franchise replacement programme	57,000
Arups	Joint working with Railtrack	55,000
Arups	West Coast route modernisation—Rolling stock investigation	69,000
Arups	Infrastructure project work	71,900
Arups	WARM (E) project	Less than 50,000
Booz Allen & Hamilton	Transport Appraisal Services for ELL	76,000
Booz Allen & Hamilton	Demand and economic analysis	Less than 50,000
Booz Allen & Hamilton	West Midlands rail strategy next steps	80,000
Booz Allen & Hamilton	Capacity to utilisation strategy	50,000
Booz Allen & Hamilton	Strategic Plan economic analysis	Less than 50,000
Booz Allen & Hamilton	Due diligence of Railtrack and CLG bus plan	234,000
Booz Allen & Hamilton	ECML Project support services	Less than 50,000
Booz Allen & Hamilton	High Speed Interoperability management	464,000
Booz Allen & Hamilton	ITL 2000 risk manager	Less than 50,000
Booz Allen & Hamilton	Scotrail technical advice	130,000
Booz Allen & Hamilton	ECML Rolling Stock strategy definition	Less than 50,000
Booz Allen & Hamilton	West Coast route modernisation—project	Less than 50,000
Booz Allen & Hamilton	VGR negotiations	55,000
Booz Allen & Hamilton	Baseline 3 analysis	146,000
Booz Allen & Hamilton	Tools for capacity utilisation analysis	130,000
Booz Allen & Hamilton	Virgin trains franchise negotiation	1,100,000
Booz Allen & Hamilton	Development of database for route specification and strategic modelling	243,000
Bovis	Project management services (small works)	650,000
Bovis	Technical advice on Chiltern replacement	Less than 50,000
Bovis	ECML support services	275,000
Bovis	Freight project management	137,000

Consultant	*Project*	*Contract value (£)*
Consolidated communications	Benchmarking exercise	56,000
EC Harris	Felixstowe—Nuneaton commercial assistance	Less than 50,000
EC Harris	Project baselining 2	Less than 50,000
Fluor	Project baselining RFP	75,000
Fluor	Review of RPI costs and risk management for infrastructure	75,000
Jacobs Gibb	Consultancy Support for Mark 1 rolling stock	Less than 50,000
Jacobs Gibb	Business Case manual	Less than 50,000
Jacobs Gibb	Greater Anglia replacement	100,000
Jacobs Gibb	T2000 LTS preparation and other CLRL tasks	50,000
Jacobs Gibb	Thames Trains franchise extension technical support	51,000
Jacobs Gibb	Joint working with Railtrack	50,000
Jacobs Gibb	Capacity utilisation	130,000
Jacobs Gibb	Mrk 1 strategic reserve vehicles	Less than 50,000
Jacobs Gibb	The impact of crossrail on the national rail network	128,000
Jarvis Facilities Ltd.	Feasibility Study re mauchline remodel	88,000
KPMG	National Express Work	Less than 50,000
KPMG	Virgin Rail Ltd. scope review	150,000
KPMG	Financial advisers for Virgin Rail Group Negotiations	367,000
KPMG	WCML Review implementation, scope and costs	191,000
KPMG	Central trains extension	180,000
KPMG	CSE Financial adviser	160,000
KPMG	West Anglia Route modernisation project	92,000
KPMG	Franchise replacement programme and strategy	100,000
KPMG	Strategic planning process	84,000
KPMG	ISWT replacement project	200,000
KPMG	Project Tide	50,000
KPMG	Financial adviser to Scottish passenger rail franchise relet	958,000
KPMG	Due Diligence—Transpennine express	130,000
KPMG	Northern Franchise accountancy advice	100,000
KPMG	Review of TOC Franchise replacement	50,000
KPMG	East London Line financial modelling services	55,000
KPMG	East London Line Corporate and project finance advice	60,000
Lazards1	Project Ariel, SPVs and enhancements	3,000,000
LEK	Case for rail freight	50,000
LEK	Policy evaluation of track access grant	Less than 50,000
LEK	Review of freight performance regimes	60,000
LEK	Freight performance	75,000
LEK	Conventional interoperability	168,000
LEK	Financial advisers Northern	650,000
MDS Transmodal	Innovation competition	Less than 50,000
Mott McDonald	Transport Modelling Services for ELL	125,000
Mott McDonald	West Anglia Route modernisation	70,000
Mott McDonald	Cherwell Valley re-signalling project	Less than 50,000
Mott McDonald	Value of Rail studies	89,000
Mott McDonald	Appraisal of PLANET models	Less than 50,000
Mott McDonald	Regeneration impacts of changes in rail services	Less than 50,000
Mott McDonald	Asset management survey desk top study ELL	220,000
Mott McDonald	CSE 2003 budget review	Less than 50,000
Mouchel	Central railway demand forecast review	200,000
Mouchel	Interchange funding	100,000
Mouchel	Central Railway growth and strategic fit	97,000
Mouchel	Interchange funding	150,000
NERA	Due Diligence work for CLG	373,000
NERA	Due Diligence work for CLG (appendix B)	51,000
NERA	Management and remuneration advice	193,000
Nichols	Review of Thames Trains financial information and projections	85,000
Nichols	Mark 1 Rollingstock project support team	490,000
Nichols	Freight project management	133,000
Nichols	TL 2000 Blockade project management	Less than 50,000

Consultant	Project	Contract value (£)
Parsons Brinkerhoff	ELL value engineering facilitation	Less than 50,000
PKF	Reporting accountant Scottish passenger rail franchise relet	114,000
PKF	Reporting accountant Wales and Borders	160,000
PKF	British Transport Police audit plan	120,000
PKF	SRA audit plan	78,000
Pricewaterhousecoopers	IRT open book audit	Less than 50,000
Pricewaterhousecoopers	Review of financial models in freight grants	50,000
Pricewaterhousecoopers	Project support for TL2000 work	1,300,000
Pricewaterhousecoopers	Thames Trains extension	129,000
Pricewaterhousecoopers	ITL2002 project support	450,000
Steer Davies & Gleave	Review of International rail services	70,000
Steer Davies & Gleave	Modelling and strategic review of rail industry	75,000
Steer Davies & Gleave	Review of international services	50,000
Symonds	Business case review of freight interchange	Less than 50,000
UK accreditation service	Assessment of notified bodies	130,000
WS Atkins	Thames Trains extension	51,000
WS Atkins	Production of regional freight strategies	Less than 50,000
WS Atkins	Newco-Immerys FFG: Port of secondary aggregates scheme	Less than 50,000
WS Atkins	Review FFG application for McAlpine slate waste project	Less than 50,000
WS Atkins	Proposed development of Mossend Eurotunnel	Less than 50,000
WS Atkins	Regional Strategies	100,000
WS Atkins	Mersey docks—Birkenhead	Less than 50,000
WS Atkins	High Speed Line study (Trent Valley upgrade)	Less than 50,000
WS Atkins	ECML (upgrade) Development Business Transport Case	175,000
WS Atkins	Development of business case for Kings Cross expansion	120,000
WS Atkins	ELLEP digital mapping	67,000
WSA	Island line infrastructure	60,000

1 Annual equivalent

Wyre Piddle Link Road

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what central Government funding is available to assist in the construction of the western Wyre Piddle link road. [88414]

Mr. Jamieson: The local transport capital expenditure settlement announced on 10 December provides £13.9 million for Worcestershire for 2003–04, including £1 million in respect of the proposed Chadbury-Twyford link road east of the Wyre Piddle bypass. The Wyre Piddle bypass has itself received funding of £5.9 million and is nearing completion. It is for Worcestershire county council as the local highway authority to consider whether the western Wyre Piddle link road is a priority within their local transport plan and for any future transport settlement.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Affordable Housing

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to reform the planning system in such a way as to promote the supply of good quality affordable housing. [88547]

Mr. McNulty: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is fundamentally overhauling the planning system to make it more effective overall. Proposals for reform were set out in last July's planning policy statement "Sustainable Communities: delivering through planning", and we introduced into Parliament in December the "Planning and Compulsory Purchase" Bill. The office of the Deputy Prime Minister will publish early this year how it intends to achieve a step-change in building successful, thriving communities with affordable homes.

Boundary Committee

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether ministerial guidance to the Boundary Committee acting under the proposed Regional Assemblies Act will allow for the creation of unitary authorities with a population of less than *(a)* 100,000 and *(b)* 50,000. [88969]

Mr. Leslie: It will be for the Boundary Committee to decide on the size and number of unitary authorities it recommends in a local government review, having regard to any Guidance issued. The draft of the Guidance, on which the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is currently consulting, indicates that in the Government's view the Boundary Committee will need to consider the impact of size on the organisational and managerial capacity of an authority in the context of the most appropriate unitary authorities for an area being those best able to deliver quality services and effective community leadership.

Business Improvement Districts

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what input will be expected from private landlords in the business improvement districts. [87972]

Mr. McNulty: Clause 45 of the Local Government Bill, which was introduced into Parliament on 15 November, allows private landlords to make voluntary financial contributions to the business improvement district in their local area.

As we set out in our White Paper Strong Local Leadership—Quality Public Services "Property Owners have a key role to play in BIDs. But there are significant practical difficulties in extending the levy to property owners, outside the rating system. This would, in effect, be a new tax on property ownership. The Office of the Deputy PrimeMinister therefore intends to build voluntary contributions, already substantial in many existing projects, into the model for BIDs in England. This would be done through the guidance rather than the legislation. This will encourage BID partnershipsto involve property owners from the start so that they can participate in the development and the implementation of BID proposals."

Fire Dispute

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister pursuant to the answer of 3 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 702W, if he will place in the Library e-mails containing information given by his officials to the Fire Service Employers since the beginning of 2002 regarding the pay dispute with the Fire Brigades Union. [86500]

Mr. Leslie: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is withholding this information under exemption 2 (internal Discussion and Advice) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information on the basis that the release would be prejudicial to ongoing negotiations.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the timetable for the publication of the fire cover review pathfinder document. [88531]

Mr. Raynsford: I refer the Hon. Member to the answer given to my Hon. Friend, the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak, Lynne Jones, on 7 January 2003, *Official Report*.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he expects to publish the pathfinder review of the fire service. [89319]

Mr. Raynsford: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak, (Lynn Jones), on 7 January 2003, *Official Report*.

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the likely impact of a reduction in fire personnel during night hours on the number of *(a)* deaths and *(b)* injuries resulting from fire. [88254]

Mr. Raynsford: The final report of the Independent Review of the Fire Service puts forward a series of common sense reforms which will lead to a better service, to a safer service, and to a service which saves more lives. These include the recommendation that the service should move to a system of targeted (or risk based) fire cover, based on a careful, professional assessment of the real risk of incidents in the each local area.

Risk based fire cover is not about cutting fire stations or firefighters. Risk based fire cover is about making sure that local fire service resources-fire engines, fire stations and firefighters-are in the right place at the right time to respond to community fire needs.

The Government will produce a White Paper on the fire service in the spring in order to fulfil our part of the programme of modernisation. The White Paper will set out in detail the legislative and other changes required to modernise the fire service.

Pathfinder Report

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council will consider the Pathfinder report. [88244]

Mr. Raynsford: The Fire Cover Review Task Group agreed the text of its final report at the end of September 2002. The Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council was due to consider the report in the autumn, but no meetings were held because of the on-going pay dispute. The Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council is therefore due to consider the report at a future meeting.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will publish the Pathfinder review of the fire service. [88483]

Mr. Raynsford: A copy of the draft Report of the Task Group on the Fire Cover Review[1]—also known as the report of the Pathfinder trials—was placed on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's website on 20 December 2002.

[1]URL: www.safety.odpm.gov.uk/fire/fepd/fcr/fcrhome.htm

Housing (Black and Minority Ethnic People)

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will commission research into the concerns raised in the DTLR (Housing Directorate) Action Plan, addressing the needs of BME people, on the impact of the kinds of properties sold under the right to buy on BME families. [88263]

Mr. McNulty: This will be considered for inclusion in next years Office of the Deputy Prime Minister housing research programme.

Housing (Health and Safety)

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has *(a)* to license houses in multiple occupation and *(b)* to introduce a new housing, health and safety system. [88548]

Mr. McNulty: As announced in the Queen's Speech, the Government intend to publish a draft Housing Bill this session. The Bill will make clear our commitment to introduce the mandatory licensing of houses in multiple occupation and to replace the existing housing fitness regime with the evidence-based Housing Health and Safety Rating System. Taken together, these measures will target poor property condition and management standards in the parts of the housing market that accommodate some of the most vulnerable in our society.

Housing Consultants

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what regulations are in place to evaluate *(a)* the quality of housing need and *(b)* the house condition assessment provided to councils by consultancies. [87937]

Mr. McNulty: Robust information on housing need and stock condition is essential to the effective delivery of local authorities' housing strategic and landlord roles. The quality of this information is addressed in the annual scrutiny of authorities' housing strategies and housing revenue account business plans carried out by Government offices and will also be covered in some of the Housing Inspectorate's best value inspections. Detailed guidance is available to authorities on issues to be considered in commissioning housing need and stock condition surveys and in the use of the data obtained.

Housing Need

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the level of housing need is in *(a)* Coventry, *(b)* the West Midlands and *(c)* the UK. [87938]

Mr. Jim McNulty: Local authorities in England report the numbers of households on their housing register (excluding tenants awaiting a transfer) as at 1 April in their annual housing investment programme returns. The latest reported information, for 2002, is as follows:

Coventry City Council	7,104
West Midlands Government Office Region	95,000
England	1,093,300

For information about other parts of the United Kingdom, I refer my hon. Friend to my right hon. Friends the Members for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy), Airdrie and Shotts (Mrs Liddell) and Hamilton, North and Bellshill (Dr Reid).

Open Spaces

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what steps the Government is taking to provide additional funding to local authorities to improve the standard of public open spaces. [86946]

Mr. McNulty: The Government set out its vision for improving the standard of public open spaces in the report "Living Places: Cleaner, Safer, Greener', published on 31 October. Living Places set out a number of ways in which the Government are already offering support, including financial, to local authorities, as well as other delivery agencies, so that they can better manage and maintain high quality public spaces.

In addition Living Places also contained a package of measures specifically aimed at urban green spaces. In particular the Government recognises the need for better use of existing support and to attract new resources for urban parks and green spaces. We will be working closely with relevant Government Departments, agencies and the new CABE Space unit to address this issue.

Rented Accommodation (Overcrowding)

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to modernise legal standards relating to overcrowding in rented accommodation. [88550]

Mr. McNulty: As the Deputy Prime Minister mentioned in his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King) on 16 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 612W, the office of the Deputy Prime Minister is considering whether overcrowding-including in rented accommodation-is best tackled through a more modern set of standards or through the new Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS), on which the office hopes to legislate when Parliamentary time allows. Provisions to introduce HHSRS will form part of the Housing Bill which we intend to publish in draft during this session.

Sheltered Housing

Lynne Jones: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many extra-care sheltered housing places were available in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2001; how many are expected to be available in 2005; and what information he has collated on the waiting times for places in such schemes. [87776]

Mr. McNulty: Information on sheltered, or extra care housing was collected for Housing Investment Programme purposes until 2000. The number of very sheltered housing places was 18,041 in 1997 and 20,269 in 2000. Up to date figures will shortly be available from the supply mapping exercise undertaken by local authorities as part of the preparations for supporting people.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) has announced a target of increasing the levels of extra care provision by 50 per cent. on 1997 levels by 2006. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will work to ensure that the number of places available in 2005 is at least in line with this target.

No information is collected centrally on waiting times for places in extra care schemes and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Medical Students

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many medical students left their medical courses early in each of the last five years [85460]

Margaret Hodge: Information on non-completion rates for higher education students broken down by subject is not held centrally. For full-time first degree students who began their studies in 1999/00, the overall non-completion rate for the UK was estimated by the Higher Education Funding Council for England to be 17 per cent. the second lowest rate in the OECD.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the gender balance is in the intake of medical students. [85473]

Margaret Hodge: The latest available information is shown in the table.

Accepted applicants via UCAS to full-time courses in pre-clinical medicine Autumn 2001 entry HE Institutions in the UK

	Numbers	Percentage
Men	2,559	41
Women	3,681	59
Total	6,240	100

Academic Staff (Universities)

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many academic staff are employed by UK universities; and how many are of ethnic minority origin. [87012]

Margaret Hodge: The latest available data are shown in the table.

All academic staff[1] in UK higher education institutions 2000–01

Ethnicity	Number
White	111,012
Black Caribbean	457
Black African	759
Black other	264
Indian	2,010
Pakistani	460
Bangladeshi	148
Chinese	2,800
Asian other	1,405
Other	2,666
Total known ethnicity	121,981
Not known	17,959
Total all	139,940

1 Full-time and part-time staff; covers staff whose primary employment is teaching, research, or teaching/research.

Source:

Higher Education Statistics Agency.

Christmas Expenses

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much will be spent on *(a)* entertaining, *(b)* Christmas decorations and *(c)* other festive activities this Christmas season by his Department and Government agencies answerable to his Department; and of this sum, how much will be spent in Ministers' *(i)* private offices and (ii) official residences. [88123]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* This information could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Any expenditure incurred is made in accordance with the departmental guidance on financial procedures and propriety, which is based on the principles set out in Government Accounting.

Development Plans

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how agreements between the LSC and each college will be reached for the three year development plan; who will advise whether the targets set are realistic for an individual FE college; and what support will be offered to those FE colleges who receive less funding as a result of failing to attain their targets. [86888]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* From September 2003, colleges will agree a three year development plan, including challenging improvement targets, with the LSC. The LSC will agree targets with each college, drawing on benchmarking data and an assessment of individual capacity to improve. The LSC will consult with colleges at the end of January on the structure of the new development plans, and the detail of how targets would be agreed and how performance will be measured. Guidance on the new arrangements will be published

in May 2003.

The LSC will give practical help for colleges to support them in improving their performance and offer financial support where this is needed from the special investment and intervention fund.

Education Maintenance Allowance

Mr. Denis Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proposals he has to change the method of calculating entitlement to educational maintenance allowance for students whose parents live apart. [88151]

Margaret Hodge: We have gained useful experience through running the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) pilots. In light of this, when the scheme is extended to all areas in England in September 2004, there will be changes to the income assessment. This will no longer take account of the income of a parent who lives apart from the young person. Instead, the assessment will be based on household income and follow the same principles used by the Inland Revenue for calculating entitlement to the new tax credits.

Educational Attainment Levels

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how the educational attainment of school children in current and former coalfield areas compared with the national average in each year since 1997. [82251]

Mr. Miliband: The information required on the educational attainment of 15-year-old pupils in current and former coalfield areas is given in the table:

Percentage of 15-year-old pupils attaining 5 or more A-C grades at GCSE/GNVQ*

	2001	*2000*	*1999*	*1998*	*1997*
Coalfields—maintained schools	41.5	40.0	38.9	36.4	36.3
England—maintained schools	47.9	47.1	45.7	43.8	42.5
England—all schools	50.0	49.2	47.9	46.3	45.1

Note:

The definition of a coalfield area taken from the coalfields task force report, June 1998, is: a ward where 10 per cent. of resident males in employment at the time of the 1981 census of population were engaged in the energy and water sector. In these areas, this sector overwhelmingly comprises coalmining.

The information required on the educational attainment of seven, 11 and 14-year-old pupils in current and former coalfield areas is currently not available for the period requested. Achievement in coalfields areas for the whole period will be available in the new year as part of the Government-wide neighbourhood statistics project being co-ordinated by the Office for National Statistics. Once available the Department will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Exam Markers

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate he has made of the cost of recruiting additional exam markers, following the recommendation of Mike Tomlinson's final report into A-levels. [89292]

Mr. Miliband: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 3 December that up to £6 million would be made available to deliver the 2003 examinations securely, the money to be spent in the main on ensuring that the necessary markers can be recruited. QCA are undertaking detailed costing work with the awarding bodies and further advice is awaited.

FE Colleges

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether there will be a ceiling to increases in funding for FE colleges that continually exceed their targets; and whether the premium rate of funding increase will be reduced as more FE colleges exceed their targets. [86889]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* We want to see a continuing incentive for colleges to continually improve and we are working with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) on the detailed proposals for the future funding of further education colleges. The strategy document "Success for All" sets out our intention that excellent colleges, which exceed their targets, enjoy a 3.5 per cent. real terms increase in each of 2004–05 and 2005–06 with no ceiling. This premium rate of increase will not change in those years as the percentage of colleges eligible grows.

GCSE (Performing Arts)

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what advice his Department has received from the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority regarding the introduction of a GCSE in performing arts and related disciplines. [88886]

Mr. Miliband: The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority has been asked by the Department to begin work on the development of additional titles for new GCSEs in vocational subjects. Advice is awaited on the range of possible titles, and timings for implementation.

Green Ministers

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which Minister in his Department is the nominated Green Minister; how often he has attended meetings of the Green Ministers; and which official has responsibility for the DEFRA rural proofing check-list in his Department. [88452]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: I have Ministerial responsibility for Green Issues and represent my Department on the Ministers' committee ENV (G). My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills is not a member of ENV (G).

Policy responsibility for rural proofing in my Department lies with Strategy and Communications Directorate.

Higher Education

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* A-level and *(b)* non A-level students entered higher education in each year since 1997. [83939]

Margaret Hodge: The latest available information is given in the table. Figures for 2002 will be available in January 2003.

Accepted applicants via UCAS to full-time and sandwich undergraduate courses in the UK[1]

	Year of entry				
	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Entry qualification:					
2 or more A levels	183,123	181,459	183,852	185,348	193,536
Scottish Highers	16,641	16,421	16,823	17,106	17,899
All other qualifications[2]	103,554	100,340	102,390	106,267	114,037
Total	303,318	298,220	303,065	308,718	325,472

[1]— Covers UK domiciled students.

[2]— Including students with GNVQs, BTEC, Access and Foundation courses, degree credits, and a small number with no qualifications.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of higher education students in 1997 completed their courses; and what the proportion was in each subsequent year for which information is available. [86856]

Margaret Hodge: Information on the completion rates of HE students is published by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) in "Performance Indicators in HE". The latest available data are shown in the table.

Figures published recently showed that the UK has one of the lowest non-completion rates in the OECD.

Projected Learning Outcomes
Full-time Students Starting First Degree Courses in UK HE Institutions

	Projected Outcomes[1]		
Students starting in	*Obtained degree percentage*	*Obtained no qualification percentage*	*Other[2] percentage*
1996/97	80	18	2
1997/98	81	17	2
1998/99	81	17	2
1999/00	81	17	2

1 The projected outcomes are calculated on the assumption that the progression paths of new entrants will be the same as those for students currently in the system.

2 Includes students who obtain undergraduate qualifications other than a degree (e.g an HMD).

Higher Education Student Profiles

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on participation rates broken down by socio-economic class of parents of higher education students in each year since 1990. [88328]

Margaret Hodge: The latest available information is shown in the table. The sharp rise in participation rates in the early 1990s reflects the expansion of the higher education sector during these years. There was an increase in entrant numbers in 1997 related partly to the funding arrangements for higher education, with students choosing to enter HE rather than wait until 1998. There was a corresponding reduction in 1998 before the entry rates started to increase again in 1999.

The Government are committed to raising the participation rates for people from less affluent family backgrounds, and has introduced Excellence Challenge, including the AimHigher campaign, which is targeted at raising attainment and aspirations among young people who traditionally would not consider going to university.

Participation[1] in Higher Education by Social Class—Great Britain
Percentages

	Academic year beginning:					
Social class	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
I Professional	n/a	55	71	73	78	80
II Intermediate	n/a	36	39	42	45	46
IIIN Skilled non manual	n/a	22	27	29	31	31
IIIM Skilled manual	n/a	11	15	17	18	18
IV Partly skilled	n/a	10	14	16	17	17
V Unskilled	n/a	6	9	11	11	12
I-IIIN	37	35	40	43	46	47
IIIM-V	10	11	14	16	17	17
All classes	19	23	28	30	32	32

	Academic year beginning				
Social class	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
I Professional	82	79	72	73	76
II Intermediate	47	48	45	45	48
IIIN Skilled non manual	32	31	29	30	33
IIIM Skilled manual	18	19	18	18	19
IV Partly skilled	17	18	17	17	19
V Unskilled	13	14	13	13	14
I-IIIN	48	48	45	45	48
IIIM-V	18	18	17	17	18
All classes	33	33	31	32	33

n/a = not available

1 Measured by the Age Participation Index (API), which is defined as the number of UK domiciled under 21 initial entrants to full-time and sandwich undergraduate courses expressed as a proportion of the averaged 18–19 year old population.

Innovation

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what applications have been made for exemptions related to innovation under the Education Act 2002; and in each case *(a)* when the application was made, *(b)* what decision has been reached and *(c)* what his grounds were for that decision. [87831]

Mr. Miliband: *[holding answer 17 December 2002]:* The Department has received one application under section 2 of the Education Act (the 'power to innovate'). Langley Junior School applied on 7 November 2002 to gain exemption from the Changing of School Session Times Regulations 1999. The application has been approved because it will enable the school to create time for a curriculum enrichment session for pupils, and planning, preparation and assessment time for teachers. The Power to Innovate was needed to enable the school to implement the changes sooner than the start of the new school year (as required by regulations). We are expecting to receive many more inquiries and applications as this new power becomes known.

Language Teaching

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what range of languages are included within the Government's plans to make foreign language learning standard in primary education. [88998]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The entitlement for all pupils to study languages at Key Stage 2 must include one of the working languages of the European Union. It will be for schools to decide which European Union language is chosen. Over and above that, it is for schools to decide which and how many languages they choose to offer. Schools may decide for example to offer one main language, or one or two main languages and additional 'taster' sessions in other languages. In addition, by drawing in foreign language speakers, such as parents, those in the community and in business, schools will be in a position to offer and promote a much wider range of languages than has been possible before.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what additional IT resources he will provide to assist primary schools in the development of language teaching at key stage 2. [89331]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: A total of £710 million has been made available to schools in England through the ICT in Schools Standards Fund over the 2002–04 financial years. This funding is targeted to improve schools' ICT infrastructure and connectivity. It is for individual LEAs to decide how the funding is distributed to schools in line with their ICT development plans.

An additional £30 million has been distributed to schools in September 2002 in the form of eLearning Credits (eLCs) for the sole use of buying certified curriculum online digital learning products. A further £20 million will be distributed in April 2003.

We will continue to work with public and private sector providers to increase provision, raise the quality and widen the range of online teaching and learning materials. The new curriculum online service will facilitate teacher access to high quality electronic materials across the curriculum and will stimulate the development of materials for languages as well as for other subjects. There are also many online and offline ICT resources already available for teachers, including the British Educational SoftwareDatabase and the National Grid for Learning website. The Department is currently considering other ways of using ICT to support the teaching and learning of Modern Foreign Languages at Key Stage 2.

Learning and Skills Council

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the common funding approach to be adopted by the Learning and Skills Council for 2003–04 and subsequent years. [87032]

Margaret Hodge: The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) is establishing a common funding approach for 2003–04 for further education, work-based learning, and school sixth forms. This replaces the previous separate funding arrangements for these three sectors. Adult and community learning will be brought progressively into the common funding approach as far as appropriate.

The main principle of the common funding approach is that funding must follow the learner. It is built on the best elements of the former Further Education Funding Council's national system of formula based funding. The key elements of this system include funding elements for the basic costs for delivering all programmes, the extra costs for specialist programmes, learner achievement, extra support for disadvantaged learners, and higher costs for delivering provision in London and related areas.

The LSC National Council has set up a Funding Group to consider future development of the common funding approach, including simplification of funding arrangements in response to the recommendations of the Bureaucracy Task Force. The LSC will take account of the "Success for All" strategy document and the forthcoming Government statements on 14–19 learning and on the Review of Funding of Adult Learning. We will ensure that the outcome and implications are clear for school sixth forms, colleges and other providers of further education and training.

Public Schools

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to review the charitable status given to public schools; and if he will make a statement. [88272]

Beverley Hughes: I have been asked to reply.

The Cabinet Office report, "Private Action, Public Benefit", was published on 25 September 2002. Its 61 recommendations set out a package of measures which aim to modernise charity law and enable a wide range of organisations to be more effective and innovative.

The report recommends that in future all charities should have to demonstrate public benefit. Part of the report considers what happens now with those charities that charge fees which serve to exclude large sections of the population in terms of their having to make provision for wider access for those who would be excluded because of the fees. The report cites the example of independent schools.

At present there is no systematic programme in place to check the public character of charities. The report recommends that an on-going review programme run by the Charity Commission should check the public character of such organisations. It is proposed that the commission would identify charities likely to charge high fees (such as independent schools) and undertake a rolling programme to check that provision was made for wider access. This programme will be designed to minimise red tape and will not focus on any particular sector. Short returns will be issued which ask charities what they do in terms of widening access, such as making provision for sharing facilities. It is envisaged that for the majority of cases no further inquiry will be necessary beyond the initial return.

It is proposed that the Charity Commission, in consultation with charities likely to be affected and their umbrella bodies, would issue guidelines as to the level of access appropriate in particular circumstances.

Of course at the moment these are only proposals. The report was out for consultation until 31 December 2002, and we shall consider the responses to this, and all the other matters addressed in the report, very carefully.

School Admissions

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the responses received to the consultation on Revised School Admissions and Admission Appeals Codes of Practice and Accompanying Regulations. [89369]

Mr. Miliband: We received 187 written responses to the consultation, detailed in the following list. We also received verbal responses from four meetings with LEA officers, headteachers and others—some 400 people attended.

LEAs (94)

Barking and Dagenham
Barnet
Barnsley
Bath and North East Somerset
Bedfordshire
Birmingham
Blackpool
Bournemouth
Bracknell Forest
Bradford
Brent
Brighton and Hove
Bromley
Buckinghamshire
Calderdale
Cambridgeshire
Camden
Cheshire
Cornwall
Croydon
Cumbria
Derbyshire
Devon
Doncaster
Dorset
Durham
Ealing
East Riding of Yorkshire
East Sussex
Enfield
Essex
Greenwich
Hampshire
Harrow
Hartlepool
Hounslow
Isle of Wight
Islington
Kensington and Chelsea
Kent
Kingston upon Thames
Leeds
Leicestershire
Lewisham
Liverpool
Luton
Medway
Merton
Middlesbrough
Milton Keynes
Newcastle upon Tyne
Newham
Norfolk
North East Lincolnshire
North Somerset
North Yorkshire
Nottinghamshire
Oxfordshire
Peterborough
Poole
Portsmouth
Redbridge
Richmond upon Thames
Rochdale
Sandwell
Sheffield
Shropshire
Slough
Somerset
South Gloucestershire
Southampton
Southend-on-Sea
Southwark
Staffordshire
Stockport
Stoke-on-Trent
Suffolk
Sunderland
Surrey
Tameside
Torbay
Tower Hamlets
Trafford
Wakefield
Waltham Forest
Wandsworth
Warwickshire
West Berkshire
Westminster
West Sussex
Wirral
Wiltshire
Wokingham
Wolverhampton

Churches, Diocese and other belief organisations

Catholic Education Service
Church of England Board of Education
Agency for Jewish Education/United Synagogue
The Methodist Church
Diocese of Blackburn
London Diocesan Board for Schools
Board of Education of Norwich Diocese
Portsmouth Diocese Board of Education
St. Albans Diocese
The Dioceses of Southwark
Archdioceses of Westminster Education Service
Winchester Diocesan Board of Education
British Humanist Association
National Secular Society

Key organisations

Advisory Centre for Education (ACE)

Association of London Chief Education Officers (ALCEO)/ London Inter-Authority Admissions Group (LIAAG)

Audit Commission

Campaign For State Education (CASE)

Consortium of Selective Schools in Essex

Council of Tribunals

Education Network (TEN)

Equal Opportunities Commission

Foundation and Aided Schools Association (FASNA)

Information for School and College Governors (ISCG)

Local Government Association (LGA)

Local Government Ombudsman

London School of Economics

National Children's Bureau

National Confederation of Parent Teacher Associations (NCPTA)

National Union of Teachers (NUT)

Save the Children

Secondary Heads Association (SHA)

Others

Office of the Children's Rights

Five e-mails from parents

Schools (51)

Beaverwood School for Girls

Beechen Cliff School

Bennett Memorial Diocesan School

Bishop Stopford's School

Bullerswood School

Bushey Meads School

Canon Slade School

Carr Hill 11–18 High School

Casterton Community College

Chelmsford County High School for Girls

Coloma Convent Girls School

The Folkestone School for Girls

Grays Convent School

Hasmonean Primary School

Hasmonean High School

Hertsmere Jewish Primary

Independent Jewish Day School

Kemnal Technology College

King Edward VI Grammar School

Lady Margaret School

Latimer High School

London Oratory School

Langley Park School for Girls

Menorah Primary School

Michael Sobell Sinai School

Minchinhampton School

Montagu School

Moriah Jewish Day School

Northolt High School

North West Jewish Day School

Nottingham Emmanuel School

Parkstone Grammar School

Parmiter's School

The Priory LSST

St. Andrew's CE Primary, Enfield

St. Bernard's High School, Essex

St. Francis Xavier School

St. Ignatius College

St. James's CE Secondary School, Bolton

St. James the Great VA Primary and Nursery School

St. Peter's School, Bournemouth

St. Peter's School, Walsall

Sacred Heart School, Camberwell

Sandiwig Primary

Southend High School for Boys

Watford Grammar School for Girls

Westcliff High School for Boys

Wolfson Hillel Primary School

Plus e-mailed responses from three unnamed schools.

School Budgets (Unspent Balances)

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what unspent school balances were clawed back using the funding formula set out by Mr.S.Bishop in his letter to chief education officers of local education authorities in England dated 23 October. [89336]

Mr. Miliband: The Department wrote to Local Education Authorities on 10 December 2002 confirming that local education authorities would be able to use the system of controls on school balances proposed in the 23 October letter. However, they can do so only from April 2004.

School discipline

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what research he has commissioned into disciplinary problems in schools, related to juvenile drug abuse. [88654]

Mr. Miliband: The Department for Education and Skills has not commissioned research specifically focusing on disciplinary problems in schools related to juvenile drug abuse.

Specialist Schools

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate his Department has made of the additional cost if the number of specialist schools rose to *(a)* 50 per cent., *(b)* 75 per cent. and *(c)* 100 per cent. of all maintained schools. [87197]

Mr. Miliband: The 2002–03 estimated cost of the programme will be £154.4 million. The full year revenue cost of the programme with the different levels of coverage of maintained secondary schools would be *(a)* £213.2 million *(b)* £320.2 million and *(c)* £427.2 million. Capital costs to take coverage to these levels would be *(a)* £61.8 million *(b)* £141.5 million and *(c)* £221.2 million.

In November 2002 the Government lifted the cap on national funding to support the expansion of the programme. However, progress to specialist status continues to be dependent on meeting the required standard.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the specialist schools which have lost specialist status, with the date of the decision in each case and the reason for it. [87198]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested is shown in the following table.

Applicant schools seeking re-designation in their specialism are assessed against published criteria. Those applicants which do not meet the criteria in respect of the progress expected of specialist schools against the designation criteria, and/or prepare new plans that do not meet the required standard, are unsuccessful in their applications and are not re-designated.

De-designated specialist schools

School	*LEA*	*Specialism*	*Operational From (September)*	*To*
Aldersley High School	Wolverhampton	Technology	2000	31 August 19971
Archbishop Michael Ramsey	Southwark, LB of	Technology	2001	31 July 19991
Ashcroft High School	Luton	Technology	1996	1 September 2002
Baines School	Lancashire	Technology	1994	31 August 2000
Banbury School Technology College	Oxfordshire	Technology	1995	31 August 2001
Bethnal Green High School	Tower Hamlets	Technology	1996	1 September 2002
Chalfonts Community College (The)	Buckinghamshire	Technology	2002	31 August 19981
Cowes High School	Isle of Wight	Technology	1995	31 August 2001
Culcheth High School	Warrington	Technology	1995	31 December 1997
de Stafford College	Surrey	Technology	1995	31 August 1998
Fallibroome High School	Cheshire	Technology	1995	31 December 1997
Kings School Grantham	Lincolnshire	Technology	1994	31 August 2000
Knowles Hill School	Devon	Technology	2000	31 August 19981
Latymer School (The)	Enfield	Technology	1995	31 August 1998
Lea Manor High School	Luton	Language	1996	31 August 1999
Mansfield High School	Lancashire	Technology	1997	31 August 1998
Maricourt High School	Sefton	Technology	1996	1 September 2002
Merrill College	Derby, City of	Technology	1995	31 August 1998
Oakmead School	Bournemouth	Technology	2001	31 August 19991
Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School	Derbyshire	Technology	1997	31 August 2000
Rastrick High School	Calderdale	Technology	1994	31 August 2000
Reading School	Reading	Technology	1995	31 August 1998
Sawston Village College	Cambridgeshire	Technology	1999	31 August 19981
Senacre Technology College	Kent	Technology	1994	31 August 1997
Sidney Stringer School	Coventry	Technology	1995	31 August 2001
St Francis Xavier College	Liverpool	Technology	1996	31 August 1999
St James C of E School	Bolton	Technology	1995	31 August 1998
St Peter's High School and Technology College	Essex	Technology	1995	31 August 2001
St Thomas More Catholic College	Stoke on Trent	Technology	1995	31 August 1998
Tring School	Hertfordshire	Technology	1995	31 August 1998
Westlands High School	Cheshire	Technology	1997	31August 2000
Westwood St Thomas School	Wiltshire	Technology	1997	31 August 2000
Woolston High School	Warrington	Technology	1996	31 August 1999

1 These schools have subsequently been successful in applications to re-join the programme.

Note:

Reasons for de-designation:

All of the schools listed above, with the exception of Mansfield High School, were de-designated because they did not meet the criteria in respect of the progress expected of specialist schools against the designation criteria, and/or they did not prepare new plans that met the required standard. Mansfield High School was de-designated because of financial irregularities.

Standards Fund

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the elements of the standards fund for each of the next two years showing budgeted expenditure under each head for each year. [87199]

Mr. Miliband: Details of education funding for the next three years, including the Standards Fund, were announced in the Secretary of State's statement to the House on 9 December and have been placed in the Library.

£ million

The Standards Fund	Total budget 2003–04	2004–05	
Leadership Incentive Grant	175	175	
Targeted Improvement Grant	34	34	
Special Educational Needs	41	0	Cease to be paid from 2004–05
Drugs, Alcohol and Tobacco Education and Prevention	12	0	Cease to be paid from 2004–05
Study Support	27	0	Cease to be paid from 2004–05
Study Support (Excellence in Cities)	19	21	
Child Protection Co-ordinators	1	1	
Vulnerable Children	42	42	
National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies	109	79	
Key Stage 3 National Strategy	104	71	
Key Stage 3 National Strategy: Behaviour	20	20	
Ethnic Minority Achievement	78	78	
Education Health Partnerships	6	6	
Music Services	60	60	
Playing for Success	3	3	
Early Excellence Centres	10	n/a	This grant will be paid outside the SF from 2004–06
Behaviour (Excellence in Cities)	60	70	
School Achievement Award Scheme	60		Funding from 2004–05 will be determined by the outcome of the evaluation of scheme
Excellence in Cities and Excellence Clusters	287	330	
Summer Schools for Gifted and Talented Children	4	4	
Specialist Schools: Revenue	193	273	Demand led
Beacon Schools	—	—	To be determined
Diversity Pathfinders	2	2	Demand led
Extended Schools	5	14	
Federations	—	—	To be determined
Advanced Schools	—	—	To be determined
Golden Hello Payments	29	0	Demand led
Training Schools	8	11	Demand led
Advanced Skills Teachers	33	0	Cease to be paid from 2004–05
School Support Staff	134	0	Cease to be paid from 2004–05
School Support Staff: Training and Development	37	65	
Teacher Sabbaticals	10	0	Cease to be paid from 2004–05
Early Professional Development	10	58	
Fast track	—	—	To be determined
Fresh Start and New Partnerships	—	—	To be determined
Information Communications Technology in Schools	178	—	2004–05 to be determined

Targets

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what his response was to recent representations on targets connected with *(a)* the implementation of asset management plans by local educational authorities and *(b)* the rewording of substantial school repair projects. [88326]

Mr. Miliband: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has sent no response to representations on these targets. In recent weeks, officials have had meetings with representatives of the Construction Products Association to give details of the capital strategy and the role of the DfES in providing support for capital investment in their buildings by schools and LEAs. The Department is currently considering how best to collect information on the delivery of improved school buildings without imposing undue bureaucratic burdens locally or centrally.

Temporary Workers Legislation

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what costs he estimates will fall on *(a)* local education authorities and *(b)* other public education providers resulting from recent European legislation on temporary workers. [88327]

Mr. Miliband: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has arranged for Regulatory Impact Assessments to be placed in the Library concerning: the recent Fixed Term Employees (Prevention of less favourable treatment) Regulations, which came into force on 1 October; and the European Commission's proposed Directive on the Working Conditions of Temporary Agency Workers.

University Funding

Ms Stuart: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the criteria which he will use to allocate planned extra resources for student places to particular *(a)* universities and *(b)* courses, with special reference to the academic excellence of particular institutions. [88230]

Margaret Hodge: The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) determine the extra allocations for individual institutions through an annual bidding exercise for additional student numbers. The criteria for the allocation of these places for 2003–04 are set out in the HEFCE publication, "Additional Student Places and Funds 2003–04", report number 2002/39. The strategy document on higher education, which will be published in January 2003, will set out our vision for the future funding of higher education.

University Places

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students from Leeds West obtained places at a university in *(a)* 2002 and *(b)* 1997; and what percentage of those who had sat A levels went on to university. [81487]

Margaret Hodge: Figures for the number of students who enter higher education are not collated centrally by constituency.

The available figures for Great Britain, showing the proportion of under 21-year-olds who enter higher education for the first time, are given in the table. There was an increase in the index in 1997–98 related partly to changes in the funding arrangements for higher education, with students choosing to enter HE rather than wait until 1998–99. There was a corresponding reduction in 1998–99 before the entry rates started to increase again in 1999–2000. Between 1997–98 and 2000–01, total HE students in English universities and colleges rose by 83,000. Nationally, around nine out of 10 18-year-olds who obtain two or more A levels enter HE by the time they are 21.

Age participation index (API)[1] *for Great Britain*

Year	*Percentage*
1997–98	33
1998–99	31
1999–2000	32
2000–01	33
2001–02	233–35
2002–03	233–35

1 The API is defined as the number of GB domiciled initial entrants to full-time and sandwich undergraduate HE aged under 21, expressed as a percentage of the average number of 18 and 19-year-olds in the population.
2 Projected: final data on initial entrants not yet available.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Angola

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the lifting of sanctions against the UNITA group in Angola. [88080]

Mr. Rammell: I refer the hon. Member to the written ministerial Statement I made on 17 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 43WS.

Christmas Expenses

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much will be spent on *(a)* entertaining, *(b)* Christmas decorations and *(c)* other festive activities this Christmas season by his Department and government agencies answerable to his Department; and of this sum how much will be spent in ministers' *(i)* private offices and (ii) official residences. [88125]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* The answer to the first part of this question could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Any expenditure in these categories is strictly for official purposes only, and is made in accordance with the departmental guidance on financial procedures and propriety, based on the principles set out in Government Accounting.

The total spent on entertainment, Christmas decorations and other festive activities for the FCO ministerial private offices and official residence at Christmas 2002 was £13,337.15. Of this £11,809.65 was spent on entertaining by ministerial offices and £1,527.50 in the official residence.

Cyprus

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will specify the adjustments to the UN plan for Cyprus which were ratified to the parties on 10th December; if he will place a copy of the UN plan as adjusted in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [87496]

Mr. MacShane *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* The United Nations' Secretary General has asked that the full details of the United Nations' negotiating process for a settlement in Cyprus remain confidential. It is for the UN Secretary General to decide on this plan's publication. I regret that it is therefore not possible to put a copy, as requested, in the Library.

The broad thrust of the Secretary General's revised 10 December proposal was to make improvements for both sides in the areas of greatest concern to them.

The United Nations held intensive consultations with the two sides in Cyprus and also in Copenhagen on 12 and 13 December 2002. It did not prove possible, however, to achieve a comprehensive settlement. However, the parties' positions have never been closer and agreement seemed possible up until the last minute.

The UN Security Council heard a report from Mr Alvaro de Soto on 18 December and the President of the Council issued the following press statement:

"On 18 December the members of the Security Council, in the presence of the Secretary General, heard a report from the Special Adviser to the Secretary General on Cyprus on the negotiations that have taken place in recent months, in pursuance of the mission entrusted to the Secretary General by the Security Council in its resolution 1250, aimed at achieving agreement on a comprehensive settlement to the Cyprus problem which takes full account of relevant Security Council resolutions. The members of the Council commended the Secretary General for the initiatives he had taken in November and December 2002 to bridge the gaps between the two sides and to enable them to reach an agreement. They expressed the view that the proposal put forward on 11 November as revised on 10 December offered an unique opportunity to reach a settlement in the coming weeks. They regretted that the Turkish Cypriot leadership had not responded in a timely way to the initiatives of the Secretary General; and they called for its constructive efforts to reach a settlement in conformity with the timetable proposed by the Secretary General. They welcomed the willingness of both sides to continue the negotiations in the period ahead. They underlined the importance of intensifying the negotiations so that full agreement could be reached before 28 February 2003, in conformity with the timetable proposed by the Secretary General in his proposals. They urged both sides to work on the basis of the Secretary General's revised proposals of 10 December. The members of the Council drew attention to the unique opportunity that existed for the settlement of this long-running problem; and to the benefits for all concerned

from so doing, so that all Cypriots can benefit from Cyprus's accession to the European Union. They urged all concerned to seize the historic opportunity to bring a peaceful, just and lasting settlement to the Cyprus problem to the benefit of all its people and the wider region.The members of the Council expressed their full support for the continuation of the Secretary-General's mission of good offices and his efforts to bring about a settlement in the first two months of 2003."

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Ann McKechin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment his Department has made of the Final Report of the UN Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. [87049]

Mr. Rammell: The UK fully supports the work of the UN Panel and welcomes its latest report. This highlights the activities of "criminal elites" operating throughout the region to exploit the DRC's natural resources. We hope the information in the report can be used to call those involved to account, although more information will be required to substantiate many of the claims made.

The Panel's mandate expired on 18 October. We are still in discussion with the UN about the allegations. The Security Council is considering the extension of the panel's mandate to allow discussions to continue.

Draft EU Constitution

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the clause in the EU draft constitution produced by the Convention on the Future of Europe requiring member states to do everything to further the aims of the EU. [88062]

Mr. MacShane: The draft Constitutional Treaty of the Praesidium of the Convention on the Future of Europe is an outline for discussion by the Convention. It has a clause which 'sets out the obligation of loyal co-operation of Member States vis-a-vis the Union'. The principle exists in the present Treaties (Article 10 of the Treaty on European Community and Article 11(2) the Treaty on European Union).

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the current draft of the European Constitution produced by the Convention on the Future of Europe contains a clause requiring a member state to join the euro. [88063]

Mr. MacShane: The draft Constitutional Treaty of the Praesidium of the Convention on the Future of Europe does not contain a clause requiring Member States to join the Euro. The UK would not agree to a constitution that would compel us to join the Euro. The Government would only recommend membership of the Euro if it is in the national economic interest and the economic case is clear and unambiguous.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish *(a)* the latest draft EU constitution produced by the Convention on the Future of Europe and *(b)* the UK response. [88064]

Mr. MacShane: The Praesidium of the Convention on the Future of Europe's draft Constitutional Treaty is publicly available. It can be accessed through their website at http://european-convention.eu.int/. It is a basis for further discussion by the Convention.

EU Borders (Immigration)

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions took place at the Copenhagen summit regarding the securing of EU borders to illegal immigration. [88861]

Mr. MacShane: There were no specific discussions of illegal immigration at the Copenhagen European Council. The European Council in Seville in June 2002 focussed on ways to tackle illegal immigration and asylum, agreeing specific tasks and a timetable for implementing them. Good progress has been made on implementing these objectives. The Greek Presidency has identified combating illegal immigration as one of its priorities. Heads of State and Governments will assess progress in implementing the Seville Conclusions at the European Council in June 2003.

European Union Enlargement

Mr. Ian Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether money and resources will be provided by the British Government for campaigning in referenda to be held in the various states proposing to join the European Union in 2004; and if he will make a statement. [88481]

Mr. MacShane: Given the decisions made at the Copenhagen Summit, the Government hopes that where there are referendums, EU membership will be supported; and in deepening and developing relations with the ten states prior to their planned accession on 1 May 2004, the Government will continue to set out the benefits of membership.

The decision to join the EU rests with the citizens of the accession states themselves and the government has no plans to give direct financial support to campaigning groups within the 10 EU accession states

Green Ministers

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which Minister in his Department is nominated Green Minister; how often he has attended meetings of the Green Ministers; and which official has responsibility for the DEFRA rural proofing check-list in his Department. [88461]

Mr. Rammell: I am the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Green Minister.

Information such as ministerial attendance at committees is covered by Exemption 2 of Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information not to disclose information relating to the proceedings of the Cabinet and its committees.

The DEFRA rural proofing check-list does not currently apply to the FCO.

India

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether Hawk components or production equipment exported to India under the open licence issued on 6 September 2001 have subsequently been re-exported; and what the *(a)* location of and *(b)* end-use were to which Hawk components or production equipment exported to India under the licence were put. [87613]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 17 December 2002]*: The company has informed us that no Hawk components or production equipment have been exported to India under the open individual export licence issued by the Department for Trade and Industry on 6 September 2001.

Statutory Instruments

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many Statutory Instruments subject to negative procedure made by his Department *(a)* came into force and *(b)* were considered by a delegated legislation committee in each of the last three sessions. [88027]

Mr. Straw: The Statutory Instruments subject to negative procedure that were made by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in each of the last three sessions, are in the following list. All came into force and were considered by a designated legislation committee.

1999/666 The Hong Kong (Overseas Public Servants) (Pension Supplements) (Amendment) Order 1999

1999/1437 The Northern Ireland (Location of Victims' Remains) Act 1999 (Immunities and Privileges) Order 1999

2000/2147 The Antarctic (Amendment) Regulations 2000

2001/3497 The British Nationality Act 1981 (Amendment of Schedules) Order 2001

2002/1823 The Extradition (Overseas Territories) Order 2002

2002/1824 The Extradition (Overseas Territories) (Hong Kong) Order 2002

2002/1825 The Extradition (Overseas Territories) (Application to Hong Kong) Order 2002

Turkey

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what investigation he has made into the number of changed appointment times brought about by the visa section of the British Consulate in Istanbul over the last quarter. [88378]

Mr. Rammell: No investigation has been made. On rare occasions, operational difficulties such as staff sickness or security restrictions may mean that interview appointments have to be rearranged. In such circumstances, applicants are usually seen the next day. Applicants can ask to have interview appointments brought forward for compassionate or other compelling reasons.

UN Headquarters

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the potential move of the United Nations London headquarters to another European capital. [89024]

Mr. Rammell: As much UN information is available on-line, the United Nations Secretary- General in his report of 23 September 2002, "Strengthening of the United Nations", recommended the rationalisation of UN Information Centres in Western Europe, with their work being taken on by a single regional "hub". We believe the London UN Information Centre does an excellent job in promoting the UN in the UK. But we also fully support the Secretary-General's Reform report, which we believe will help to achieve a more efficient UN with resources focussed on priority activities. The proposed rationalisation of UN information centres will result in savings, which will be reallocated to those parts of the world with less access to information technology.

A decision on the location of the Western Europe regional "hub" is not due until late 2003. The decision is for the Secretary-General to take. We would, of course, be delighted if London was chosen.

Venezuela

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what advice he is giving to *(a)* British expatriates living in Caracas and *(b)* British companies with interests in Venezuela on unrest in that country. [88706]

Mr. Rammell: On 21 December we advised all British Nationals in Venezuela to leave unless they had an urgent reason to remain. This decision was taken because of the continuing national strike and the resultant deteriorating security situation. We have maintained regular contact with British companies operating in Venezuela throughout this period.

[Continued in column 139W]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Asylum Seekers

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum-seeking unaccompanied minors were *(a)* returned to their country of origin prior to their 18th birthday in (i) 1999, (ii) 2000, (iii) 2001 and (iv) 2002, *(b)* to which countries they were returned in each year and *(c)* what criteria were applied for each country; and if he will make a statement. [88368]

Beverley Hughes: The information requested is not available. Although statistics of the removal of failed asylum seekers include unaccompanied minors; they are not separately identified. The information would therefore be available only by examination of individual case-files at disproportionate cost.

However, as a matter of policy, unaccompanied children are not removed under Immigration Act powers unless we are satisfied that suitable arrangements have been made for their reception and care in the destination country.

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether there will be changes to the process for families who apply for asylum in-country claiming support following implementation of section 55 of the Nationality Immigration and Asylum Act 2002. [88376]

Beverley Hughes: From 8 January 2003, when section 55 comes into force, support will be provided to an asylum seeker and his/her household if he or she has a dependant aged under 18 even if he/she did not apply for asylum as soon as reasonably practicable. It is for the Secretary of State, in practice The National Asylum Support Service (NASS), to determine whether a person is a dependant under 18 and to determine who forms part of the household and can therefore receive support irrespective of whether the asylum seeker concerned applied for asylum as soon as reasonably practicable. Accordingly new procedures are being developed to enable this to take place.

Children Act

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he intends to take to implement the decision of the High Court on 29 November that the Children Act 1989 applies to children held in prison custody. [88233]

Hilary Benn: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke) on 9 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 128W.

Children in Prison

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children are held in prison, broken down by type of offence. [88519]

Hilary Benn: The number of people under the age of 18 that were in prison on 31 October 2002, broken down by offence group is shown in the table.

Juveniles in Prison Service establishments by offence type, 31 October 2002

Offence Type	*Number of Persons*
Total	2,724
Violence Against the Person	468
Sexual Offences	80
Burglary	491
Robbery	701
Theft and Handling	424
Fraud and Forgery	8
Drugs Offences	65
Other Offences	381
Offence Not Recorded	106

Drug Trafficking

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what funding he has targeted on preventative programmes to tackle *(a)* drug use and crime and *(b)* youth offending; what funding is specifically targeted at vulnerable groups; and if he will make a statement. [82713]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 25 November 2002]*: Planned expenditure across Government in 2002–03 is as follows:

Prevention of drug misuse by initiatives to disrupt trafficking and to reduce the supply of drugs—£376 million;

Preventative initiatives to strengthen communities and reduce the impact on them of drug misuse, including by reducing offending and re-offending by the drug misusers who cause the most harm to themselves and others—£171 million; and

Preventing drug misuse by young people, including through education and early interventions particularly targeted at vulnerable young people—£102 million.

Emergency Services

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce legislation to create a separate offence of assault on members of the emergency services. [88488]

Hilary Benn: All assaults against emergency services personnel are totally unacceptable, and the severity of the sentence should reflect the relative seriousness of the crime. Courts already have discretion to impose the appropriate sentence taking into account all the aggravating or mitigating circumstances, within maximum penalties that range from six months for common assault to life imprisonment for causing grievous bodily harm with intent.

Floating Accommodation

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) which are the mainland locations closest to the floating accommodation that are being planned; [88016]

(2) what recent representations his Department have received on using floating accommodation centres for asylum seekers; and what size of such centres he is planning. [88015]

Beverley Hughes: I met the hon. Member for Mid Worcestershire (Peter Luff) on 4 July 2002 to discuss floating accommodation for asylum seekers. We have not ruled out this possibility.

Site searching for potential accommodation centre sites remains ongoing. We will not be putting into the public domain details of such sites unless and until they are considered to be a serious prospect for the siting of an accommodation centre.

Prison Inmates (Hospital Treatment)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions in 2002 prison inmates have been taken to hospital for medical treatment and have been shackled while in hospital; and if he will make a statement. [86824]

Hilary Benn: No central records are maintained of the number of prisoners taken to hospital for medical treatment or the number of those who are held under restraint, and the information requested can be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The application of restraints to prisoners at hospital is determined by a risk assessment but restraints are not applied to women attending for antenatal treatment or to give birth. Once applied, restraints may be removed subject to a risk assessment, and will be removed where a healthcare professional seeks their removal because of an immediate risk to the health of the prisoner, or because the prisoner is in pain or discomfort, or because the restraints are impeding essential treatment.

Prisoners (Thrombolysis)

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of heart attack victims in the prison population received thrombolysis within 30 minutes in the most recent period for which figures are available. [88003]

Hilary Benn: This information is not collected centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Suicides (Youth Detention)

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many *(a)* young people and *(b)* women have committed suicide in youth detention in each year since 1997; [87764]

(2) how many suicides there have been in English prisons in each year since 1997. [87763]

Hilary Benn: The information requested is in the tables. Table 1 covers the 468 self-inflicted deaths in Prison Service establishments in England since 1 January 1997. Table 2 covers the 71 male and eight female self-inflicted deaths of those under the age of 21 held in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales since 1 January 1997. Those under the age of 18 may also be held in Local Authority Secure Units and Secure Training Centres (STCs). Table 3 covers the one self-inflicted death in Local Authority Secure Units in England and Wales since 1 January 1997. There have been no deaths in STCs since the first STC opened in April 1998.

Table 1: Number of self-inflicted deaths in Prison Service establishments in England between 1 January 1997 and 17 December 2002

Calendar year	*Number*
1997	65
1998	76
1999	89
2000	80
2001	67
2002	91
Total	468

Table 2: The number of self-inflicted deaths in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales by gender and age category between 1 January 1997 and 17 December 2002

	Age category		
Gender/calendar year	*15–17 years*	*18–20 years*	*Total*
Male			
1997	0	8	8
1998	3	11	14
1999	2	13	15
2000	3	9	12
2001	3	8	11
2002	3	9	11
Total	13	58	71
Female			
1997	0	1	1
2000	0	4	4
2001	0	2	2
2002	0	1	1
Total	0	8	8

Table 3: The number of self-inflicted deaths in Local Authority Secure Units between 1 January 1997 and 17 December 2002

	Number
1997	—
1998	1
1999	—
2000	—
2001	—
2002	—

The Prison Service and the Youth Justice Board (YJB) are working closely together to try to prevent the suicides of young people held in their care. The Prison Service's suicide prevention and self-harm reduction programme (which applies to all prisoners, regardless of gender and age) includes a series of projects to improve pre-reception, reception and induction arrangements; the exchange of information; the care of prisoners; detoxification; prisoners supporting each other and learning from investigations into deaths in custody.

Terrorism

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultations he has had with European partners on changes to immigration and asylum policy in the fight against terrorism. [88392]

Beverley Hughes: The United Kingdom has actively promoted counter terrorism measures within the European Union (EU) and the global fight against terrorism now represents a key priority objective for the EU. We ensure that discussions of immigration and asylum issues, and in particular border control measures, take full account of the contribution that these activities can make to the fight against terrorism.

NORTHERN IRELAND

High Hedges

Mr Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to introduce legislation for Northern Ireland to deal with high hedges. [88379]

Angela Smith: I have no plans at present to introduce legislation for Northern Ireland on this issue.

Transport Links

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the potential for enhanced rail, air and sea transport links between Scotland and Northern Ireland. [88936]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Air and shipping services are 'reserved' matters, which are the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Transport. Northern Ireland is reasonably well served at present by the existing transport linkages with Scotland, however there is always potential for such links to be further strengthened and enhanced, and I would expect this to happen as the private sector operators respond to new commercial opportunities and the changing market. It remains to be seen though what effect the growing competition between air and shipping operators will have on the Northern Ireland-Scotland routes.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

GATS

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what organisations have been consulted in the UK public consultation on GATS; and what measures have been taken to maximise public contributions to the consultation process. [88002]

Ms Hewitt: To date, my Department has distributed over 1,500 copies of the consultation document to NGOs, professional associations, trade associations, industry groups, members of the public and other interested groups and associations. In addition, the consultation document has been available in two formats (PDF and Word) on the DTFs World Trade web site.

Nuclear Facilities (Safety)

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what advice he has given to civil nuclear facilities regarding security. [88396]

Mr. Wilson: Advice on security measures at civil nuclear facilities is provided by the DTI's Office for Civil Nuclear Security (OCNS). The Director of Civil Nuclear Security, the nuclear security regulator, published his first annual report this year outlining his activities, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

It is not Government policy to disclose details of security issues concerning nuclear facilities as this information could be of use to potential terrorists.

Arbre Biomass Renewable Energy Plant

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she received *(a)* from and *(b)* in relation to the Arbre Biomass renewable energy plant; and if she will make a statement. [88101]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* My officials and I, have received a number of representations from those with an interest in the Arbre biomass plant.

Despite the recent problems that have beset Arbre it is hoped the project will be brought into full commercial operation under new ownership. The Government has indicated its willingness to talk to interested parties willing to create a long-term future for Arbre and to consider proposals which reduce the technical risk of taking the project to commercial operation.

Many lessons have already been learnt as a result of the project that can be applied to future high efficiency biomass plant, which are likely to be required if dedicated biomass plant are to be available in the medium term.

ASW Steel

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will publish the communications she has received from *(a)* Members and *(b)* officials of the Welsh Assembly about (i) ASW Steel and (ii) Celsa. [87452]

Ms Hewitt: DTI Ministers have received a number of communications from Members and officials of the Welsh Assembly Government about the receivership of ASW Holdings Ltd. and the subsequent announcement by its receivers, KPMG, that they have entered into an exclusivity agreement with Celsa to discuss the sale of certain ASW assets. It has been the policy of successive Governments not to disclose confidential communications between Government Departments which are covered by Exemption 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on what date she was informed that *(a)* ASW Steel had gone into receivership, *(b)* the Cardiff plant was closed by the receivers and *(c)* Celsa had purchased part of ASW Steel's assets. [87453]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* The answer is as follows:

(a) I became aware that ASW Holdings Ltd. was in difficulty in early July and immediately initiated discussions to try to help the company. My colleague, Minister of State for Employment Relations, Industry and the Regions, held an emergency meeting, on 8 July 2002 involving the company, its bankers and credit insurers. Despite these efforts, I was informed on 10 July 2002 that the company unfortunately had been left with no alternative but to call in the receivers.

(b) On 24 July 2002, the receivers, KPMG, informed my Department that production at the Cardiff plant would not recommence after the annual two-week summer shut down due to begin on 26 July 2002.

(c) I became aware that Celsa had entered into an exclusivity agreement with KPMG to negotiate the purchase of part of ASW's assets on 11 November 2002.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions her Department had with *(a)* Members, *(b)* officials of the Welsh Assembly, *(c)* officials and *(d)* receivers of (i) ASW Steel and (ii) Celsa regarding the sale of ASW Steel to Celsa and what the (A) purpose and (B) conclusions of them were. [87459]

Ms Hewitt: ASW is in administrative receivership and discussions with potential purchasers of the company are entirely a matter for the receivers, KPMG. My Department has therefore had no discussions with Celsa. My Department has, as you might expect, maintained a dialogue, and met, with KPMG to keep abreast of developments in order to assess the future of the company and its workforce. It has also maintained contact with officials at the Welsh Assembly to exchange information on the progress of discussions between the receivers and potential purchasers.

The sale of parts of ASW to Celsa has not been finalised. The discussions between Celsa and KPMG are subject to a confidentiality agreement and so full details of the proposed agreement are not known at this stage. Celsa has indicated that if its bid is finalised it hopes to create jobs for around 600 in Cardiff. KPMG continue discussions with prospective purchasers for the parts of the Sheerness plant not included in the proposed Celsa deal and I very much hope that a buyer can be found.

At the request of my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey, officials in HM Consulate General Barcelona have separately attempted, unsuccessfully, to facilitate a private meeting for my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey, with Celsa. In doing so, it was made clear that my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey, wished to express his concern for his constituents and the job losses involved and that her Majesty's Government was impartial between the UK locations currently occupied by ASW and officials would not be able to accompany my hon. Friend to any meeting with the company. Apart from this, my Department has had no contact with the company.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on her Department's involvement in the sale of ASW Steel to Celsa. [87460]

Ms Hewitt: ASW Holdings Ltd. is in administrative receivership and the sale of the company is a matter for the appointed receivers, KPMG. My Department has had no involvement in the proposed sale of parts of ASW Holdings Ltd. to Celsa.

At the request of my hon. Friend, the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt), officials in HM Consulate General Barcelona have separately attempted, unsuccessfully, to facilitate a private meeting for my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey with Celsa. In doing so, it was made clear that my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey wished to express his concern for his constituents and the job losses involved.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what grants have been made to *(a)* ASW Steel, *(b)* Celsa, *(c)* ASW's Cardiff site, and *(d)* ASW's Sheerness site in each of the last two years, stating for each (i) the date and (ii) conditions of the grant. [87490]

Ms Hewitt: I can find no record of grants awarded by my Department to any part of ASW Holdings Ltd. in the last two years, neither is there any record of any grants to the Sheerness plant from authorities in the south-east. Similarly, the Welsh Assembly Government inform me that no grants have been awarded to the Cardiff site from Welsh authorities. Celsa, although it is currently in discussion with KPMG for the purchase of parts of ASW, is a Spanish company with no known business operations in the UK, and so would not have received any grants in the UK.

British Energy

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the financial implications to BNFL of the rescue package for British Energy; and if she will make a statement. [88662]

Mr. Wilson: This is a commercial matter for BNFL.

Broadband Satellite (SEEDA)

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much was spent on the SEEDA's policy to introduce broadband by satellite; and why the scheme was discontinued. [88014]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* To date approximately 200 grants have been offered at £1,060 each during a pilot phase of SEEDA's satellite broadband programme. The trial ran from June through to November 2002. The programme has not been discontinued. The results of the pilot are being evaluated and it is planned that the programme will be launched across the whole of the south-east region early in the new year.

Child Care

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment has been made of the role of regional development agencies in promoting growth of child care in industry; and if she will make a statement. [89114]

Alan Johnson: I strongly believe that the appropriate provision of child care makes an important contribution to the achievement of economic prosperity at national and regional level. Accordingly, officials in the Department and the Department for Education and Skills have been discussing with the RDAs ways in which they can help to promote and support both public and private provision of child care in their regions.

Christmas Expenses

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many departmental Christmas cards she and her Ministers intend to send in 2002; how much these cards will cost *(a)* to buy, *(b)* to post and *(c)* in staff time to sign, address and place in envelopes; and if she will place in the Library a sample copy of the official Christmas card she has sent this year. [88108]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* In total, 800 departmental Christmas cards were sent by Ministers in my Department. The total cost of designing and printing these cards was approximately £269 and the cost to post them was about £250. It is not possible to estimate the staff costs involved in signing, addressing and placing the cards in envelopes without incurring disproportionate cost.

All expenditure incurred in the purchase and despatch of official Christmas cards was made in accordance with the departmental guidance on financial procedures and propriety, based on the principles set out in 'Government Accounting'.

I have arranged for a sample of the departmental Christmas card to be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Coal Health Compensation Schemes

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much has been spent on the coal health compensation schemes; and what percentage of the total has gone to *(a)* claimants, *(b)* solicitors and *(c)* other organisations, with specific reference to *(i)* IRISC, (ii) Healthcall, (iii) Schlumberga Senna and (iv) Hayes. [88285]

Mr. Wilson: The information is as follows:

	COPD £ million	*VWF £ million*	*Total £ million*	*Percentage*
Total damages paid	520	660	1,180	73
Total solicitors' costs paid	100	60	160	10
Other costs related to claim settlements which include payments to contractors	—	—	[1]270	17

[1] Due to commercial confidentiality, the Department is unable to provide a breakdown of the figures paid to individual contractors.

Correspondence

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will reply to the letter of 16 October regarding car imports from the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan. [88633]

Ms Hewitt: My office cannot find any trace of the letter. I suggest that the hon. Member sends it to me again and I will ensure that it receives prompt attention.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will reply to the letter of October 2002 regarding mis-selling of pensions from the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan. [88634]

Ms Hewitt: The letter was transferred to the Treasury for response since the subject is the responsibility of that Department.

Embedded Generation

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress she has made in encouraging embedded generation; and if she will make a statement. [87883]

Mr. Wilson: The DTI has taken a number of initiatives to facilitate the development of embedded or distributed generation. Many of the initiatives are being progressed through the Distributed Generation Co-ordinating Group (DGCG), established jointly by the DTI and Ofgem, to monitor the implementation of the Embedded Generation Working Group's recommendations. These recommendations focus on ensuring that embedded generation is treated in a fair and equitable fashion when connecting to the distribution networks and operating in the electricity market.

Many of the activities of the DGCG are funded via the DTI's Renewable Energy Programme, which also supports a range of other activities designed specifically to facilitate the development of embedded or distributed generation within the UK.

Further and Higher Education Policy

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had on the needs of employers with the Secretary of State for Education and Skills in connection with formulation of policies on further and higher education. [87489]

Ms Hewitt: I am well aware that the business perspective needs to be reflected in the higher education and further education agendas.

To this end, I have regular meetings with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills to discuss these issues. The last such meeting was on 1 December 2002. There are regular meetings between my right hon. and hon. Friends, the Minister for Work and Pensions, the Minister for Adult Learning, the Economic Secretary and the Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness, in order to develop the agenda. Also, senior officials from the two Departments meet regularly to discuss the strategy fully.

Green Ministers

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which Minister in her Department is the nominated Green Minister; how often she has attended meetings of the Green Ministers; and which official has responsibility for the DEFRA rural proofing check-list in her Department. [88453]

Mr. Wilson: I am DTI's Green Minister.

It is established practice under Exemption 2 of Part II of the code of practice on access to Government information not to disclose information relating to the proceedings of the Cabinet and its committees—such as Ministerial attendance at committees.

Departments do not publish a list of officials responsible for the DEFRA rural proofing check-list as personnel and machinery of Government changes mean that any published list would become out of date fairly quickly.

Icelandic Trawlermen

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will include the Erimo on the list of eligible vessels for the purpose of the compensation scheme for former Icelandic water trawlermen. [80120]

Nigel Griffiths: The Government are not satisfied on the basis of the available evidence that the Erimo made voyages within 200 miles of Iceland, as required under the scheme rules. It would not therefore be appropriate for it to be added to the list.

Investment Committee

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the terms of reference are for the Investment Committee; and if she will make a statement. [87926]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* Draft terms of reference for the Business Support Investment Committee are to be discussed at its first meeting in January and the agreed version will then be published.

Knowledge Transfer Initiatives

Mr. Mark Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much money her Department will spend on knowledge transfer initiatives in *(a)* 2003–04, *(b)* 2004–05 and *(c)* 2005–06 following the comprehensive spending review 2002. [87836]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 17 December 2002]:* As part of its 2002 spending review (SR2002) settlement, the Department of Trade and Industry's resources for innovation and knowledge transfer will rise from £338 million in 2002–03 to £388 million by 2005–06. My Department is currently developing—as part of our business planning process—detailed allocations for individual budgets and activities for the SR2002 period.

In addition, through the Office of Science and Technology and the UK science budget, my Department provides funding for activities which support the commercial exploitation of science. This includes, for example, funding for the Higher EducationInnovation Fund and the Public Sector Research Establishment (PSRE) Fund. For more information, see www.ost.golv.uk/reerach/funding/budget03_06/dti-sciencebudgetbook.pdf

Ministerial Engagements

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many engagements were undertaken outside London *(a)* by her or her predecessor and *(b)* by ministers in her Department in January (i) 2000, (ii) 2001 and (iii) 2002. [87348]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* I refer the hon Member to the answer given to him on 16 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 608W, by my hon Friend the Minister of State for the Cabinet Office.

Ministerial Responsibilities

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much of the time she spent in the last six months working as a Minister was spent on issues relating to her role as *(a)* Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, *(b)* Minister for Women and *(c)* E-Minister in the Cabinet. [87454]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* My roles as Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, Minister for Women and E-Minister in the Cabinet are closely linked, and it is not practicable to make an assessment of my time spent on each subject without incurring disproportionate cost.

Nimrod/Astute Contracts

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether her Department hired UBS Warburg to advise it and the MoD on issues arising from the Nimrod and Astute contracts with BAE Systems. [88412]

Alan Johnson: The Government has retained the services of UBS Warburg to provide specialist financial advice. There is nothing unusual in this, as it is not uncommon for Government to bring in external experts for specialist advice.

Post Office Network

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what reports she has made to the Prime Minister on progress in implementing the recommendations made by the PIU for modernising the Post Office network; if she will publish the reports; and if she will make a statement. [88042]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* Postcomm reports annually on the post office network and its second annual report was published on 30 September 2002. The Prime Minister's Office has also been kept abreast of progress in implementing the recommendations made by the PIU for modernising the Post Office network; there are no plans for publication. We have separately kept Parliament informed of progress.

Post Office Benefit Payments

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action she has taken to facilitate the distribution to customers by sub-postmasters of material produced by their trade association concerning changes to the payment of benefits and pensions; and if she will make a statement. [88666]

Mr. Timms: The marketing of universal banking services is, like other post office services, a matter for Post Office Ltd, in line with any contractual obligations. It is inappropriate for other organisations or individuals to produce their own marketing materials. Competing marketing materials would run the risk of misleading and worrying customers.

Post Office Group

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the financial position of the Post Office Group. [88039]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* Royal Mail Holdings published their interim financial statements on 14 November 2002. These showed that in the six months to 29 September 2002 the company made a post-tax loss of £484 million on turnover of just under £4 billion. The company's accumulated capital and reserves stood at £2,127 million.

The Government believe the necessary changes to remedy this disappointing performance are now under way. These changes include the appointment of new board members, a major restructuring programme under the chairman, Allan Leighton, and making available the £1.8 billion of accumulated reserves, which will back investment required in the mails business and Post Office Ltd.

Post Offices

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will set out the timetable for *(a)* testing and *(b)* installing the software systems for operating the new Post Office card accounts. [86211]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* These are matters that fall within the day-to-day responsibility of Post Office Ltd. and I have therefore asked the Chief Executive to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the Post Office will advise about banking services at Post Offices. [86558]

Mr. Timms: Post Office Ltd. currently provides information to customers on banking arrangements at Post Office branches.

The Government and Post Office Ltd. are working together to ensure that frontline staff have all the information they need to answer any questions from customers about banking facilities in Post Office branches.

Post Office Ltd. has now sent three pieces of communication to all Post Office branches: a leaflet entitled "Your essential guide to your customers' banking options" to explain to sub-postmasters all the options available to customers; a customer child benefit leaflet for issue to customers; and, a Banking Information Pack. I am informed that all have received positive feedback from sub-postmasters.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many post offices are being run by modified sub-postmasters, working on *(a)* short-term, *(b)* temporary contracts and *(c)* long-term contracts; and if she will make a statement; [88041]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* These are matters that fall within the day-to-day responsibility of Post Office Ltd. and I have therefore asked the Chief Executive to reply direct to the hon. Member.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to her answer of 16 December 2002, *Official Report*, columns 542–43W, on post offices, when she expects the first proposals for closures to be announced. [88476]

Mr. Timms: I understand from Post Office Ltd. that the first proposals for post office closures under the urban reinvention programme went out to public consultation under the Code of Practice in respect of 25 offices on 29 November, followed by closure proposals for a further 12 offices on 16 December.

Post Offices (Benefits)

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will estimate the change in revenue of the average Post Office branch as a result of changes to the method of paying benefits from April 2003. [86450]

Ms Hewitt: The migration of benefit payments to ACT will take place over two years from April 2003. There will not be a sudden drop in benefit book related income in April 2003. On changeover of payment arrangements, all customers who wish to do so will be able to access their benefits in cash at a post office counter and sub-postmasters will be remunerated for those transactions. The change in revenue as a result of changes to the method of paying benefits from April 2003 will vary according to the individual circumstances of each office, and the extent to which they develop new revenue streams, including from banking services.

Post Office Ltd. continues to develop plans for expansion of revenue generating services in the post office network. Banking will be a central part of the Post Office's strategy to move forward. Universal banking services, together with plans for the expansion of network banking, should lead to substantial increases in the range and volume of banking at post offices, tapping into a very much larger customer base than benefit recipients alone.

Post Offices (Chorley)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when Chorley council area post offices will be ready to use post office customer card accounts. [87519]

Mr. Timms: Good progress is being made on the implementation of universal banking services, including the card account at the Post Office. The programme is on track to deliver in advance of migration of benefits to ACT in 2003.

Post Offices (GP Services)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on her plans for Government general practitioner services to be provided in post offices. [88673]

Mr. Timms: As I announced on 15 October, although the outcome of the evaluation of the Your Guide pilot of post offices as Government General Practitioners showed that a publicly funded national Your Guide service would not provide value for money and we therefore decided not to extend it, the pilot did identify opportunities for individual Government Departments to deliver services through post offices in the future. There is also commercial interest in placing kiosks in retail outlets including post offices. It is expected that a commercial kiosk pilot run by E-Daily will start in Cornwall next year and that this will involve a number of post offices. Officials in my Department are in contact with other departments about the potential for using E-Daily as an information channel and I understand that E-Daily is in direct touch with other departments as well as with the National Federation of Sub Postmasters.

Postal Services

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her policy is on the maintenance of universal postal service provision at a uniform price. [87970]

Mr. Timms: The universal postal service obligation was laid down in the Postal Services Act 2000 and consists of a service provided at an affordable price determined by a public tariff uniform throughout the United Kingdom. It includes the delivery each working day to the home or premises of every individual in the United Kingdom and a collection each working day from access points, subject to the exceptions to this agreed with Postcomm.

Under section 3 of the Act, it is the primary duty of the Regulator, Postcomm, to maintain the universal postal service. The Government's commitment to that service is consequently enshrined in the Postal Services Act.

Power Generation (State Aid)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the admissibility of state aid to the power generation industry under EU regulations; and what recent consultations she has had on this issue. [88048]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* State aid may be paid to the power generation industry, subject to commission approval and consistency with the terms of the EC treaty, under a number of horizontal frameworks and guidelines. These include the community guidelines on state aid for environmental protection and for rescuing and restructuring firms in difficulty. My ministerial colleagues and I have been in contact with the European Commission and others about the rescue aid recently granted to British Energy, which was approved by the commission on 27 November.

Productivity

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what research has been conducted by her Department into the relationship between expenditure on research and development and productivity. [87837]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 17 December 2002]:* My Department undertakes some studies into the factors affecting business innovation, including industrial and public research and development and its effects on productivity. Some examples can be found on a DTI economists' Website www.dti.gov.uk/iese. We also keep in close touch with the large amount of academic research on the links between R&D and GDP growth and productivity. Some of this material was summarised in the joint DTI/Treasury./DfES publication Investing in Innovation, pages 11–12. Available at www.hm-treasury.gov.uk .

Regional Development Agencies

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what business support is provided by regional development agencies. [87999]

Alan Johnson: A key part of the RDAs' role is to ensure there is appropriate business support in their regions to support the regional economic strategies which the RDAs have developed and are implementing, working with regional and local partners closely.

Information on what the RDAs are doing is available in the regional economic strategies, which can be accessed on the RDAs' website (via www.rdauk.org) and in the RDAs' corporate plans. The corporate plans for 2003–06 will be available in the Libraries of the House in the spring.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which projects involving renewable energy sources have been accepted for generation export since May 2001. [89315]

Mr. Wilson: The information requested is not available since there is no means of determining whether any of the electricity exported is generated from renewable energy sources.

Retired Mineworkers

Diana Organ: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many retired mineworkers have received a lump sum payment as compensation for low level payments from the Mineworkers Pension Scheme; and how many were from the Forest of Dean coalfield. [87593]

Mr. Timms: To date over £56.9 million has been paid to 42,500 MPS members on the lowest pensions who left British Coal before or shortly after 1975. 57 members with postcodes in the area of the Forest of Dean have been paid.

Diana Organ: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many retired mineworkers from the Forest of Dean coalfield have been turned down for the compensatory lump sum payment to the Mineworkers Pension Scheme. [87594]

Mr. Timms: The Scheme to help those MPS members on the lowest pensions who left British Coal before or shortly after 1975 does not operate on the basis of applications. MPS members who are identified by DTI's agents, Paymaster, as meeting the Scheme's criteria

are automatically sent the appropriate sum. While Paymaster, and my Department, both receive enquiries from MPS members about eligibility, no records are kept of the addresses of those advised they are ineligible.

Diana Organ: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to assist those retired mineworkers from the Forest of Dean coalfield who are not eligible for the lump sum payment as compensation for the Mineworkers Pension Scheme owing to them not fulfilling the criteria of being in the scheme for five years from April 1961 [87595]

Mr. Timms: The intention of the scheme to help those MPS members on the lowest pensions who left British Coal before or shortly after 1975 is to address the problem of retired mineworkers who receive very low pensions in spite of lengthy service in the industry. For this reason, mineworkers with less than five years contributory service were excluded. For most MPS members, service prior to April 1961 is not included because they opted to take a refund of contributions with respect to that service, although service prior to April 1961 is counted in the cases of those who chose not to exercise that option. We have no plans to revisit these criteria.

Single Mail Delivery

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the Post Office's *(a)* proposal to move to a single mail delivery and *(b)* decision to cancel late collections from city centre post boxes. [88140]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* These are matters that fall within the day-to-day responsibility of Royal Mail Group plc and I have therefore asked the chairman to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Small Retail Businesses

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimates she has made of the number of people employed in small retail businesses in *(a)* the UK, *(b)* Lancashire, *(c)* the north west and *(d)* Wales. [R] [88646]

Nigel Griffiths: At the start of 2001 there were 1.1 million people employed in small retail businesses in the UK with less than 250 employees.

Data are available for the north west and Wales at the start of 1999 but only at a greater aggregation that includes wholesale, repairs, retail, hotels and restaurants. There were 361,000 people employed in small businesses classified to these sectors in the north west and 141,000 in Wales.

County level data are not available.

Solar Panels

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many people have applied for a grant to aid the installation of solar panelling for their domestic electricity; and how much money has been set aside for this purpose. [87963]

Mr. Wilson: Under the £20 million major demonstration programme, 126 small-scale applications had been received by the end of November 2002. Of these, 25 had been completed, a further 79 had a grant offered, nine were on hold, eight had been withdrawn and five rejected. Total grants (which represent 50 per cent of the total cost of the PV systems) to date is around £860,000.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proposals she has to improve the promotion of solar panels. [87964]

Mr. Wilson: The £20 million first phase of the Major Photovoltaic Demonstration Programme has already received publicity through newspaper and magazine articles and in items on TV and radio. The Programme Management Contractor is promoting the programme through thousands of flyers and fact sheets, and at seminars, conferences and exhibitions, and a number of PV suppliers and installers are doing their own promotion on the back of the programme. We will continually review the marketing of the programme, particularly to geographical areas and sectors which show a poor level of take-up.

Solar PV Industry

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what criteria are being used to decide which large scale project bids under Stream 2 of her Department's solar PV major demonstration programme receive capital grant funding. [87716]

Mr. Wilson: The criteria for selecting Stream 2 projects are set out in the Guidance Notes for the Application Process and on the programme website www.solarpvgrants.co.uk

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will begin the process of determining whether phase one of the solar PV major demonstration programme has been a success. [87718]

Mr. Wilson: The first phase of the PV MDP runs for three years and, while progress is constantly being reviewed, we will probably not undertake formal evaluation until the third year.

Telecommunications Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the outcome was of the Telecommunications Council held in Brussels on 5 December: what the Government's stance was on the issues discussed, including its voting record; and if she will make a statement. [86705]

Mr. Timms: I represented the UK at the Telecommunications Council in Brussels on 5 December.

There was a policy debate on the situation in the telecommunications sector in Europe, and the Council adopted conclusions which emphasised the importance of developing content, services and applications for the information society, and the widespread availability and use of broadband networks, using a multi-platform approach as set out in the eEurope 2005 Action Plan. The conclusions also underlined the importance of implementation of the new regulatory framework for electronic communications, and agreed that intervention in the form of state aid was not the way

forward. In particular, the Council emphasised the importance of placing the information society and the telecommunications sector high on the agenda of the Spring European Council, and invited the Commission to report on these subjects in due time beforehand and if necessary put forward appropriate proposals.

There was also adoption of two resolutions: one on the implementation (including the benchmarking) of the eEurope Action Plan 2005; and another on promoting a culture of network and information security. Council conclusions were also adopted on eSkills. There was also an agreement on a general approach, without the need for a vote, towards the MODINIS programme which helps fund the implementation of the eEurope Action Plan 2005, and work on network security. Regarding the dti Department of Trade and Industry Commission's proposal for a Directive on the re-use and commercial exploitation of public sector information, the presidency concluded that a common position is likely to be adopted at the March Council following adoption of an opinion by the European Parliament.

The Commission also gave a short presentation on its eighth report on the implementation of the current regulatory framework for telecommunications which reiterated the importance of timely, effective and coherent implementation of the new regulatory framework for electronic communications. The Commission also reported progress on its work on open platforms for digital television and 3G mobile, and on electronic identification and authentication systems in e-commerce, on which public hearings are expected in the New Year.

On the reform of ICANN, the private sector company based in the United States that manages the Internet domain name system, the Commission gave an update on the positive progress towards successful reform achieved at the latest ICANN reform negotiations which took place in Shanghai in October.

TUPE Regulations

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will respond to the consultation on the reform of TUPE Regulations, with particular reference to the treatment of occupational pension rights; and if she will make a statement. [88046]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* The Green Paper "Pensions and the Workplace", published on 17 December 2002, reaffirms that the Government remain committed to the long-standing policy of protection for employees' occupational pension rights on a "broadly comparable" basis for public sector transfers, both on first transfer of a service to the private sector and on any subsequent transfers within the private sector. It also seeks further views on the question of providing a degree of explicit legal protection for occupational pension rights on transfer, including in the private sector, in the light of the wide range of views expressed in response to the options put forward in our initial consultation at the end of 2001.

As regards the other aspects of our proposed TUPE reform, we aim to carry out a further round of public consultation in 2003 on draft revised regulations.

Undersea Cables

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the likely cost of undersea cables to take power from northern Scotland to southern England, down the west and east coasts; and if she will make a statement. [88663]

Mr. Wilson: The Department commissioned a high level feasibility study into the possibility of building a subsea cable to transfer electricity generated in Scotland down the west coast to markets in the south. The report, which was published in February and is available on the DTI website: www.dti.gov.uk, includes capital costings for different systems and costs will be dependent of course on the length of the cable and its capacity. For illustrative purposes, the report concludes that the capital costs of an HVDC link capable of transferring 2000 MW of electricity would range from £790 million for a 200 km cable to £1,700 million for a 700 km cable.

The report is a useful contribution to the important debate on the best way of transmitting renewable energy generated in Scotland to centres of demand in the south.

Wind Power

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on how the Government plans to reach its aim of 6 per cent. of Britain's electricity to be provided by wind power by 2010. [88066]

Mr. Wilson: The Government's target for renewable energy is that, by 2010, 10 per cent. of electricity should be supplied from sources eligible for the renewables obligation. While we expect wind to make a substantial contribution to this target, no specific targets have been set in relation to its contribution to the overall 10 per cent. target.

TREASURY

Bank Clearance System

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when power will be granted to the Office of Fair Trading to allow it to regulate the bank clearance system; and if he will make a statement. [88661]

Ruth Kelly: The Government is closely monitoring developments in payment systems and will introduce legislation to give the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) new powers to promote effective competition in payment systems as soon as parliamentary time allows. Progress has already been made through, for example, the removal of charges for most cash withdrawals from automated teller machines ("ATMs") and reforms to the governance structures of the main UK payment systems. The Government welcome these moves by payment system participants to address the competition issues identified by the Cruickshank report and urges the industry to continue with these reforms.

To promote its understanding of how payment systems operate, and to help pave the way for its prospective powers, the OFT announced on 27 November that it will conduct an empirical study into recent payment system developments, starting early in 2003.

Productivity Performance Figures

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the productivity performance figures were in each year since 1992 for *(a)* output per worker and *(b)* output per hour. [88856]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from K. Dunnell to Dr. Vincent Cable, dated 7 January 2003:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question about what the productivity performance figures were for each year since 1992 for *(a)* output per worker and *(b)* output per hour. I am replying in his absence. (88856)

The table below shows indices of output per job and output per hour for the UK whole economy for each year from 1992 to 2001 along with the annual growth rates.

UK whole economy productivity indices and growth, 1992 to 2001

	Index (1995 = 100)		*Annual growth rate (per cent)*	
Year	*Output per job*	*Output per hour*	*Output per job*	*Output per hour*
1992	91.0		3.4	
1993	94.3	95.4	3.6	
1994	98.2	98.5	4.1	3.2
1995	100.0	100.0	1.8	1.5
1996	101.5	101.8	1.5	1.8
1997	103.1	103.3	1.5	1.4
1998	105.0	106.0	1.9	2.6
1999	105.8	107.5	0.8	1.4
2000	107.5	110.6	1.6	2.9
2001	108.6	111.5	1.0	0.8

Central Government Accounts

Norman Lamb: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on progress towards publication of the first consolidated Central Government accounts for 2003–04. [89271]

John Healey: The Government is working towards publication of the first consolidated Central Government accounts for 2003–04 by producing dry run accounts for 2001–02 and 2002–03. Data in respect of 2001–02 is currently being submitted to the Treasury by departments.

Climate Change Levy

Sue Doughty: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer what the anticipated receipts are during the current fiscal year from those companies subject to negotiated agreements under climate change levy. [88539]

John Healey: No estimate is available of levy receipts the Exchequer anticipates to receive during 2002–03 from those companies covered by negotiated climate change agreements.

Debt Relief

Tony Worthington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his policy is on further debt relief additional to that currently available. [87572]

John Healey: The UK Government have been at the forefront of the international debate on debt relief issues, and continues to press for the rapid and full implementation of the enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative. Under the terms of the HIPC initiative bilateral creditors typically provide 90 per cent. debt relief. However, many creditors, including the UK, go further and provide 100 per cent. debt relief to qualifying countries.

In the provision of interim debt relief at Decision Point to reach a debt-to-exports ratio of 150 per cent. this additional bilateral voluntary debt relief is excluded. Subsequently at Completion Point if this debt ratio is greater than 150 per cent., perhaps due to new borrowing or weaker export prices, the initiative provides the option for further debt relief or 'topping-up'. Moreover, the UK has argued that we should be prepared to be proactive and flexible in providing this additional debt relief at Completion Point.

But at present this additional bilateral voluntary debt relief is included in the calculation of any 'topping-up' needed, and the net effect is that this additional relief benefits other creditors and not the HI PC. The UK believes that this additional relief should be excluded from the calculation of topping-up at Completion Point, and this would delineate more clearly the burden sharing between all creditors, both bilateral and multilateral, in the HIPC initiative.

This policy would ensure that this voluntary debt relief over and above HIPC terms would be truly additional. Moreover, it would provide an additional degree of support to vulnerable HIPCs facing the challenges of a global economic slowdown and weaker commodity prices.

However, even the provision of 100 per cent. debt relief to all low-income countries would still far short of the resources needed to fund the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It is our ultimate objective to make a lasting difference in the lives of the world's poorest people by achieving the MDGs, but debt relief is only part of the solution: the real issue is one of total resources. That is why the Chancellor has proposed an International Financing Facility to leverage significant additional resources from developed countries, to help achieve the 2015 MDGs. Increasing our support from $50billion currently to the $100 billion a year needed to meet the MDGs would transform the ability of countries to increase their investment in critical poverty reducing programmes. The UK Government will shortly be publishing a detailed proposal on the International Financing Facility.

Departmental Sickness Absence

Norman Lamb: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures have been taken to reduce sickness absence in his Department in line with Spending Review 2000 SDA Target E2.1, as described on page 33 of the HM Treasury Departmental Report 2002. [89268]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury has taken a number of steps to manage the level of sick absence including publishing clear guidance of the responsibilities for staff and line

managers, revising procedures for recording sick absence, an increased role for the Welfare Officer, closer involvement of Human Resources, and running a flu vaccination and health screening programmes for Treasury staff.

Departmental Targets

Norman Lamb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what formula is being used to measure *(a)* annual efficiency gains and *(b)* savings of running costs within his Department in order to meet the targets outlined on page 75 of the HM Treasury departmental report 2002; [89258]

(2) if he will make a statement on why it has not been possible to measure aggregate Treasury output, as mentioned on page 75 of the HM Treasury departmental report 2002. [89257]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury monitors those outputs which can be measured, such as replies to parliamentary questions, letters or other communications with the public, payment performance, and so on. However the Treasury's primary output is policy advice. Such outputs are difficult to measure—and without a measure of overall output it is not possible to measure efficiency.

Departmental Working Hours

Norman Lamb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the percentages of excessive hours worked within his Department were in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [89256]

Ruth Kelly: This information is available in the Library of the House and was referred to in the answer I gave on 25 February 2002 to the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr Cable), *Official Report*, columns 1045–46.

E-procurement

Norman Lamb: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer if his Department has purchased an e-procurement system. [89273]

Ruth Kelly: H M Treasury is in the process of introducing such a system.

Earnings Statistics

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the ratio was of female to male full-time equivalent earnings for *(a)* non-manual, *(b)* manual and *(c)* all workers in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [88589]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Karen Dunnell to Mr. Peter Bottomley, dated 7 January 2003:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question on the ratio between female and male earnings. I am replying in his absence. (88589)

The attached table gives the ratio of female to male average weekly earnings, for April 2002 based on the annual New Earnings Survey (NES). Monthly data of average weekly earnings are not available.

Ratio of female to male average earnings[1]

	April 2002
Manual	0.68
Non-manual	0.66
All	0.75

[1] Full time employees on adult rates whose pay for the survey pay period was unaffected by absence

Source:

New Earnings Survey

Enterprise Areas

Mr. Willetts: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer what the new enterprise areas announced in the Pre-Budget Report are; how they were chosen; and if he will make a statement,. [88201]

John Healey: Enterprise Areas are designed to improve access to and take-up of a number of Government policy measures focused on tackling the barriers to small business in disadvantaged areas. They are intended to ensure that these policies form a coherent package from the perspective of existing and potential new businesses, so that take-up by businesses in disadvantaged areas is easier, and effectiveness in improving outcomes is increased. In addition to stamp duty exemption on property transfers up to £150,000, and policies designed to tackle market failures and provide better business support, the Government is looking at ways to make the planning regime in Enterprise Areas more flexible.

The Enterprise Areas are the 2,000 most deprived areas across the UK. They are the same as the areas which benefit from the stamp duty exemption on property transfers up to £150,000. A list can be found at *www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/so/disadvantaged.htm*. A list was also placed in the House of Commons Library on 27 November 2001.

The areas were selected using the best available data on multiple deprivation in each of the countries of the UK. These were: in England, the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2000; in Wales, the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2000; in Scotland, the Scottish Area Deprivation Index 1998; and in Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Measures of Deprivation 2001.

External Suppliers

Norman Lamb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the external suppliers used by his Department for training purposes, as stated on page 37 of the HM Treasury departmental report 2002; and if he will make a statement on the assessment he has made of the value for money delivered by these suppliers and the programmes. [89260]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury has contracts with various external training providers to deliver the Treasury's Development Programme. The companies used are as follows:

Accountancy Tuition Centre
Angel Scott Associates
Birkbeck College
CMPS
London School of Economics
Parity Training
Sunley Management Centre
Trainers at Work

All contracts with external suppliers are procured on a competitive basis, initially for two years but with the option to extend the contract to a maximum of five years. The provision of centrally managed training means that training is delivered on cost effective terms and can be regularly monitored to ensure that it continues to meet the Treasury's needs.

Film Production (Tax Relief)

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the income tax receipts forgone, since 1997, as a result of Her Majesty's Government's policy of making tax relief available for investment in film production; and if he will make a statement. [88677]

John Healey: Film production benefits from a number of tax reliefs that accelerate the deduction of expenditure on British qualifying films. The estimated tax cost of relief provided under Section 48 of the Finance (No.2) Act 1997 is £440 million for the period 1997–98 to 2001–02, over double the amount that would have been available under the previous arrangements. The tax cost of the other reliefs is estimated to be an additional £70 million a year.

Government Borrowing

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answer of 12 December, *Official Report*, column 472W on government borrowing, what the evidence is of the effect of government borrowing on wholesale commercial rates. [88510]

Ruth Kelly: As the right hon. gentleman will note from the Chief Secretary's previous answer of 12 December, there is no clear-cut evidence regarding the impact of government borrowing on commercial borrowing rates. In particular, the statistical evidence in the economic literature from both time series and cross-sectional studies is inconclusive on this question.

Honours and Dignities

Norman Lamb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will break down by main spending heads HM Treasury's payments towards *(a)* the Civil List and *(b)* honours and dignities, as listed in the table on page 35 of the HM Treasury departmental report 2002. [89259]

Ruth Kelly: The Queen's Civil List is the funding provided by Parliament to enable the Queen to undertake her duties as Head of State; it meets the central staff costs and running expenses of Her Majesty's official Household. The figure of £8,902,000 for 2001–02 in table 4.4 of the Treasury's departmental report also includes annuities granted by Parliament for HM Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother and HRH the Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh. It comprises:

	£
Queen's Civil List	7,900,000
Parliamentary annuities	
HM Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother	643,000
HRH the Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh	359,000

Parliamentary annuities for other members of the royal family are reimbursed by Her Majesty and are therefore not included in the net payments shown in the departmental report.

On the breakdown of costs associated with honours and dignities, I refer the hon. Gentleman to my answer to his question 89263.

House Price Inflation

Mr. Love: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the accuracy of the estimates he used of house price inflation from *(a)* major mortgage providers and *(b)* the Land Registry; and if he will make a statement. [89394]

Ruth Kelly: There are significant concerns about whether currently available measures give adequate estimates of house price inflation. The Land Registry produces the most comprehensive measure, covering all transactions in England and Wales. However, price changes as measured by the Land Registry are affected by changes in the composition (mix) of transactions, as well as pure price changes. Mix- adjustment is desirable as there is significant variation from one period to the next in the characteristics of properties sold size, type eg flat or house, location and other factors that affect price. Figures from the Halifax and Nationwide are mix-adjusted, and also more timely, but only cover properties purchased with mortgages from these providers. These two indicators can show significant differences, highlighting concerns as to how representative they are. The Government is concerned about such discrepancies, and is therefore planning to launch a new official house price measure in the Summer 2003, though it will not cover non-mortgage financed house purchases.

Household Income

Keith Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will take further steps, in addition to those presented in the pre-Budget report, to reduce the division in household income between England's northern and southern regions. [89023]

Ruth Kelly: Measures associated with Public Sector Agreement targets, such as those related to children in low-income households, to regional economic performance, and to the employment rates of disadvantaged areas, are likely to have a positive impact on the regional distribution of household income.

Import Controls

Mr. Lidington: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many staff posts and how much money is being transferred to HM Customs, and to the Department of Food, Agriculture and Rural Affairs in view of the transfer to HM Customs of responsibility for controls of ports over the import of plant and animal products; [88432]

(2) what additional *(a)* manpower and *(b)* financial provision he is making available to HM Customs and Excise to equip them to carry out their new responsibilities in respect of the import of plant and animal products; [88430]

(3) what targets he has set for HM Customs and Excise in respect of their new responsibilities to control the import of plant and animal products. [88431]

John Healey: The recent government spending review made available £5 million of new money in 2003–04 and £10 million per annum in the subsequent two years to address the issue of illegal imports of plant and animal products.

Manpower and other financial resources to be made available to Customs in respect of their new responsibilities in this area, together with the nature of targets to be achieved, are still the subject of discussions between Defra, Customs and other relevant Departments and Agencies.

Landfill

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of schemes funded by tax foregone under the landfill levy would be eligible for funding under the terms of the allocation of funds for public spending to encourage sustainable waste management in *(a)* 2003–04, *(b)* 2004–05 and *(c)* 2005–06. [88585]

John Healey: The design of the public spending programme will be determined following further work on the management of waste policy.

Mr. Flook: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many environmental projects which are funded by the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme and that contribute to achieving the United Kingdom biodiversity action plan, have a completion date beyond March 2003. [88974]

John Healey: There are no statistics that detail how many environmental projects, funded by the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme, contribute to achieving the United Kingdom biodiversity action plan and have a completion date beyond March 2003. Contributions made by landfill site operators for the period up until 31 March 2003 will still be able to be spent after that date on current projects. A reformed tax credit scheme, worth around £47 million a year, will continue to be available for community environment projects, including those that contribute to biodiversity, after 31 March.

Mr. Flook: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the Government will make a decision on the criteria or scope of the replacement spending scheme for the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme which runs until March 2003. [88975]

John Healey: Decisions on the criteria and scope of the replacement spending scheme for waste related projects will be made by Budget 2003, as the Government are aware of the need to make announcements in good time.

The general tax credit scheme will continue for local community environmental projects after 31 March 2003, with around the present level of funding available for these projects. The Government are currently considering the detailed administration and the criteria for the scheme and will be announcing any further changes over the coming months.

Life Insurance Companies

Barbara Follett: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals he has for changing the rules for taxing life insurance companies. [89550]

Dawn Primarolo: On 23 December 2002 the Inland Revenue issued a press notice setting out measures to be included in the Finance Bill 2003 changing some of the rules for taxing life insurance companies. The proposed package of measures will remove certain anomalies and prevent a small number of companies exploiting particular circumstances to pay much less tax than other companies writing similar business. The changes will therefore protect the tax base and ensure a fairer distribution of tax across the industry. Copies of the Press Notice have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses and full details have been published on the Inland Revenue's web site.

Non-domicile Tax Laws

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimates have been made of the amount of foreign investment in the UK resulting from non-domicile tax laws. [88551]

John Healey: I refer the hon. Member to the reply the Paymaster General gave her on 4 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 840W.

Parliamentary Questions

Norman Lamb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to improve his targets for responding to Named Day Parliamentary questions. [89322]

John Healey: An increasing proportion of Named Day Parliamentary questions was answered on time by the Treasury in each session since PSA targets were introduced in 1998–99, as the table shows:

	Percentage answered on time
1998–99	35.3
1999–2000	59.4
2000–01	63.0
2001–02	73.2

71.1 per cent. of Named Day questions have been answered on the nominated day in the 2002–03 session to date.

Pollution Targets

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the economic measures which he has taken that have as one of their objectives helping the UK meet its Kyoto carbon dioxide emissions targets. [87735]

John Healey *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to previous Budget documentation which detail the taxation policies and the climate change programme which covers other regulatory and spending initiatives that the Government have introduced to the help the UK meet its legally binding commitments to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases including carbon dioxide under the Kyoto Protocol.

A list of environmental initiatives is published in both the Budget and pre-Budget reports (in the 2002 PBR and Budget 2002 tables 7.1 and 7.2).

Privately Operated Tolls

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the privately operated tolls which will be subject to VAT from 1st February. [89116]

John Healey: The Government is aware of 10 bridges operated by non-public bodies where the tolls will become subject to VAT from 1 February if the bodies are liable to register for VAT. These are Aldwark Bridge, Clifton Suspension Bridge, Dunham Bridge, Rixton and Warburton Bridge, Severn River Crossing, Skye Bridge, Swinford Bridge, Shrewsbury (Kingsland) Bridge, Whitchurch Bridge and Whitney on Wye Bridge.

As I made clear in my written statement of 19 December, the Government's intention remains that tolls will not increase on account of VAT being levied from 1 February. The Department for Transport and the Scottish Executive are consulting with toll operators on the details, and suitable arrangements will be in place by 1 February.

In addition to these, tolls levied by private landowners to cross their land will also become subject to VAT. There is no central record maintained of this type of toll.

Mr. Chope: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to the Written Ministerial statement of 19 December, on VAT on privately operated toll roads, how he intends to ensure that tolls will not increase on account of VAT being levied from 1st February 2003. [89398]

John Healey: As I made clear in my statement, the Government's intention remains that tolls will not increase on account of VAT being levied from 1 February. The Department for Transport and the Scottish Executive are consulting with toll operators on the details, and suitable arrangements will be in place by 1 February.

Mr. Chope: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will define the expression 'privately operated' in relation to toll roads in his Written Ministerial Statement of 19th December. [89399]

John Healey: The European Court of Justice has ruled that statutory tolls levied by central and local government bodies are outside the scope of VAT, because these bodies do not engage in business activities when performing their statutory functions. The court has also ruled that tolls levied by other bodies, or levied in other circumstances, must be made subject to VAT. The term "privately operated" is a generic term, which refers to this second category of tolls.

Mr. Chope: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his Written Ministerial Statement of 19 December, on VAT on privately operated tolls, if the Central London road user charge will bear VAT; and if he will make a statement. [89400]

John Healey: Provided that the Central London road user charging scheme is operated entirely by a public body and under public statute, the charges will not be liable to VAT.

Social Exclusion

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation on the use of public procurement contracts to reduce social exclusion; what plans he has to issue guidance on the subject; and if he will make a statement. [88142]

Ruth Kelly: Treasury officials have had discussions with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in connection with their report "Achieving Community Benefits through Contracts". As the report acknowledges, the authors' understanding of the issues surrounding the procurement policy and legal framework has been furthered by discussions with, inter alia, officials at HM Treasury and the Office of Government Commerce (OGC).

Transaction Costs

Norman Lamb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his Department's progress towards a reduction in transaction costs by 2004. [89272]

Ruth Kelly: Good progress is being made towards this target through increased use of the Government Procurement Card and more efficient systems for handling invoices.

Website Relaunch

Norman Lamb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much the relaunch of the www.euro.gov.uk website in March 2001 cost. [89255]

Ruth Kelly: Details of HM Treasury expenditure on business euro preparations were included in the 'Sixth Report on Euro Preparations', published on 18 July 2002. Copies of the report were deposited in the Library of the House.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Minimum Income Guarantee

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he intends to implement targets for take-up of the minimum income guarantee. [89321]

Malcolm Wicks: There are no plans to introduce a take up target for the Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG). However, from October 2003, the MIG will be replaced by pension credit. The Public Service Agreement (PSA) target is to be paying pension credit to at least three million households by 2006.

ASW

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to pay funds into the pension schemes of the ASW workers at Sheerness and Cardiff. [85262]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 12 December 2002]:* Ministers have met members of the ASW Action Group and their constituency MPs to discuss the Group's concerns about the Cardiff and Sheemess pension schemes. We identified a number of practical ways forward and have written to the hon. Member on a number of detailed technical pension issues on the process of winding up, and has raised the concerns of the Group as appropriate within Government.

It was also suggested that the scheme's independent trustee might like to contact the Inland Revenue to discuss the option of members being re-introduced into the State Second Pension (formerly SERPS). It may be possible, under the 'deemed buyback' provisions contained in the Pensions Act 1995, for members to have their state scheme rights restored, thus ensuring that they receive an additional pension under the state scheme, in addition to basic state pension.

The Government recognises that the ASW situation is extremely unfortunate, and that is why it acted quickly to put in place a range of measures through Jobcentre Plus, in conjunction with key partner organisations to help those employees being made redundant. No responsible Government could agree to be the guarantor of private pension savings. It would place huge liabiliites on tax payers some of whom will not have private savings of their own.

The Government is concerned about schemes that wind up with insufficient assets to cover their liabilities. That is why it has set out proposals aimed at improving protection for scheme members in the pensions Green Paper 'Simplicity, security and choice: Working and saving for retirement', Cm 5677. The Green Paper includes proposals to share out scheme assets more fairly, introduce some form of insurance and strengthen protection for members whose solvent employer chooses to wind up its scheme

Child Support Agency

Mr. Denis Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many cases are being dealt with by the Child Support Agency; and how many cases were received in each of the last five years. [88156]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. Murphy, dated December 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent parliamentary questions about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply from me.

You ask how many cases are being dealt with by the Child Support Agency; and how many cases were received in each of the last five years.

At the end of November 2002 the Agency's live and assessed case load is 1,088,920.

The total new intake is:

	at 31 March
1998	581,815
1999	594,805
2000	369,226
2001	303,797
2002	365,414
to end November 2002	219,103

Community Care Grant

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what is the average amount by which community care grant payments have fallen short of the amounts applied for in the last four years for which figures are available. [85159]

Malcolm Wicks: The discretionary Social Fund provides help with unexpected or occasional costs which vary widely in their nature and importance, to a wide range of client groups. People applying for community care grants can request any items they wish, whether or not they fall within the scope of the scheme. In deciding whether, and for what items, a grant is payable a balance has to be struck between meeting people's needs and the costs of providing that support from available resources.

The available information is in the table. Figures for the average amount requested refer to all applications, not all of which will be successful.

Community Care Grants

Year	*Average amount initially requested (£)*	*Average amount initially awarded (£)*
1998–99	761	343
1999–2000	772	342
2000–01	794	338
2001–02	833	338

Notes:

For 1998–99,and part of 1999–2000, it was possible to make a dual application for both a budgeting loan and a community care grant. For these years the average amount applied for is based on community care grant applications only, while the average amount initially awarded is for both types of application. Dual applications were phased out from 5 April 1999.

Source:

Social Fund Policy, Budget and Management Information System.

Housing Benefit

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much housing benefit is unclaimed so far this financial year; and what impact he expects the implementation of the Supporting People Partnership will have on reducing this figure. [89242]

Malcolm Wicks: Estimates of unclaimed Housing Benefit for 19997/2000, the latest financial year for which information is available, are in the report "Income Related Benefits: Estimates of Take-Up 1999/2000", a copy of which is in the Library. Estimates for 2000–01 will be published in March 2003. The Supporting People programme will give local authorities a leading role in matching the provision of housing-related support services with local needs so as to give vulnerable people in the community improved choice and flexibility. Under the programme, providers of support services and local authorities will encourage people to claim the Housing Benefit to which they are entitled, if they have not already done so. However, the impact of the programme on benefit take-up will not be measurable in isolation.

Occupational Pension Schemes

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the change in the number of occupational pension schemes since the abolition of the right for employers to make membership a condition of employment; and if he will make a statement. [89396]

Mr. McCartney: Provision of an occupational pension scheme is a voluntary act by the employer and changes in the numbers of occupational pensions schemes since the abolition of the right to make membership compulsory in 1988 are unlikely to be related to whether membership of any particular scheme is compulsory.

A significant number of employees are not taking advantage of the occupational pension provision of their employers. The General Household Survey (2001) indicates that less than 70 per cent of employees whose employer provides a pension scheme actually participate in their employer's scheme. As a result, the Pensions Green Paper 'Simplicity, security and choice: working and saving for retirement' Cm 5677, suggests options for employers to be able to make membership of their occupational pension schemes a condition of employment for new employees. This could be one way of increasing the numbers of employees who are members of, and contributing to, their occupational pension scheme and may have benefits for employers in terms of recruitment and retention of staff.

Pension Credit

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of pensioner benefit units have been in receipt of income-related benefits in each of the last five years, including the effects of the *(a)* guarantee and *(b)* savings elements of the pension credit; and what his estimate is for the proportion in the next five years. [88222]

Mr. McCartney: I refer to the hon. member to the answer given on 6 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 292W.

Pensions

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the net present value is of the Government's liability for pensions to be paid to its employees in *(a)* the public sector as a whole and *(b)* in the Ministry of Defence; in each case how much of this has been funded; and whether provision has been made for it in the Government's accounts. [87759]

John Healey: I have been asked to reply.

The Government Actuary's Department estimate that the unfunded public service pension scheme liabilities are approximately £380 billion as at 31 March 2002. It is not possible to separate out the liabilities relating to civil servants working for the Ministry of Defence, but the liabilities of the Armed Forces Pension Scheme covering armed forces personnel is £53.5 billion. The liabilities of the major public service schemes are reported in Resource Accounts, and from 2003–04, the liabilities of the smaller schemes will be incorporated into the balance sheets of employers who are mainly non-departmental public bodies.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what up-rating assumptions for the pension credit were used when calculating the spending on pensions as a proportion of gross domestic product outlined in the Pre-Budget document, "Long-term Public Finance Report: An Analysis of Fiscal Sustainability". [88210]

Mr. McCartney: Estimates of pension credit spending, included as part of total state pension spending in HM Treasury's publication, "Long-term Public Finance Report: An Analysis of Fiscal Sustainability", assumed that the savings credit threshold would be up-rated in line with increases to the basic state pension, and the guarantee credit would be up-rated by average earnings. The long-term assumption was that average real earnings would grow in line with productivity of two per cent. a year. This is one of several possible up-rating scenarios.

Stakeholder Pensions

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to his answer of 26 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 212W, which companies were registered as stakeholder pension providers on 6 April 2001; and whether any of these have stopped offering stakeholder pensions direct to individuals since then. [88221]

Mr. McCartney: Information available is in the table.

Companies registered as stakeholder pension providers on 6 April 2001[1]	*Address*	*Companies since 6 April 2001 notified that they have stopped offering stakeholder pensions direct to individuals*[2]
Abbey National Life Plc	Abbey National House, 287 Vincent Street, Glasgow	
Allied Dunbar Assurance Plc	UK Life Centre, Station Road, Swindon	
AXA Sun Life Plc	AXA Centre, PO Box 1810, Bristol	
St Andrew's Life Assurance Plc	PO Box 10,Walton Street, Aylesbury	De-registered[3] as a stakeholder pension scheme August 2002 following parent company's (Bank of Scotland) merger with the Halifax
B&CE Insurance Ltd	Manor Royal, Crawley	
Brittanic Assurance Plc	1 Wythall Green Way, Wythall, Birmingham	
Canada Life Ltd	Canada Life Place, Potters Bar	De-registered as a stakeholder pension scheme December 2002
Chamber Pensions Ltd	Manning House, 22 Carlisle Place, London	Stopped[4] July 2001
Co-operative Insurance Society	Miller Street, Manchester	
Clerical Medical Investment Group	Narrow Plain, Bristol	
Deutsche Asset Management Life and Pensions Ltd	One Appold Street, London	
Eagle Star Life Assurance Company Ltd	UK Life Tower, Montpellier Drive, Cheltenham, Gloucester	
Friends Provident Life and Pensions Ltd	Pixham End, Dorking, Surrey	Stopped January 2002
Halifax Life Ltd	Trinity Road, Halifax, West Yorkshire	
HSBC Life (UK) Ltd	Norwich House, Nelson Gate, Commercial Road, Southampton	
INVESCO Pensions Ltd	INVESCO Park, INVESCO Park Drive, Henley on Thames	
Legal and General Assurance Society Ltd	Temple Court, 11 Queen Victoria Street, London	
Marks and Spencer Life Assurance Ltd	Kings Meadow, Chester	
Merrill Lynch Pensions Ltd	33 King William Street, London	
Nationwide Unit Trust Managers Ltd	Nationwide House, Pipers Way, Swindon	
National Westminster Life Assurance Ltd	PO Box 886, Trinity Quay, Avon Street, Bristol	
National Farmers Union Mutual Insurance Society Ltd	Tiddington Road, Stratford-Upon-Avon	
CGNU Life Assurance Ltd	2 Rougier Street, York	
NPI Ltd	Box 89, 55 Calverley Road, Tunbridge Wells	
Pearl Assurance (Unit Linked Pensions) Ltd	Box 89, 55 Calverley Road, Tunbridge Wells	
Police Mutual Assurance Society Ltd	Alexandra House, Queen Street, Lichfield	
The Prudential Assurance Company Ltd	Abbey Gardens, 55 Kings Road, Reading	
Royal and Sun Alliance Life and Pensions Ltd	St Marks Court, Chart Way, Horsham	
Royal Liver Assurance Ltd	Royal Liver Building, Pier Head, Liverpool	
The Royal London Mutual Insurance Society Ltd	Royal London House, Middleborough Colchester	
Royal Scottish Assurance Plc	42 St Andrew Square, Edinburgh	
Schroder Pensions Ltd	31 Gresham Street, London	
Scottish Amicable Life Plc	PO Box 25, Craigforth, Stirling	
Scottish Equitable Plc	Edinburgh Park, Edinburgh	
The Royal London Mutual Insurance Society Ltd	Royal London House, Middleborough, Colchester	
Scottish Mutual Assurance Plc	Abbey National House, 301 Vincent Street, Glasgow	
Scottish Widows Plc	69 Morrison Street, Edinburgh	
FPS Stakeholder Trustee Limited	Castle House, Park Road, Banstead	
The Standard Life Assurance Company	Standard Life House, 30 Lothian Road, Edinburgh	
Teachers Provident Society Ltd	Deansleigh Road, Bournemouth	
TUG Stakeholder Trustees Ltd	Congress House, Great Russell Street, London	
Virgin Money Unit Trust Managers Ltd	Discovery House, Whiting Road, Norwich	
Wesleyan Assurance Society	Colmore Circus, Birmingham	
Winterthur Life UK Ltd	Winterthur Way, Basingstoke	

[1] Information from The Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority's (Opra) register of stakeholder pension schemes.

[2] Whilst registered stakeholder pension providers are required to inform Opra of any restrictions they impose on membership to their scheme, they do not have to inform the Authority of any changes to their marketing or publicity strategies.

[3] "De-registered" effectively means leaving the stakeholder pensions market altogether.

[4] "Stopped" means the provider does not accept business from individuals but does offer stakeholder pensions to group clients.

Note:

James Hay Trustees Ltd is not included in the table above because it did not register until after 6 April 2001 (registered March 2002 and de-registered August 2002).

HEALTH

Child Protection Staff (Assaults)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* social workers and *(b)* health visitors were assaulted in 2002 in their duties in child protection. [89344]

Jacqui Smith: The Department does not collect statistics on violence against social workers centrally. However, it did commission a national task force on violence against social workers that reported early in 2001. The task force made a number of recommendations that were accepted by Government and social care employer organisations.

The early targets recommended by the task force were for employers to: undertake an audit of their organisation's ability to deal with violence and abuse, do a training needs analysis for their workforce, prepare an action plan and begin to effect planned developments. The longer term target was for local authority employers to reduce incidents of violence and abuse by 25 per cent. by 2005 and the Department is working with employers to set up the means to measure their progress. The Department maintains and updates a website that was set up under the auspices of the task force on violence against social care. It is at www.doh.gov.uk/violenttaskforce. The Department does not collect information on reported number of violent or abusive incidents by groups of staff or by services such as child protection within the national health service. However, in June 2002 the following survey was published: "2000/2001 Reported Violent or Abusive Incidents, Accidents Involving Staff and Sickness Absence in NHS Trusts and Health Authorities in England". This survey states that there were a total of 84,273 reported violent or abusive incidents across all the staff in NHS trusts and health authorities in England in 2000–01. A copy of this report is available in the Library.

"Changing Habits"

John Mann: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many of the Audit Commission recommendations from their report Changing Habits, have been adopted by the Government. [82275]

Ms Blears: The recommendations in the Changing Habits report were very much in line with the Government's drugs policy and were therefore accepted. In fact, work on the areas highlighted in the report had been either undertaken prior to the publication of the report or was in the process of being developed.

"Valuing People" White Paper

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress made delivering the commitments in the White Paper 'Valuing People', published in March 2001, with particular reference to *(a)* the Learning Disability and Development Fund, *(b)* the Implementation Support Fund, *(c)* the Quality Protects programme, *(d)* the Schools Access Initiative, *(e)* the Standards Fund, *(f)* funds invested in the development of advocacy services for people with learning disabilities, and *(g)* the development of a national learning disability information centre and helpline. [87379]

Jacqui Smith: I reported progress to the House on 1 February, *Official Report*, column. 535 and on 26 September in my reply to the hon. Member for Daventry, *Official Report*, column 391W. The Learning Disability Task Force, which monitors and supports implementation of the Valuing People programme, expects to publish its first annual report in January. I will be responding to that report when I publish my own report on learning disability services shortly afterwards. My report will give a full account of progress made with the delivery of Valuing People.

We continue to make good progress. This was acknowledged by the recognition given to Valuing People in the recent Institute for Public Policy Research/ Guardian Public Involvement awards.

Accident and Emergency Services

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of minor injuries services in A and E departments are nurse-led. [87532]

Mr. Lammy: Data on the proportion of minor injuries services in accident and emergency (A and E) departments that are nurse-led is not available centrally.

The Reforming Emergency Care Strategy, launched in October 2001, introduced a new streaming system so that patients with minor injuries or illness are separated from those with more serious problems. £40 million was invested to recruit 600 additional A and E nurses to help deliver streaming in A and E departments.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many of the additional accident and emergency nurses announced by his Department on 23 October 2001 have been recruited; and where they are located. [87529]

Mr. Lammy: On 25 October 2001, the Reforming Emergency Care Strategy was announced including £40 million to fund an additional 600 accident and emergency nursing (A&E) posts.

At 30 November 2002, 743 additional A&E nurses announced on 25 October 2001 had been recruited and 679 of these were in post.

The location by strategic health authority (StHA) of these additional nurses is shown in the table.

DHSC	StHA		Number of these nurses in post by 30 November	Number of these nurses appointed but not yet in post by 30 November
			Whole time equivalent	
		England	679.35	63.95
Y21		London	154.9	12
Y22		Midland and Eastern	159.22	14
Y23		North	194.8	30.35
Y24		South	170.43	7.6
Y21	Q04	North West London StHA	45	4
Y21	Q05	North Central London StHA	25	1
Y21	Q06	North East London StHA	35.4	1
Y21	Q07	South East London StHA	32.5	5
Y21	Q08	South West London StHA	17	1
Y22	Q24	Trent StHA	26	5
Y22	Q25	Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Rutland StHA	14.06	0
Y22	Q26	Shropshire and Staffordshire StHA	9.8	1
Y22	Q27	Birmingham and the Black Country StHA	37	0
Y22	Q28	Coventry, Warwickshire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire StHA	16	0
Y22	Q01	Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire StHA	10	3
Y22	Q02	Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire StHA	27.82	5
Y22	Q03	Essex StHA	18.54	0
Y23	Q09	Northumberland, Tyne and Wear StHA	15.9	1.5
Y23	Q10	County Durham and Tees Valley StHA	19	22.65
Y23	Q11	North and East Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire StHA	12	0
Y23	Q12	West Yorkshire StHA	33.2	1.2
Y23	Q13	Cumbria and Lancashire StHA	26	0
Y23	Q14	Greater Manchester StHA	34.75	0
Y23	Q15	Cheshire and Merseyside StHA	40.4	5
Y23	Q23	South Yorkshire StHA	13.55	0
Y24	Q16	Thames Valley StHA	21.5	0
Y24	Q17	Hampshire and Isle of Wight StHA	25.69	2
Y24	Q18	Kent and Medway StHA	13	0
Y24	Q19	Surrey and Sussex StHA	58.29	1.6
Y24	Q20	Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire StHA	36.85	0
Y24	Q21	South West Peninsula StHA	8.6	1
Y24	Q22	Somerset and Dorset StHA	6.5	3

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what criteria are used for streaming patients on waiting lists in A&E units. [87528]

Mr. Lammy: The Reforming Emergency Care Strategy launched in October 2001, introduced a new streaming system in accident and emergency (A&E) departments so that patients with minor injuries or illness are separated from those with more serious problems. Each stream is seen in parallel by staff dedicated to that stream.

Streaming patients ensures that patients with minor conditions do not wait disproportionate lengths of time whilst safeguarding immediate treatment for the more seriously ill or injured. £40 million was invested to recruit 600 additional A&E nurses to help deliver streaming in A&E departments.

It is for clinical decision in individual A&E departments to decide which patients have minor injuries or illnesses that can be treated in a separate dedicated stream.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many of the additional Accident and Emergency consultants envisaged in the Government's strategy document have been recruited. [87531]

Mr. Lammy: The Reforming Emergency Care Strategy was launched in October 2001. It states that an additional 183 accident and emergency (A&E) consultants will be recruited by 2004, an increase of 40 per cent., as part of the planned expansion of consultant numbers in the NHS Plan.

As at 31 March 2002, there were 486 consultants in A&E. This represents an increase of 26 per cent. since September 1997.

Current workforce projections suggest that by March 2004, there may be sufficient trained specialists to increase numbers in A&E by around 190 over a 2,000 baseline. This takes account of expected numbers of additional recruits and numbers leaving due to retirement.

Acute Care

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cleaning contractors have lost their contracts as a result of non-performance in acute hospitals in each of the past three years. [88764]

Mr. Lammy: Figures for private sector cleaning contractors who have had their contracts terminated by

National Health Service trusts for poor performance in each of the past three years are as follows:

In 2000—one contract terminated

In 2001—two contracts terminated

In 2002—six contracts terminated

Adverse Drug Reactions

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many adverse drug reactions have been reported by nurses to the electronic yellow card scheme in each of the last three months. [88246]

Ms Blears: The Medicines Control Agency (MCA) and Committee on Safety of Medicines (CSM) launched a new electronic yellow card on the 31 October 2002. To date the MCA and CSM have received four reports of suspected adverse drug reactions submitted by nurses using the electronic yellow card. Three electronic reports were received from nurses during November and one report was received during December, out of a total of 29 electronic reports.

Ambulance Service

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it the policy of the Government that access to the NHS ambulance service should be available to patients travelling to private hospitals when referred by NHS GPs; and if he will make a statement. [87730]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 17 December 2002]:* National health service ambulance services are available to patients travelling to private hospitals when they are receiving NHS treatment at that hospital or if they are receiving treatment at a private hospital within the trust's normal catchment area.

Ambulance Trusts

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which ambulance trusts he and his ministerial colleagues have visited in the past year. [88161]

Mr. Lammy: The Ministerial Team has visited the following ambulance trusts in 2002.

London Ambulance Trust—21 January 2002, 25 June 2002 and 4 September 2002.

Greater Manchester Ambulance Services National Health Service Trust—24 April 2002.

Warwickshire Ambulance Trust—26 September 2002.

West Country Ambulance Service National Health Service Trust—14 November 2002.

Ambulance Turnaround Times

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the ambulance turnaround times were in *(a)* England, *(b)* each NHS region and *(c)* each ambulance trust in each of the last six years. [88072]

Mr. Lammy: The information requested is not available centrally.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many 999 calls for ambulances received a response within eight minutes in the last 12 months. [88744]

Mr. Lammy: The latest information available about the proportion of Category A emergency calls resulting in an ambulance arriving at the scene of the reported incident within the Government's target response times for all ambulance trusts, is contained in the Department of Health Statistical Bulletin "Ambulance Services, England 2001–02". A copy of the bulletin is in the Library and available at www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0213.htm.

Antibiotics

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information his Department collects on the growth in resistance of staphylococcus aureus to antibiotics. [88069]

Ms Blears: The Public Health Laboratory Service has a voluntary reporting system for cases of bacteraemia (blood infection). These data are known to be incomplete but are useful for tracking long term trends and the available data on staphylococcus aureus bacteraemias with their susceptibility to methicillin are shown in the table.

Laboratory reports of Staphylococcus aureus blood isolates with methicillin susceptibility England and Wales, 1992–2001.

	1992	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Number of S aureus blood isolates resistant to methicillin (MRSA)	104	187	407	797	1,279	2,290	2,853	3,338	4,308	4,904
Percentage[1] resistant to methicillin	2	4	9	14	22	30	34	37	42	42
Number of S aureus blood isolates sensitive to methicillin	4,215	4,539	4,300	4,959	4,556	5,325	5,433	5,590	5,897	6,864
Percentage[1] sensitive to methicillin	98	96	91	86	78	70	66	63	58	58
No information on methicillin susceptibility	730	1,015	1,253	831	1,960	1,763	1,936	1,896	1,898	1,316
Total	5,049	5,741	5,960	6,587	7,795	9,378	10,222	10,824	12,103	13,084

[1] As a percentage of reports with methicillin susceptibility information.

Note:
Data last updated 5 June 2002 and subject to change due to late reporting.

Source:
PHLS

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information his Department collects on the number of new discoveries of antibiotics each year. [88073]

Mr. Lammy: The Medicines Control Agency does not monitor the number of new antibiotic discoveries that are made each year and hence is unable to provide the information requested.

Appointments

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health to which bodies his Department makes appointments; how many members there are *(a)* in total and *(b)* in each body; and how many of those appointed are *(i)* businessmen, (ii) businessmen in SMEs and (iii) businessmen in micro-businesses. [87391]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Cabinet Office (Mr. Alexander) on 16 December 2002, *Official Report*, volume. 396, column 607W.

Bed Availability (Worcestershire)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what contingency arrangements he has made to enable hospitals in Worcestershire to find sufficient beds in the event of *(a)* a major influenza epidemic, *(b)* a serious motorway accident and *(c)* a terrorist incident; and if he will make a statement. [88011]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* All primary care trusts and acute trusts have produced specific plans, which address any rise in activity across local health communities, including that potentially caused by influenza.

Both motorway and terrorist incidents have been covered in Worcestershire acute hospitals national health service trusts major incident plan. Following the events of 11 September 2001, the deputy Chief Medical Officer issued specific guidance on planning for mass casualty incidents. These plans had to include robust arrangements for mutual aid across health partners. A recent audit of the primary care trust's plan by the Department commended the arrangements in place for mass casualties.

Carers

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent measures have been introduced to support informal care by carers and other groups. [88873]

Jacqui Smith: The Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000 strengthens the rights of carers to an assessment of their own needs as carers, and also gives local councils more powers to directly support carers. The carers grant for 2003–04 will be increased to £100 million to ensure that more carers are able to receive breaks. One of the major changes to this grant is that the proportion to be spent on carers services will increase from 10 per cent, to 16 per cent. From October 2002, the Department of Work and Pensions has extended the invalid care allowance to carers over 65.

Chefs Initiative

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what changes to catering in acute hospitals resulted from the leading chef initiative; how many recipes developed by leading chefs for the NHS are used in the NHS; and how many hospitals use menus resulting from the leading chefs initiative. [88747]

Mr. Lammy: Leading chef dishes promote freshness and taste in hospitals meals and have encouraged the use of higher quality ingredients

There are currently 201 leading chef dishes available for use in the National Health Service.

Details regarding which of these dishes are currently in use is not collected.

The latest information available, at June 2002, shows that 40 per cent, of acute hospitals had included three leading chef dishes in their menus.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much the NHS spent on the leading chefs initiative. [88761]

Mr. Lammy: The leading chef dishes promote the use of fresher ingredients and reflect changes in tastes and lifestyles. Exact costs of leading chef dishes vary across the national health service, depending on locality and the methods of production.

Information on the use of these dishes is not collected but average dish costs are no greater than that for other NHS dishes.

Child Abuse

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ask for an urgent meeting with the Home Office regarding child protection to discuss implications of the Newham Area Child Protection Committee Report on the Ainlee Walker case. [89357]

Jacqui Smith: The Government recognise that there is still more to be done to ensure that high standards of child protection are applied in every case. That is why it commissioned "Safeguarding Children", the Joint Chief Inspectors' report on arrangements to safeguard children. It is also why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and the Home Secretary set up the statutory Inquiry, chaired by Lord Laming, into the circumstances leading up to, and surrounding, the death of Victoria Climbié. The issues raised by Victoria's case are wide-ranging, in terms of both policy and practice. The recommendations of the Joint Chief Inspectors' report and those of the Victoria Climbié Inquiry will provide us with an authoritative basis for any reforms to child protection that may need to be made, and, if radical reform is necessary, we will implement it. In considering these reports, the Government will also consider all relevant recommendations in the Ainlee Walker/Labonte Serious Case Review report and those arising from any other serious case review reports that may be published in the near future.

Children's Vision

Andy Burnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to extend entitlement to NHS vouchers to children who are prescribed coloured spectacle lenses without a power for the purpose of enabling them to read. [88579]

Mr. Lammy: There is currently limited evidence to suggest that the provision of tinted lenses would provide enduring benefits to a significant number of children with reading difficulties, though some children may benefit. We will, however, continue to consider the issue as evidence becomes available and any decision will be taken in collaboration with the Department for Education and Skills.

Children in Care

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of children in care have been listed as missing since 1997. [88187]

Jacqui Smith: Information about the proportion of children in care listed as missing is shown in the table.

Estimated number of looked after children who went missing from their usual place of residence at any time during the years ending March 1998 to 2001; and the proportion of all children looked after at any time—England

	Number of children missing at any time during the year	*Percentage of all children looked after at any time during the year*
1997–98	570	0.7
1998–99	550	0.7
1999–2000	530	0.6
2000–01[1]	920	1.1

[1] With effect from 1 April 2000, the definition of missing was changed from being absent for more than seven days to being absent for 24 hours or more.

Note:

Table excludes all children looked after under an agreed series of short-term placements.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children in local authority voluntary agency care were adopted in *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2001 and *(c)* 2002; and what percentage these represent of the total in care. [88607]

Jacqui Smith: The numbers of children adopted from local authority care in England in years ending 31 March 2000, 2001 and 2002 are shown in the table.

Information on the number of children adopted from voluntary agency care is not collected centrally. However, the actual figure is likely to be very small, as voluntary adoption agencies only place children voluntarily relinquished by their birth family to their care for the purposes of adoption.

Children adopted from local authority care in England

	Number	*Percentage*[1]
2000	2,700	5
2001	3,100	5
2002	3,400	6

[1] Of all looked after children

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children in *(a)* local authority and *(b)* voluntary agency care were awaiting foster homes on 31 March in *(i)* 1979, (ii) 1987, (iii) 1997 and (iv) 2002. [88608]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested regarding numbers of children in local authority and voluntary agency care awaiting foster homes on 31 March 1979, 1987, 1997 and 2002 is not held centrally.

Chiropody

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met the Society of Chiropodists and Podiatrists; and what plans he has to meet the society in the near future. [87676]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 17 December 2002]:* I met the Society of Chiropodists and Podiatrists on 1 May 2002.1 have no current plans for a further Ministerial meeting.

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the findings of the Feet First II review; and if he will make a statement. [87677]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 17 December 2002]:* We have no plans at present to publish the review of 'Feet First', Since the review was undertaken our policy is now focused on patient-led National Health Service services rather than professionally-led guidance. We want to ensure that primary care trusts (PCTs) make service provision decisions on the basis of their local populations' clinical needs. The national service frameworks for older people and diabetes will help PCTs make these decisions and these have been developed with clinical input from chiropodists.

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients on average were awaiting an appointment with an NHS chiropodist in England in 1997; and what the figure was at the last date for which figures are available. [87684]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 17 December 2002]:* Data are not collected on numbers of patients waiting by the category of chiropody or podiatry.

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he plans to review the provision of chiropody services in the NHS. [87683]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 17 December 2002]:* We have no current plans to review the provision of National Health Service chiropody services.

CJD

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made of the link between vCJD, BSE and rogue prions. [86763]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* Creutzfeldt Jakob disease (CJD) in humans and bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) in animals are part of a group of diseases called transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSEs) or prion diseases. The precise nature of the agent responsible for CJD is not fully understood, but the most likely theory points to an abnormal form, known as a prion, of a normal cell protein. According to the protein-only hypothesis, infectious prions are composed mainly if not entirely of the abnormal form of the prion protein, which aggregates in infected tissue.

Post mortem examination of the brains of CJD patients and BSE animals shows the accumulation of the abnormal protein and there is a massive destruction of the brain, which shows the characteristic spongy appearance.

Although there is no direct evidence that the BSE prion is infectious to humans, obtaining such evidence could not be justified ethically as this would require humans to be inoculated with BSE agent. A judgment on the link between BSE and vCJD inevitably depends on an assessment of a range of clinical, pathological, epidemiological and laboratory based evidence. There is now convincing evidence that the agent causing BSE is

the cause of vCJD, although there remains uncertainty about the future number of cases and the mechanism of transmission of BSE to humans.

Commission for Health Improvement

Angela Watkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what medical *(a)* qualifications and *(b)* background are required in those engaged in clinical governance reviews carried out by the Commission for Health Improvement. [88316]

Mr. Lammy: The Commission for Health Improvement (CHI) is responsible for improvements in quality across the national health service. CHI assess systems and processes through clinical governance reviews and comment on where and when they think the potential to deliver good care is compromised.

Teams carrying out clinical governance reviews are multidisciplinary. Each team normally comprises: a doctor, a nurse, an NHS manager, a lay member and another clinical professional who is not a doctor or a nurse, for example a pharmacist or physiotherapist.

The eligibility criteria for doctor reviewers is,

"must be a registered medical practitioner Consultant/GP ideally with managerial experience at directorate, board or senior partner level".

The backgrounds of those doctor reviewers are:

119 from acute hospital trusts

25 from mental health trusts

55 from primary care trusts

four from ambulance trusts

Community Health Councils

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance and assurances have been given to Community Health Council staff relating to the forthcoming abolition of community health councils. [87623]

Mr. Lammy: A human resources framework for community health council (CHC) staff is being prepared by the Department jointly with the employing strategic health authorities and the unions. This will be available early in the year. The Chief Nursing Officer has issued regular newsletters to keep CHC staff updated on developments concerning the abolition of CHCs and support for CHC staff.

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has set a date for the cessation of community health councils; and if he will make a statement. [87624]

Mr. Lammy: We are presently considering the date for abolition of Community Health Councils. An announcement will be made early this year.

Continuous Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether all strategic health authorities and local authorities have agreed eligibility criteria for continuous care in line with current guidance. [88708]

Jacqui Smith: HSC 2001/015: LAC (2001)18 issued in June 2001, asked health authorities to review their continuing care criteria to ensure that they complied with the judgment made on national health service responsibilities in the Coughlan judgment. In addition, the new strategic health authorities were asked to agree one set of criteria across their boundaries from October 2002. The Department will be monitoring StHAs' progress on this in the New Year.

Correspondence

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for West Chelmsford of 16 July, Ref PO1012753, concerning NHS Professionals, the National Framework and anti-competitive practices. [82945]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 26 November 2002]:* A reply was sent on 19 December 2002.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Eastbourne of 6 August, relating to constituents, Mr. and Mrs. Ryder. [87590]

Jacqui Smith: A reply was sent on 23 December 2002.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letter sent to him by Mr.Mark Heyes, of Lathom, Lancashire, relating to Ormskirk hospital. [88055]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* The Department's Customer Services Centre, correspondence management has no record of receiving this correspondence and has requested a copy of this correspondence.

Delayed Transfers

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what conclusions his Department has reached concerning its examination of the effect of the Direction on Choice on delayed transfers. [88535]

Jacqui Smith: We are at present reviewing the guidance on the Direction on Choice. We intend to consult on the revised guidance in the early months of 2003.

Departmental Christmas Cards

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many departmental Christmas cards he and his Ministers intend to send in 2002; how much these cards will cost *(a)* to buy, *(b)* to post and *(c)* in staff time to sign, address and place in envelopes; and if he will place in the Library a sample copy of the official Christmas card he has sent this year. [88103]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* 1,000 cards have been purchased at a total cost of £1,243.15. More detailed information could be provided only at disproportionate cost. All expenditure incurred in the purchase and despatch of official Christmas cards has been made in accordance with the departmental guidance on financial procedures and propriety, based on the principles set out in "Government Accounting".

A sample of the official Christmas card has been placed in the Library.

EDS Hotmail System

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he made of alternative systems prior to the decision to contract EDS to supply a hotmail system to the National Health Service; when the project to procure a hotmail system for the NHS was originally costed, and what the initial estimated cost for the system was; for what purpose the NHS is commissioning a hotmail system; and what estimate he has made of the final cost of the system. [88179]

Mr. Lammy: As part of a formal open competitive procurement exercise 30 expressions of interest in the national e-mail service were received; eight of these were invited to submit outline proposals based on the service specification. Five of these responded, from which the final shortlist of three was chosen and their proposals assessed in detail.

The Outline Business Case (OBC) for the National Health Service national e-mail system was prepared in September 2001.

The initial total cost to the NHS for the recommended option in the OBC was estimated at £148 million over five years.

The national e-mail service is a strategic business tool for the NHS and an enabler for many of the electronic data flows which the NHS wish to implement. The service will give NHS staff a single e-mail address that can be securely accessed from within the NHS network as well as from the Internet. This will be particularly useful to NHS staff based in more than one organisation or who require mobile working in the community. Staff will also be able to access their e-mails via portable devices such as mobile phones or personal digital assistants as well as from home.

The contract was let for a period of 10 years after negotiation with EDS for a cost of £9 million with an option to terminate after five years.

Electronic Patient Records

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when his Department plans to issue initial applications for tenders to supply the NHS with smart card technology for personal medical records. [88757]

Mr. Lammy: The Department has no current plans to invite tenders for smart card technology for personal medical records.

The Department is considering the role smart card and other technologies will play in allowing patients easier access to their health records in the context of the integrated care records services programme.

Emergency Admissions

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of admissions to accident and emergency units have to wait more than four hours for treatment. [88742]

Mr. Lammy: The Department collects and publishes information quarterly on total time in accident and emergency and waits for admission to a bed via A&E. The data for the period July-September 2002 were published on 20 December 2002 and are available from www.doh.gov.uk/hospitalactivity.

The published data show that between July and September 77 per cent. of patients spent four hours or less in A&E from arrival to admission, transfer or discharge. In the same period 90 per cent. of patients admitted as emergencies via A&E were found a bed within four hours of a decision to admit.

Emergency Readmissions

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list *(a)* the number and *(b)* the rate of emergency psychiatric readmissions in each of the last five years. [88806]

Jacqui Smith: The number and rate of emergency psychiatric re-admissions in each of the last five years are shown in the following table.

Number of emergency psychiatric re-admissions of patients aged 16–64 within 90 days of discharge from the care of a psychiatric specialist as a percentage of such discharges

	1997–98 total [1]	1998–99 total [1]	1999–2000 total [1]	2000–01 total [1]	2001–02 total [2]
Number of re-admissions within 90 days	16,384	15,461	14,875	14,068	13,306
Total number of discharges	114,946	113,585	114,616	110,312	104,367
Re-admission rate (percentage)	14.3	13.6	13.0	12.8	12.7

Source:
[1] Common Information Core, now known as the [2] Service and Financial Framework Return (SaFFR), end of financial year forecast outturn (FOT) position, apart from 1997–98 where only activity for each quarter was collected, so figures represent the sum of all four quarters.

Feeding Patients (Guidance)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance nursing staff in acute hospitals receive about feeding patients unable to feed themselves; and how many complaints the NHS has received in the past 12 months about patients being left to feed themselves and being unable to do so. [88759]

Mr. Lammy: 'The Essence of Care', a tool to promote best practice in eight fundamental aspects of patient care, including food and nutrition, was published by the Department of Health in February 2001. It comprises best practice benchmarks to be used as a tool to help improve the quality of care provided, and includes a standard concerned with assisting patients to eat and drink.

Data on the number of National Health Service complaints made each year is set out in the Department of Health publication 'Handling complaints: monitoring the NHS complaints procedures.' Due to the diverse range of issues for which complaints may be made under

the NHS complaints procedures, it is not possible to provide information on the number of complaints requested.

Five-a-day Initiative

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much it has cost to introduce the five-a-day nutritional logo; and which outside bodies were involved in the creative process. [86372]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* The logo is due to be introduced to consumers in Spring 2003. The creative work to develop the logo cost £40,000 and was carried out by Identica.

The logo has been developed through extensive research and consultation with the food industry, consumers, and health, education and voluntary organisations. This work has also contributed to the development of the five-a-day programme as a whole, to improve awareness of and access to fruit and vegetables. The research and consultation has cost £50,000.

Food Safety

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent advice he has received from the Food Standards Agency on the safety of eating meat from animals which have been vaccinated against foot and mouth disease. [88994]

Ms Blears: The Food Standards Agency has advised that there are no health concerns for consumers from eating meat, milk or other produce from animals vaccinated with any of the foot and mouth disease vaccines that are being considered for possible future use in the United Kingdom. The vaccine does not contain live virus and hence is not infectious. All of the other ingredients in the vaccine are commonly used substances that are known to be safe.

Frozen Embryos

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has to give women greater rights in respect of the use of their frozen embryos; and if he will make a statement. [83563]

Ms Blears: The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 provides that the consent of both the man and woman whose gametes are used to create an embryo through in vitro fertilisation is needed for the storage and use of the embryo. This recognises the interest that both parties have in the embryo. The Government have no plans to change this.

Genetic Lifestyle Tests

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on the sale of genetic lifestyle tests by private companies in the UK; and what his policy is on the sale of self-administered osteoporosis testing kits. [87526]

Ms Blears: The Department has published two voluntary codes of practice and guidance for genetic tests being sold directly to the public. These set out broad requirements in areas such as: peer-reviewed evidence of value, accreditation and quality assurance in testing laboratories, consent, confidentiality, sample and information storage, and customer information.

The Human Genetics Commission is conducting a review of genetic testing services supplied direct to the public and plans to publish its report and recommendations to Ministers early in 2003.

Anyone concerned about the risk of osteoporosis should seek advice from his or her general practitioner. Those at high risk of developing this disease can be easily identified and offered appropriate treatment. Others can be given simple lifestyle advice about prevention.

In vitro diagnostic medical devices such as osteoporosis testing kits are regulated by the In Vitro Diagnostic Medical Devices (IVD) Directive (98/79/EC) which has been transposed into United Kingdom law by Medical Devices Regulation (SI2002 No 618).

Health Protection Agency

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the future of the Public Health Laboratory Service; [86029]

(2) what his policy is on the future of the National Radiological Protection Board. [86027]

Ms Blears: The Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS) and the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB) are both affected by our proposals to create a unified Health Protection Agency (HPA) which will be able to provide more effective support for health protection and health emergency planning.

Having considered responses to "Health Protection: A Consultation Document on Creating a Health Protection Agency", published in June 2002, we aim to establish the HPA as a non-departmental public body from 1 April 2004, subject to legislative time being available. At that stage, the agency would take responsibility for most of the functions currently performed by the NRPB.

As an interim step towards this, we intend to establish a special health authority, also to be called the Health Protection Agency, from 1 April 2003. This special health authority would be responsible for functions under the NHS Act which are to be given to the new agency.

On these proposals, the NRPB would, on the establishment of the HPA as a non-departmental public body, become a body with responsibilities to the Scottish Executive only. The Scottish Executive is currently consulting on future health protection arrangements in Scotland.

The PHLS would remain in existence until primary legislation is changed. From 1 April 2003, we intend that it will be responsible for the production of media for microbiology laboratories, following the transfer of its other current functions to the proposed new special health authority and other national health service bodies in England and Wales.

Copies of letters of 15 November 2002 to the chairs of the NRPB, the PHLS Board and the Microbiological Research Authority, which provide further details, have been placed in the Library.

Herbal Medicines Directive

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what level of fees the Medicines Control Agency will charge under the proposed Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products Directive for considering applications for the registration of herbal medicines under the terms of the directive; [88688]

(2) what estimate he has made of the compliance costs in terms of registration charges, documentation, storage costs and analysis for companies seeking a full pharmaceutical licence for a herbal product under the proposed Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products Directive. [88689]

Ms Blears: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) on 5 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 966W.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of how the pharmaceutical production and testing standards for products under the draft Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products Directive will affect the commercial value of the products on the UK market, with special reference to those produced by smaller specialist companies and distributed through specialist retailers. [88690]

(2) what assessment he has made of how the fees charged by the Medicines Control Agency for considering applications for the registration of herbal products under the terms of the proposed Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products Directive will affect the commercial value of the products on the UK market, with particular reference to those produced by smaller specialist companies and distributed through specialist retailers. [88691]

Ms Blears: Existing regulatory arrangements do not allow the public readily to distinguish which unlicensed herbal remedies on the United Kingdom market are made to acceptable standards. There is continuing evidence of an international trade in herbal remedies made to unreliable standards. Currently, the commercial value of herbal remedies made to good quality standards, as well as public health, can be compromised by products made to low standards.

The requirements of the proposed Directive on Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products should mean that the public will have access to a wide range of herbal remedies made to assured the requirements of the proposed Directive on Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products should mean that the public will have access to a wide range of herbal remedies made to assured standards of safety, quality and product information. Many in the herbal sector share our view that this could lead to increased public confidence in herbal medicines, and lead to greater stability for business.

In continuing detailed discussions with industry about the Directive the Medicines Control Agency will continue to pay close attention to issues of regulatory impact which are of specific concern to small business.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what effect the proposed Traditional Herbal Products Directive will have on the choice of herbal products available to the consumer. [88692]

Ms Blears: Our expectation is that, subject to the successful outcome of negotiations on the proposed Directive on Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products, the customer will have access to a wide range of traditional herbal remedies made to assured standards of safety and quality and with systematic information about the safe usage of the product.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what opportunities exist for new herbal products under the proposed Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products Directive; [88694]

(2) how many routes to the market will be allowed by the proposed Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products Directive for herbal remedies other than by obtaining a full pharmaceutical licence. [88686]

Ms Blears: Under the proposed Directive on Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products, non active ingredients within the traditional herbal remedy, need not have traditional usage. The possibility of permitting the inclusion of nutrients with traditional herbal remedies is currently under consideration in European negotiations on the Directive.

Where non industrially produced unlicensed herbal remedies are supplied following one to one consultation in accordance with the terms of s12(1) of the Medicines Act 1968 there is no requirement to demonstrate traditional usage of the remedy.

Home Aids

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average waiting time and how many people are currently waiting for *(a)* assessment and *(b)* delivery and installation of home aids and adaptations by *(i)* Staffordshire, (ii) Cheshire, (iii) Derbyshire, (iv) Hertfordshire, *(v)* Lancashire, (vi) Lincolnshire, (vii) Leicestershire, (viii) Shropshire, (ix) Oxfordshire and *(x)* Northamptonshire social services department. [80496]

Jacqui Smith: Information is not collected centrally on the number of people waiting for assessment or delivery and installation of home aids and adaptations.

Information was collected for the first time on waiting times on the Referrals, Assessments and Packages of Care (RAP) return in 2000–01. Data is collected on the time waited from:

(i) first contact to completed assessment;

(ii) first contact to first service;

(iii) first contact to provision or commission of all specified services in the care plan,

where specified services excludes home aids and adaptations.

Seven of the authorities listed in the question did not submit any data for these items in 2000–01.

For the authorities that did provide data on waiting times to first service, no information is available specifically on home aids and adaptations. Table 1 shows the actual length of time from first contact to first service for new clients in England for 2000–01. Data for 2001–02 will be available in February 2003.

Table 1 Actual length of time from first contact to first service for new clients
England, 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001

Rounded numbers

Actual length of time from first contact to first service	
All client groups	115,000
Contact day or the following day	20,000
More than day following contact day up to 1 week	21,000
More than 1 week up to 2 weeks	15,000
More than 2 weeks up to 6 weeks	28,000
More than 6 weeks up to 12 weeks	14,000
More than 12 weeks up to 6 months	9,400
More than 6 months	7,400

Actual figures for 52 Las

The information centrally available on delivery times is provided in the table 2.

Table 2—Performance Assessment Framework Indicator D38: Percentage of equipment items costing less than 1,000 delivered within 3 weeks in 2001–02

Local Authority	*Percentage of items of equipment costing less than £1,000 delivered within 3 weeks*
Cheshire	98
Derbyshire	99
Hertfordshire	83
Lancashire	91
Leicestershire	94
Lincolnshire	89
Northamptonshire	93
Oxfordshire	97
Shropshire	91
Staffordshire	83

The NHS Plan set targets for the integration of social services and health community equipment services and to increase the number of people benefiting from them by fifty per cent, both by 2004. Additionally, on 23 July 2002, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health made a statement to the House concerning services for older people. He announced that by December 2004 all items of community equipment will be delivered within seven working days. This target will also apply to minor adaptations made by community equipment services. New indicators will be introduced to monitor these targets.

Homeless Children

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with the Treasury to seek new funding directly to meet the support needs of homeless children to ensure that their education is not adversely affected. [88544]

Jacqui Smith: The resource requirements of children's social services were considered with the Spending Review 2002 and taken account of in the settlement. Most of the resources available to local authorities are not earmarked and it is for each local authority to decide how much to spend in the light of local priorities on the support needs of homeless children.

Homelessness

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the health effects of homelessness; and what progress has been made to improve health care for homeless people following publication of the homelessness directorate's document, "More than a Roof". [86251]

Ms Blears: The health needs of homeless people have been assessed in various studies, including the Acheson inquiry into inequalities in health and the homelessness directorate's strategy, "More than a Roof". "More than a Roof" set out a new approach to tackling homelessness, focused on the problems homeless people face as much as on places where they live. It identified addressing health needs as critical to helping homeless people, as well as in preventing homelessness.

Homeless people will have benefited particularly from measures to improve access to health care, such as the more than 1,300 personal medical service pilots and 42 national health service walk-in centres which this Government have introduced. They have been identified as a priority for cross-Government action in the "Cross-cutting Review on Health Inequalities", published on 20 November 2002.

Horton Hospital (Land Sales)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure that the increase in land values in Epsom does not prevent the sale of land at Horton Hospital to Rosebery Housing Association and other bodies which are subject to Housing Corporation rules and formulae on the acquisition of land by such associations. [88333]

Ms Blears: In accordance with the planning consent, land at Horton allocated for affordable housing is to be sold to housing associations at 40 per cent. of the open market value, representing a significant discount, and a reduced receipt for reinvestment in the national health service. The Department will comply with this requirement, but has no involvement in the housing association's funding arrangements.

Hospices

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will reimburse *(a)* in full and *(b)* in part the costs to the hospice movement of the impact of the increase in contributions to the NHS superannuation scheme; [88574]

(2) if he will make a statement on the impact the increase in the NHS superannuation scheme will have on hospices. [88576]

Ms Blears: Technical changes to the way the national health service pension scheme is funded were included in my right hon. Friend, the Chancellor's pre-Budget report on 27 November 2002. In future, employer contributions will include the cost of indexing scheme benefits but the arrangements will be phased in, with employers charged directly from April 2004.

The extra employer costs will be offset by additional health service funding. A departmental working group has been set up to develop detailed implementation plans and the position of hospices and other voluntary sector employers, who contribute to the scheme, will be fully considered.

Hospital Cleanliness

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many complaints the NHS has received in the past 12 months about standards of cleanliness in acute hospitals. [88763]

Mr. Lammy: Data on the number of National Health Service complaints made each year is set out in the Department of Health publication "Handling complaints: monitoring the NHS complaints procedures." Due to the diverse range of issues for which complaints may be made under the NHS complaints procedures it is not possible to provide the information requested.

Hospital Infections

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will next publish figures on the level of deaths in British hospitals from infections resulting from hospital treatment. [88180]

Ms Blears: There are no centrally held statistics on the number of deaths caused by hospital acquired infections. The recent paper on deaths associated with methicillin resistant Staphylococcus aureus(MRSA) was a research study and not a routine publication.

The Department does publish data on MRSA bacteraemia for acute National Health Service hospital trusts in England. Results for the first year of this scheme, from April 2001 to March 2002, were published in the Communicable Disease Report Weekly of 20 June 2002 and are available on the Public Health Laboratory Service website at *www.phls.co.uk/publications/cdr/PDFfiles/2002/cdr2502.pdf*

Legal Disputes

Mr. Doug Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have been required to pay cash to the health authority where a legal case for damages against a health authority has been lost or withdrawn, and which health authorities have been involved, in each of the last 10 years. [88302]

Mr. Lammy: Information on the amount of any money received by health authorities from people required to pay in lost or withdrawn cases of damages is not collected at the required level of detail by the Department.

Numbers of people involved would not be collected in any of the returns received by the Department.

Licence Fees

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Health with reference to his Department's answer to honourable Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme of 7 November, what mechanisms his Department uses to review the *(a)* effectiveness and efficiency of social service departments, *(b)* the adequacy of resource allocation to social service departments and *(c)* the meeting of local needs by social services, with special reference to community care for the elderly; and what statistics on *(i)* average assessment times and (ii) waiting lists for home aids and adaptations he collates in England. [80495]

Jacqui Smith: The Department has the following monitoring mechanisms in place:

(a) The overall performance of each council is assessed by the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) each year, using a range of evidence from performance indicators, inspections and twice-yearly monitoring information. This assessment incorporates evidence on effectiveness and efficiency. A summary of the performance is published as a performance star rating, ranging from zero to three stars. The most recent star ratings were published on 15 November 2002. A more detailed summary of performance is contained in a performance letter written by the SSI to each council. These are published on theDepartment's website, at www.doh.gov.uk/pssratings/councilsbylist.htm.

(b) It is the responsibility of each individual council to decide what resources to allocate to social services. Most of local government resources are not earmarked by central government. The exception is ring-fenced grants, which have to be spent in accordance with grant conditions; this is a relatively small proportion and will decrease further in future years.

(c) As in the answer to *(a)*, the SSI assess the performance of councils, and this includes an assessment of community care services for older people.

The Department collects the following information:

(i) Detailed information on the waiting times for clients receiving an assessment for a care package is published in table A7.1 of the referrals, assessments and packages of care (RAP) report for 2000–01. The publication for 2000–01 is available on the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/rap.htm. Corresponding data for 2001–02 will be published early in 2003. One performance indicator on waiting times for care packages has been published for 2001–02 in Social Services performance assessment framework indicators for 2001–02, available at www.doh.gov.uk/paf (indicator D43).

(ii) Information is not centrally collected on waiting lists for home aids and adaptations.

Looked-after Children

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many looked after children there were in each of the last five years. [88514]

Jacqui Smith: The number of looked after children for each of the last five years is shown in the table.

Number of children looked after at 31 March, 1998–2002—England

Year	*Number*
1998	53,300
1999	55,500
2000	58,100
2001	58,900
2002	59,700

Note:
Table excludes children being looked after under any agreed series of short term placements.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many looked after children were convicted of criminal acts in each of the last five years. [88515]

Jacqui Smith: Figures identifying the numbers of looked after children who have been looked after for at least a year and have been cautioned or convicted in the year have only been collected since the year 2000. The figures are shown in the table.

Offending by looked after children, 12 months ending 30 September 2000 and 2001: England

Number	*2000*	*2001*
Number of children looked after for at least 12 months, aged 10 or older at 30 September	25,700	27,000
of which:		
Number cautioned or convicted during the year	2,800	2,800

Laming Report

Mr. Bailey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when Lord Laming will publish his report on the Victoria Climbié inquiry. [88345]

Jacqui Smith: Lord Laming has handed his report into the death of Victoria Climbié to my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Health and the Minister for Children and Young People, on 6 January. The report will be published shortly.

Medical Devices

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he has taken with the Medical Devices Agency to improve public confidence in the effectiveness and reliability of self-testing diagnostic medical devices. [88529]

Mr. Lammy: The United Kingdom was one of a small number of European Community member states that transposed the in vitro diagnostic (IVD) directive into national law by the required deadline (June 2000). All IVD manufacturers placing products on the European market will be required to meet this legislation by December 2003.

Public confidence in the reliability and effectiveness of self-testing diagnostic medical devices will be improved when the IVD regulations come fully into force, and evidence is provided by the manufacturers that the results provided are accurate and meaningful.

In order to learn about concerns that the public might have with medical devices, the Medical Devices Agency introduced, in September 2001, "on-line" reporting for members of the public for all medical devices, including in vitro diagnostic medical devices.

In addition, the Department has published two voluntary codes of practice and guidance for genetic tests being sold directly to the public. These set out broad requirements in areas such as peer-reviewed evidence of value, accreditation and quality assurance in testing laboratories, consent, confidentiality, sample and information storage, and customer information.

Mental Health

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the cost of treatment with drugs for child and adolescent mental health patients *(a)* since 1 January and *(b)* in each of the previous five years. [88527]

Jacqui Smith: Information is not collected centrally in the form requested.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his assessment is of the adequacy of mental health provision in Leeds West; and if he will make a statement. [81492]

Jacqui Smith: The Leeds West Primary Care Trust (PCT) remains committed to the provision of high quality mental health services, which are easily accessible. A working group, which has representation from the PCT and the voluntary sector, as well as service users, has been formed to help determine the options for closer working and service improvements across the community.

Secondary care mental health services will also be further enhanced following the opening of a new community unit for older people in 2003.

The West Yorkshire Strategic Health Authority is responsible for overseeing the local modernisation of mental health services in line with the National Service Framework and the NHS Plan. Strategic health authorities will be clarifying through their local delivery plans, to be completed by March 2003, how mental health services should be developed over the next three years to help meet the needs of the local population.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of carers of mental health patients in Shropshire have been given a carer's assessment. [87419]

Mr. Lammy: 27 per cent. of carers of mental health patients in the Shropshire Primary Care Trust area have been offered an assessment to date in 2002–03.

Source:

Shropshire PCT

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the underlying reasons for the recent change in numbers of prisoners transferred under the Mental Health Act 1999 from prisons to hospitals. [87440]

Jacqui Smith: The "Statistics of Mentally Disordered Offenders 2001", published on 28 November 2001, shows that the number of prisoners being transferred to hospital on mental health grounds has reduced in 2000 and 2001, compared to 1999. It is too early to begin to say what the causes might be. The past three years represent a period of considerable change for prison health, and for mental health in particular, with the development of mental health in-reach to prisons from the national health service. These changes need more time to work through before we can assess their effects with any certainty.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he is putting in place to ensure that users of mental health services are treated in a respectful manner. [88198]

Jacqui Smith Empowering patients to take an active role in their own care is a key theme in the NHS Plan. We know that people are more likely to have a better outcome from treatment when they understand and agree with their treatment and have been active partners in decision making. Increasing the involvement of service users and carers in all aspects of service development and delivery will help to increase their status and the respect they are afforded by all those involved.

A number of programmes of work attest to the importance of this. For example the mental health stigma campaign Mind out for mental health and National Institute of Mental Health England's Experts by experience programme.

Mental health performance indicators for 2002–03 include indicators on patient focus. There is a specific indicator on 'Privacy and dignity', with objectives set to support the elimination of mixed sex accommodation in general wards.

The mental health patient survey, which is being carried out by the Commission for Health Improvement, is timed to provide data for the performance rating of mental health trusts in 2002–03. It will provide information to trusts to enable them to offer mental health patients better information and more choice.

Ministerial Correspondence

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many letters to him from *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* members of the public remain unanswered, broken down by those which are (i) over six months, and (ii) over one year. [83279]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 25 November 2002; pursuant to his answer, 17 December 2002, Official Report, c. 783W]:* I regret my previous answer was incorrect. The first sentence should read as follows:

"At 11 December there were 38 letters from hon. Members dated before 10 June which had not received a reply and none over a year."

MMR Vaccine

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will lift the limit on the daily quota for vaccine for the single MMR injection. [87165]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* Single measles and single mumps vaccines, which are prescribed and administered outside the national childhood immunisation programme, are imported unlicensed medicines. Licensed single rubella vaccine is currently available in the United Kingdom. Unlicensed single rubella vaccine may only be imported and supplied when the licensed vaccine is unavailable. Importers, who must be licensed by the Medicines Control Agency, are required to notify the Agency on each occasion that they intend to import an unlicensed medicine. Notifications may be submitted daily, but the maximum quantity that may be imported per notification is controlled by legislation.

Monitored Dosage Systems

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to keep the use of monitored dosage systems for elderly patients free at the point of demand; and if he will make a statement. [87429]

Mr. Lammy: Under their national health service terms of service, pharmacies are not required to provide monitored dosage systems. Primary care trusts can negotiate contracts with pharmacies to pay for the provision of monitored dosage systems where they consider it appropriate to meet the needs of patients locally.

NHS Catering

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps the NHS takes to provide varied meal options in hospitals for patients from different ethnic backgrounds. [88765]

Mr. Lammy: Each hospital's menu should reflect the needs and preferences of all patients although the range of choice available will depend on the diversity of the local population. The new national health service menu format, launched in May 2001, includes a section for "Cultural and Religious Choices" which sets out example menus for halal, vegetarian, kosher and African-Caribbean meals.

During 2003, NHS Estates will be working with the NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency to tender for a national contract for supplying the NHS with halal, kosher and other authentic ethnic dishes.

NHS Cleaning Contractors

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS cleaning contractors have lost their contracts in each of the past five years. [85776]

Ms Blears: Figures for private sector cleaning contractors who have had their contracts terminated by national health service trusts for poor performance in each of the last five years are as follows:

1998—one contract terminated
1999—one contract terminated
2000—one contract terminated
2001—two contracts terminated
2002—six contracts terminated

NHS Dentistry

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to encourage recruitment of NHS dentists. [87721]

Mr. Lammy: The number of dentists practising in the general dental service has risen consistently in recent years. Most of these dentists spend most of their time on national health service work. However, access to routine NHS dentistry can be an issue in some parts of the country.

A number of initiatives have been implemented to address this shortfall. New ways of working and new ways of paying dentists will be explored in the Options for Change field sites, which have been identified by the NHS Modernisation Agency, working closely with the

profession. The learning gained from these field sites will be used to inform future changes to NHS dentistry as a whole.

The report "Better Opportunities for Women Dentists" reflects changes in the work force and aims to make NHS dentistry a more attractive profession for women.

Doctors' and Dentists' review body recommendations on increases to gross fees have been implemented in full since 1999.

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists are accepting NHS patients in *(a)* Morecambe, *(b)* Lancaster and *(c)* Carnforth. [87722]

Jacqui Smith: The information asked for is not collected centrally in the format requested.

The number of practices taking on new patients in the Morecambe Bay Primary Care Trust (PCT) was, estimated at August 2002, 29 out of 57 practices or 51 per cent. The average for England is 45 per cent. However, 98 per cent. of the PCTs population was within a five mile (urban) and 10 mile (rural) radius of dentists accepting new patients.

NHS IT Programme

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average time taken between the initial advertising of NHS IT contracts with a value of more than £5 million and the final contract award has been in the last month. [88178]

Ms Blears: No national health service information technology contracts with a value of more than £5 million have been awarded in the last month.

The Department, at the centre, only approves NHS information management and technology business cases that exceed £20 million whole life cost. The remaining cases are dealt with at various intermediate levels in the NHS; previously by regional offices and now strategic health authorities. We do not maintain a central list of cases approved in the NHS.

Because of their complexity projects of this size normally take over a year to complete.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has issued basic standards and specifications as part of the NHS IT programme. [88164]

Ms Blears: Information standards for use by the national health service in England are maintained and published by the NHS information authority.

As part of the implementation programme for NHS information technology currently going forward within the Government's "21st Century IT" strategy, a national specification for the integrated care records service element was published for consultation on 26 July 2002.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what testing has been carried out on the procurement model for the NHS IT programme. [88165]

Mr. Lammy: Thee procurement strategy for the national programme for information technology in the National Health Service will be in line with European Union Official Journal of the European Communities (OJEC) regulations and procedures and also covered by the Government Procurement Agreement (GPA).

The purpose of the procurement strategy is to simplify the contracting environment for NHS IT projects by reducing the duplication and delay that can be the result of running numerous local procurement exercises in parallel.

The national programme and its key deliverables are subject to the Office of Government Commerce Gateway Review process. They will examine the procurement strategy and provide assurance that the selected procurement approach is appropriate for the proposed programme and in line with good practice.

The national IT programme has also appointed commercial lawyers, DLA and Alien & Overy, to provide legal advice and support.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which IT projects being undertaken by the NHS *(a)* are running over budget and *(b)* have been subject to a significant respecification. [88167]

Ms Blears: The Department does not keep central records of local information management and technology projects. Projects are managed by the local National Health Service organisation under the relevant standing financial instructions. There is no general requirement to report cost over-runs or re-specifications to the Department.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received on the implications of a moratorium in localized IT purchasing by the NHS for the viability of smaller suppliers. [88168]

Ms Blears: There is no moratorium on localised information technology purchasing by the National Health Service.

The new national programme for IT in the NHS was announced by my noble Friend, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, on 12 June 2002. We are planning significant increases in expenditure from April 2003 onwards in the NHS following the recommendations of the Wanless Report. The final details of the new funding in the 2002 Spending Review are still being worked on and an announcement will be made shortly.

The Department has issued a prior information notice (PIN), a tender notice that is published as part of the Official Journal of the European Communities (OJEC) series. The PIN invites interested parties to respond to fulfilling the role of prime contractors and suppliers in the delivery of the national IT programme.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress in implementing the NHS National IT Strategy. [88166]

Mr. Lammy: The national programme for information technology in the national health service focuses on the key developments that will make a significant difference to improving the patient experience and the delivery of care and services. There are four key deliverables: electronic appointment booking, an electronic care records service, an electronic prescribing service and an underpinning IT infrastructure with sufficient capacity to support the critical national applications and local systems.

To support better central direction a ministerial task force has been established under the chairmanship of my noble friend, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State. Each strategic health authority has appointed a chief information officer. They have a pivotal role in including costed IT plans in their local delivery plans and ensuring primary care trusts and NHS trusts implement and use the core IT solutions determined at national level.

Since Richard Granger took up the post of Director General of NHS IT on 7 October there has been a great deal of progress and accelerating the mobilisation of the national programme has been a priority.

A significant step forward has been the issue of a prior information notice (PIN), a tender notice that is published as part of the Official Journal of the European Communities (OJEC) series. The PIN invites interested parties to respond to fulfilling the role of prime contractors and suppliers in the delivery of the national IT programme.

The focus in the early part of the year will remain on strengthening programme management, including risk management and progress monitoring, ensuring faster and smarter procurement and providing a clear and meaningful critical path for implementation.

NHS Net

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what percentage of *(a)* GP surgeries and *(b)* other surgeries were connected to NHS net in each of the last four years. [86879]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 12 December 2002]:* Figures held centrally for general practitioner practice connections are shown in the table. These are for centrally funded connections; connections for other GP premises such as part-time surgeries are a matter for local arrangements.

Date	*Number of practices*	*Percentage*
April 1999	75	0.9
April 2000	4,611	53
April 2001	8,125	93
Currently	8,579	98

NHS Targets

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list targets set by his Department in 2002 for the NHS in the last year. [89031]

Mr. Lammy: The key publication setting out priorities for the national health service in 2002–03 was the "Planning and Priorities Framework 2002". A copy is available in the Library.

Parliamentary Questions

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to reply to written questions refs. 80495 and 80496 tabled by the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme on 13 November 2002. [88616]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to these questions. They have been answered today.

Patient Admissions

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has received from *(a)* ambulance unions and *(b)* other representatives of ambulance workers about delays in the admission of patients from ambulances into A&E units. [88160]

Mr. Lammy: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 10 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 293W.

Physical Health of Prisoners

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the prison population are *(a)* smokers and *(b)* overweight. [87443]

Jacqui Smith: A study of the physical health of sentenced male prisoners was undertaken in 1994. It showed that 81 per cent. of sentenced male prisoners smoked and 30 per cent. were overweight. This is still considered to be representative of the current prison population.

Primary Care Trusts

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the progress made by primary care trusts in carrying out their roles; and if he will make a statement; [88099]

(2)whether his Department has carried out research into the effectiveness of primary care trusts in carrying out their roles. [88100]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answers 19 December 2002:]* In April 1999 the Department commissioned the national primary care research and development centre (NPCRDC) at Manchester University and the King's Fund to undertake a longitudinal survey (the Tracker Survey), of a representative sample of primary care groups and trusts over their first three years of development.

The research has concluded that primary care groups and trusts have continued to build on their early achievements in establishing infrastructures and their capacity to improve services. They have continued to improve access to care, extend the range of services

available in primary care settings and raise quality standards. The reports are available on the NPCRDC website at: www.npcrdc.man.ac.uk

The national primary and care trust development programme (NatPaCT) has also been working with primary care trusts (PCTs) to develop a competency framework as a self-assessment tool to help PCTs assess their organisational competence to deliver the National Health Service agenda. It provides guidance on organisational and personal competencies. The NatPaCT programme and competency framework has been made available to all PCTs and can also be downloaded from the NatPaCT website at: www.natpact.nhs.uk

Dr. Richard Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the Diabetes National Service Framework Delivery Strategy before primary care trusts plan their expenditure for future years. [88849]

Mr. Lammy: We shall be publishing the delivery strategy for the diabetes national service framework in the next few weeks.

Prisons (Mental Health)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many prisoners with mental health problems there were awaiting transfer to secure hospitals in each prison in each year since 1997. [87416]

Jacqui Smith: The table shows data from prisons on numbers of prisoners who were waiting for mental health transfer in each prison on the last day of each calendar year since 2000. Earlier figures collected are either incomplete or cannot be verified, and so are not included here.

	As at December	
Prison	*2001*	*2000*
Acklington	1	0
Albany	2	4
Altcourse	3	0
Ashreld	0	[illegible]
Ashwell	0	0
Askham Grange	0	0
Aylesbury	0	0
Bedford	1	2
Belmarsh	17	6
Birmingham	4	1
Blakenhurst	1	0
Blantyre House	0	0
Blundeston	0	0
Brinsford	2	2
Bristol	2	1
Brixton	4	7
Brockhill	1	0
Buckley Hall	0	0
Bullingdon	0	1
Bullwood Hall	0	0
Camp Hill	0	1
Canterbury	3	0
Cardiff	1	2
Castington	0	0
Channings Wood	0	0
Chelmsford	1	2
Coldingley	0	0
Cookham Wood	0	0
Dartmoor	0	2
Deerbolt	0	0
Doncaster	3	3
Dorchester	0	0
Dover	0	0
Dovegate	0	[illegible]
Downview	0	0
Drake Hall	0	0
Durham	1	2
East Sutton Park	0	0
Eastwood Park	2	1
Elmley	1	0
Erlestoke	0	0
Everthorpe	0	0
Exeter	0	15
Featherstone	1	0
Feltham	2	5
Ford	0	0
Forest Bank	0	0
Foston Hall	0	0
Frankland	1	0
Full Sutton	0	0
Garth	0	0
Gartree	4	3
Glen Parva	0	0
Gloucester	0	0
Grendon/Spring Hill	0	0
Guys Marsh	1	0
Haslar	0	0
Hatfield	0	0
Haverigg	0	0
Hewell Grange	0	0
Highdown	2	3
Highpoint	0	0
Highpoint North	1	0
Hindley	0	0
Hollesley Bay	0	0
Holloway	1	0
Holme House	0	0
Hull	0	0
Huntercombe	0	0
Kingston	1	1
Kirkham	0	0
Kirklevington	0	0
Lancaster	0	0
Lancaster Farms	0	0
Latchmere House	0	0
Leeds	2	1
Leicester	0	1
Lewes	2	1
Leyhill	0	0
Lincoln	2	1
Lindholme	0	0
Littlehey	0	0
Liverpool	3	0
Long Lartin	2	3
Low Newton	0	1
Lowdham Grange	0	0
Maidstone	1	2
Manchester	2	2
Moorland	0	0
Morton Hall	0	0
Mount, The	0	0
New Hall	4	0
North Sea Camp	0	0
Northallerton	1	0
Norwich	3	2
Nottingham	1	1
Onley	1	0
Parc	2	2
Parkhurst	0	1
Pentonville	2	10
Portland	0	0
Preston	0	0
Ranby	0	0

Prison	As at December 2001	2000
Reading	0	1
Risley	1	0
Rochester	3	1
Rye Hill	0	0
Send	0	0
Shepton Mallet	0	0
Shrewsbury	0	0
Stafford	0	0
Standford Hill	0	0
Stocken	0	0
Stoke Heath	1	0
Styal	3	3
Sudbury	0	0
Swaleside	3	0
Swansea	1	0
Swinfen Hall	0	0
Thorn Cross	0	0
Usk/Prescoed	0	0
Verne, The	0	0
Wakefield	0	13
Wandsworth	3	4
Wayland	0	0
Wealstun	0	0
Weare	0	0
Wellingborough	0	0
Werrington	0	0
Wetherby	2	0
Whatton	0	0
Whitemoor	1	1
Winchester	2	5
Woodhill	10	0
Wormwood Scrubs	3	3
Wolds	0	0
Wymott	0	0

[1] Indicates data not available—new prison

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of health professionals working in prisons have received training in mental health issues. [87438]

Jacqui Smith: Mental health services are provided in prisons by both National Health Service providers—mental health in-reach and secondary care—and by healthcare staff employed by prisons. In addition, many prisons employ health professionals with mental health speciality on a contractual or sessional basis to support the work of permanent staff or to provide secondary care advice.

Of those prison staff providing healthcare in prisons approximately one third of nurses, and 7 per cent. of doctors have formal psychiatric qualifications.

Within the prison service much training in mental health awareness is being developed and delivered to a range of staff, including training for non-healthcare staff who work with prisoners.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met the Director General of the Prison Service to discuss mental health provision in the UK Prison Service. [87576]

Jacqui Smith: In my capacity as Minister responsible for Prison Health matters, I last met with the Director General of the Prison Service, Mr. Martin Narey, on 11 September 2001. We discussed a number of issues, including mental health provision for prisoners. Nigel Crisp, chief executive of the National Health Service and permanent secretary of the Department of Health last met with Mr. Narey on 18 September 2002. Again, a variety of issues, including mental health, were discussed.

Public Health (Proposed Committee)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what input his Department has had into the proposed committee of senior officials on public health; and what his policy is on the proposed committee. [88171]

Ms Blears: The senior officers group on health inequalities is a cross-Government Group chaired by officials from Her Majesty's Treasury and includes in its membership officials of my Department. This Group has the Department's full support.

Public Information

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 17 December 2002, *Official* Report, column 783W, for what reason accurate information is not currently available for letters from members of the public. [89360]

Mr. Lammy: Letters from the public arrive at several different points in the Department of Health and we do not collate the information routinely. We have established a new Customer Services Centre to improve the timeliness of responses to correspondence.

Rampton/Broadmoor

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in increasing the number of in-patient beds at *(a)* Rampton and *(b)* Broadmoor prison. [87417]

Jacqui Smith: Projects are well under way to deliver beds for the dangerous and severe personality disorder (DSPD) programme at both Broadmoor and Rampton High Security Hospitals. This programme will deliver an additional 70 in-patient beds at both hospitals, to be completed by late 2004. Work is due to commence in January 2003 on an initial 10 bed pilot ward for DSPD patients at Broadmoor, which is expected to open in April 2003.

Runaway Children

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of children who ran away from home since 1997 he estimates suffered from *(a)* physical abuse and *(b)* mental abuse. [88189]

Jacqui Smith: The Government are aware from the social exclusion unit's "Young Runaways" (2002) report that it is estimated that 77,000 children and young people run away every year, including nearly 20,000 who are under 11. However, the information

requested, which relates specifically to children who run away as a direct consequence of either suffering physical abuse or from suffering mental abuse is not collected centrally.

Secure Beds

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what definition he uses of *(a)* high secure beds, *(b)* medium secure beds, *(c)* low secure beds and *(d)* long-term secure beds in relation to hospitals. [87441]

Jacqui Smith: High secure beds are intended for those who pose a grave and immediate danger to others. The perimeter security of these hospitals has recently been upgraded to be equivalent of that of a category B prison. There are three such hospitals: Rampton, Broadmoor and Ashworth.

Medium secure beds are designed for those who pose a lesser risk and, although there is significant perimeter security, the emphasis is on security derived from the close attention of the staff of the units.

Low secure beds are those for people who present a minimal risk, often to themselves. They are not designed to prevent a determined escape, and may consist of no more than a locked door to an otherwise conventional ward.

Long-term secure beds can be either medium or low secure, and are specifically designed for those who are expected to need to stay in hospital for longer than two years.

Sheltered Housing

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will commission a cost-benefit analysis of care villages and other forms of extra-care or very-sheltered housing. [84012]

Jacqui Smith: The Government's policy on long-term care for older people is to promote quality, choice and independence by the increased use of alternative forms of care provision, such as intensive home care and extra care or sheltered housing.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, together with colleagues from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, is considering commissioning information which will help to evaluate comprehensively the state of the potential and future development of the extra care home sector.

Sight Tests

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have had their sight tested following the extension of eligibility for NHS sight tests to those aged 60 and over. [87675]

Mr. Lammy: The table shows the number of national health service sight tests paid for in England for the years ending 31 March 2000 to 2002.

Eligibility to NHS sight tests was extended to those aged 60 and over from 1 April 1999.

General ophthalmic services: number of sight tests paid for by health authorities in England for all patients and patients aged 60 and over

	Number of sight tests for aged 60 and over (millions)	*Total number of sight tests (millions)*
1999–2000	3.3	9.4
2000–01	3.8	9.6
2001–02	4.0	9.8

Information on the number of people having NHS sight tests is not collected centrally. The number of sight tests cannot be equated with the number of people, as some groups are advised to have more than one sight test in a year.

Social Care

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his targets are for the assessment and provision of social care; and what measures are in place to ensure that these targets are met. [87775]

Jacqui Smith: The Government's priority targets for social services are set out in the Department of Health's planning and priorities framework for 2003 to 2006, "Improvement, Expansion and Reform: the next three years", principally in the sections on life chances for children in care, mental health and older people. The document sets out priority targets for both health and social services. A copy is available in the Library.

The priorities for social services and social services performance in general are assessed by the Social Services Inspectorate, taking into account a broad range of performance evidence from performance indicators, inspections and in-year monitoring. Since May 2002 this assessment of performance has been summarised as the social services performance "star" rating. There are significant freedoms available for the best performing councils, providing an incentive to improve. Where councils show poor performance and we do not believe the council has the capacity to improve, we have provided assistance in the form of performance action teams. In cases of serious failure we will not hesitate to use our formal intervention powers.

Social Services (Targets)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list targets set by his Department in 2002 for social services. [89032]

Jacqui Smith: In September 2002 the Government set out the priority targets for both social services and health services in the Department of Health's planning priorities framework for 2003 to 2006, "Improvement, Expansion and Reform: the Next 3 Years". This is available in the Library and on the Internet at http://www.doh.gov.uk/planning2003-2006.

Social services targets are mainly in the sections on life chances for children in care, mental health and older people although social services have a contribution to make in other areas such as health inequalities and drug misuse.

South Worcestershire PCT Deficit

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure that measures taken to address the deficit of the South Worcestershire Primary Care Trust do not lead to long-term reductions in the capacity of the health economy of the area; and if he will make a statement. [88413]

Mr. Lammy: The South Worcestershire Primary Care Trust (PCT) as part of its review of all options for reducing its financial deficit is looking at services provided to the local population as well as its own administration and management. The PCT is discussing the implications of service changes and modernisation with a wide range of stakeholders and will be discussing progress on the service reviews at its next public board meeting, which takes place on 5 February 2003.

The Government expect South Worcestershire PCT to meet performance targets and return to financial balance.

Thrombolysis

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he has taken to improve the delivery of thrombolysis in acute hospitals since March 2002. [88752]

Ms Blears: Since March 2002, we have taken a number of steps aimed at improving the delivery of thrombolysis, including:

investment of £10 million from the New Opportunities fund for cardiac monitoring equipment, electro-cardiograph (ECG) machines, on 999 ambulances, to support faster thrombolysis either en route or on arrival at the acute hospital;

a further £14 million a year central investment over the next three years to complete the programme of providing ECGs for 999 ambulances, to provide thrombolysis training for paramedics and to modernise communications between ambulances and acute hospitals;

work with the coronary heart disease collaborative to ensure paramedics pre-alert hospitals that heart attack patients are on the way, so that thrombolysis can be started immediately on arrival; and

a rapid review of best practice with the coronary heart disease collaborative to support better delivery of thrombolysis across the national health service.

In addition, in October 2002 the National Institute for Clinical Excellence published "Guidance on the use of drugs for early thrombolysis in the treatment of acute myocardial infarction". In November 2002, the Royal College of Physicians published hospital performance data by the myocardial infarction national audit project. This should help hospitals to improve the time they take to provide thrombolysis to patients with a heart attack.

Tinnitus Research Consortium

Angela Watkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in establishing the Tinnitus Research Consortium agreed by the then Minister on 11 July 2000. [88317]

Mr. Lammy: There was no such agreement. At the meeting on 11 July 2000 with representatives of the British Tinnitus Association, my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Health (Mr. Hutton), who then had responsibility for sensory disabilities such as tinnitus, was asked for advice about sources of support for tinnitus research. My right hon. Friend suggested that an approach should be made to the Medical Research Council (MRC), which receives its grant in aid from the Department of Trade and Industry via the Office of Science and Technology and which is the main agency through which the Government supports medical research.

While it is true to say that my right hon. Friend made clear that funds for tinnitus research might be available from the MRC, it would be a mistake to imply that he undertook to secure such funds. The MRC is independent in its funding decisions and does not generally earmark funds for particular topics.

The MRC has discussed mechanisms of funding with representatives of the British Tinnitus Association, and always welcomes high quality applications for funding medical research, which are judged in open competition with other demands on funding. The MRC is currently funding research projects related to tinnitus, mainly at the MRC Institute for Hearing Research in Nottingham. The MRC is also funding some more basic work on the auditory system, and this would inform any developments in treatments for a range of hearing disorders including tinnitus.

Wheelchairs

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his Answer of 11 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 401W, on wheelchair services, if he will make a statement on the wheelchair services collaborative programme. [89353]

Jacqui Smith: As outlined in the Department's press release of 27 November, forty five centres are now participating in the wheelchair services collaborative, which spans eighteen months. The aim of the collaborative is to improve the overall experience for users and carers, and to work towards minimising delays and maximising efficiency.

The services participating are shown in the table.

Wheelchair Organisation	*Organisation*
The Wheelchair Service	Bedfordshire Heartlands PCT
Bexhill & Rother Wheelchair Service	Bexhill & Rother PCT
The Wirral Wheelchair Assessment Centre	Birkenhead & Wallasey PCT
Wheelchair Service	Brent PCT
Bromley Wheelchair Service	Bromley PCT
South East Staffs Wheelchair Service	Burntwood, Litchfield & Tamworth PCT, SE Staffs PCT
Chantry Wheelchair Services	Central Suffolk PCT
Southern Derbyshire Wheelchair Service	Derbyshire Dales and South Derbyshire PCT
Wheelchair Services	Doncaster East PCT
South Durham Wheelchair Service	Durham and Chester Le-Street PCT
Enfield Wheelchair Service	Enfield PCT

Wheelchair Organisation	*Organisation*
The Wheelchair Centre	Hambleton and Richmondshire pct
Haringey Wheelchair Service	Haringey Teaching PCT
Hillingdon Wheelchair Service	Hillingdon PCT
Occupational Therapy & Wheelchair Services	Isle of Wight Healthcare NHS Trust
The Wheelchair Service	King's Lynn and Wisebech Hospitals NHS Trust
Leeds Wheelchair Service	Leeds Teaching Hospital NHS Trust
North Essex Wheelchair services	Maldon and South Chelmsford PCT
Wheelchair Services	Milton Keynes PCT
Disablement Services Centre	North Cumbria Acute Hospitals NHS Trust
North Cumbria Wheelchair Service	North Cumbria Acute Hospitals NHS Trust
Wheelchair Centre	North Lincolnshire Primary Care NHS Trust
NW Surrey Wheelchair Service	North Surrey PCT
Harrow Wheelchair Service	North West London Hospitals NHS Trust
Occupational Therapy and Wheelchair Services	Northamptonshire Heartlands PLC
Oxford Centre for Enablement	Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre NHS Trust
Wheelchair Assessment Centre, Thameside General Hospital	Oldham PCT/Thameside and Glossop
Wheelchair Service & Community Equipment Service	Redditch and Bromsgrove NHS PCT
Exeter Mobility Centre	Royal Devon and Exeter Healthcare NHS
Wheelchair Service	Sedgefield PCT
Birmingham Wheelchair Service	South Birmingham PCT
Sussex Rehabilitation Centre	South Downs NHS Trust
South Tyneside (Healthcare NHS Trust) Wheelchair Services	South Tyneside PCT
South Warwickshire PCT	South Warwickshire PCT
Wheelchair Services	Sussex Downs and Weald PCT
Shropshire Wheelchair Service	Telford and Wrekin NHS PCT
Liverpool Wheelchair Service	The Royal Liverpool and NHS Broadgreen University Hospitals
Tower Hamlets Wheelchair Service	Tower Hamlets NHS PCT
Wheelchair Service at the Rehabilitation Centre	United Lincoln Hospitals NHS Trust
Leicestershire Wheelchair Service	University Hospital of Leicester NHS Trust
Wheelchair Services	Walsall PCT
Wheelchair Service	Wandsworth NHS PCT
West Dorset Wheelchair Service	West Dorset PCT
The Wheelchair Service	West Kent NHS and Social Care Trust (Medway PCT, Dartford, Gravesham and Swanley PCT)

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 8 January 2003

CABINET OFFICE

Refurbishment (Whitehall)

Norman Baker: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if a Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method document has been prepared for the refurbishment at 70 Whitehall; and if he will place a copy in the Library. [89076]

Mr. Alexander: The external refurbishment work currently being undertaken at 70 Whitehall does not require a BREEAM assessment.

Norman Baker: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what action is being taken by his Department to ensure that timber procured for use in the current refurbishment of 70 Whitehall is sourced legally and sustainably. [89077]

Mr. Alexander: External refurbishment works are currently being undertaken at 70 Whitehall. Timber or timber products are not being used in the current refurbishment of 70 Whitehall.

Timber

Norman Baker: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what refurbishment and redevelopment is being undertaken at 70 Whitehall; how much timber will be used; from which countries this will be sourced; and which companies are supplying this timber. [89075]

Mr. Alexander: External refurbishment work is currently being undertaken at 70 Whitehall.

Timber or timber products are not being used in the current refurbishment of 70 Whitehall.

Energy White Paper

Sue Doughty: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what meetings his officials have held with external organisations concerning the preparation of the Energy White Paper; and in each case, who attended and when the meeting took place. [88537]

Mr. Wilson: I have been asked to reply.

As part of the preparation of the Energy White Paper my officials have held a large number of meetings and expert workshops with external organisations. These covered a wide range of issues and included three opening workshops in London, Glasgow and Newport, a final integrative conference in London and workshops on regional issues, energy policy and long term carbon reductions, energy efficiency, renewables and the energy implications of PIU energy review. Workshops and focus groups were also held with the general public. Details are posted on the DTI's website at http://www.dti.gov.uk/energy/developep/reports.shtml.

GM Crops

Norman Baker: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what role was played by Lord Sainsbury in the study carried out by the Strategy Unit into GM crops; and whether Lord Sainsbury has access to papers held by the unit. [89095]

Mr. Alexander: Lord Sainsbury has had no role in the Strategy Unit study on GM crops. The project team has had no contact with him and he has not had access to any papers held by the unit.

Ministerial Cars

Norman Baker: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office (1) what the average cost per Minister arising from the allocation of a ministerial car was in each of the last three years; [89072]

(2) how many Ministers are entitled to the allocation of a car; and how many Ministers in each year from 1997 have chosen not to avail themselves of one; [89073]

(3) what assessment he has made of the practicality of replacement by a car pool of the system of allocation of cars individually to Ministers; and if he will estimate the savings which would result were such a scheme implemented. [89071]

Mr. Alexander: The responsibility for the provision of ministerial cars and drivers has been delegated under the terms of the Framework Document to the Government Car Despatch Agency. I have asked its chief executive Mr Nick Matheson to write to the hon. Member. Copies of his letter will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Freehold

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, if he will make a statement about retention of freehold in the context of the Archbishop's Council's review. [88669]

Mr. Bell: As promised in my answer of 19 December 2002, I have provided the hon. Gentleman with the Group's Terms of Reference, and have placed a copy in the Library. The Group will be looking at the freehold, but will give priority to consideration of the position of clergy without the freehold. Its full terms of reference are:

"to review the terms under which the clergy hold office to ensure a proper balance between rights and responsibilities, and clear procedures for resolving disputes which afford full protection against possible injustice;

to consider in this context the future of the freehold and the position of the clergy in relation to statutory employment rights; and

in the review, to give priority to consideration of the position of clergy without the freehold or employment contracts, and to report on this aspect in 2003 with detailed proposals and a programme for their implementation, the rest of the review to be completed, if possible, in 2004".

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Royal Butler Prosecutions

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Solicitor-General what the cost was to public funds of the prosecution relating to *(a)* Paul Burrell and *(b)* Harold Brown; and if she will make a statement. [86183]

The Solicitor-General: The cost of the prosecutions relating to *(a)* Paul Burrell and *(b)* Harold Brown to public funds has not yet been ascertained.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Solicitor-General on what date the Crown Prosecution Service became aware of the existence of a written authority from the Prince of Wales to Harold Brown, authorising him to dispose of a gold wedding ring; and if she will make a statement. [86185]

The Solicitor-General: The CPS has no knowledge of such a document. Following the statement to the judge at court on 2 December 2002, that the Crown would be offering no evidence against the defendants defence, counsel for Harold Brown produced and read out to the court a document that the CPS has to this day not seen. To the best of our knowledge, Harold Brown was not named in the document, nor did it concern the sale of any item.

TRANSPORT

Air Traffic

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of air traffic dealt with by *(a)* Swanwick, *(b)* Prestwick, *(c)* West Drayton and *(d)* other air traffic control operators is *(i)* over 20,000 feet, (ii) over 25,000 feet and (iii) under 20,000 feet. [89001]

Mr. Jamieson: It is not possible to disaggregate this information to the level requested. In November 2002, the latest full month for which final information is available, the total number of flights handled by NATS was 157,635. Many of these flights were handled by more than one centre at different stages of their passage through UK airspace. The number of flights handled by each centre in that month was as follows:

	Number
Swanwick	129,690
Prestwick (including oceanic flights)	64,612
West Drayton	95,078
Manchester	47,305.

Air Transport

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to his answer of 16 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 641W, on the future development of air transport, how many Scottish consultation documents were sent out by his Department by *(a)* 30 November and *(b)* 10 December. [88418]

Mr. Jamieson: The breakdown of Scottish consultation documents dispatched by 30 November and 10 December is shown in the following table.

	30 November	*10 December*
Main document	5,915	5,930
Summary document	7,176	7,181
Questionnaires	6,655	6,676

Airport Capacity (South-East)

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what relative weight will be given to responses to the consultation on the future of airport capacity in the south-east in the form of *(a)* individual letters and *(b)* questionnaire responses. [88495]

Mr. Jamieson: All responses to the consultation, whether in the form of individual letters or completed NOP questionnaires, will be fully considered and analysed carefully.

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what external professional advice was taken into account in devising the questionnaire on airport capacity in the South East; [88496]

(2) if he will revise and recirculate the questionnaire with regard to the consultation on airport capacity in the South East; and what representations he has received on the drafting and format of the questionnaire. [88497]

Mr. Jamieson: NOP were commissioned by the Department to advise on the drafting and format of the South East questionnaire prior to the start of the consultation on 23 July 2002.

Since then there have been a number of representations from both individuals and organisations about the content and format of the questionnaire. We are considering these points carefully and plan to issue a revised questionnaire when the further South East consultation document is published early in 2003. Those who have already completed the existing questionnaire will be able to replace it with the new version should they wish to do so.

Lewes Bypass

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects a quieter road surface to be applied to the A27 Lewes bypass. [89097]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 20 June 2002 [*Official Report*, column 506W].

Motorway Tolls

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what his policy is on toll charging on motorways. [89102]

Mr. Jamieson: The M6 Toll (the Birmingham Northern Relief Road), which is under construction and is expected to open in 2004, is the only planned motorway where all vehicles may be tolled.

NATS

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what representations he has received

on the reliability of the pilot controller radio communication system; and if he will make a statement; [R] [89004]

(2) what representations he has received on the clarity of the newly fitted computer screens at Swanwick air traffic control centre; [88999]

(3) what representations he has received on equipment failure experienced by NATS; and if he will make a statement. [89009]

Mr. Jamieson: I have received a number of representations in recent months concerning NATS' systems or equipment but these are primarily matters for NATS as the service provider. I understand there were computer failures at West Drayton on 27 March 2002 and 10 April and on 17 May at Swanwick and there have been other, well-publicised, minor problems such as print size on the computer screens at Swanwick. The problems which led to the computer failures have been identified and addressed. New software, which provided revised colours and fonts on the radar displays in response to staff concerns, was successfully introduced into Swanwick on 6 November.

The CAA, as safety regulator, has remained satisfied throughout that safety has not been compromised.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many engineers were employed by NATS on *(a)* 1 May 1997 and *(b)* 1 May 2002. [89008]

Mr. Jamieson: NATS employed 1,177 engineers on 1 May 1997 and 1,270 on 1 May 2002.

Postcodes

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what use his Department and its agencies make of postcode areas for *(a)* the collection and publication of data, *(b)* devising formulae for the distribution of grants and awards and *(c)* the delivery of services; and when such usages were last reviewed. [87742]

Mr. Jamieson: Postcode area data are not used widely across the Department and its agencies. The contractors who carry out the Department's National Travel Survey use the 'small user' Postcode Address File as its sampling frame, although final data are only published at Government Office Region or combined county level. The Survey of Privately Owned Vans, begun in October 2002, also uses postcode areas as the basis for collecting data. The sample size is too small to enable publication at postcode level but it is planned to publish regional results.

Rail Passengers (Security)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will establish a national strategy and standards for CCTV on stations and in railway coaches; and if he will make a statement. [88717]

Mr. Jamieson: We will be considering the effective use of CCTV surveillance on trains as part of our current joint project with the Strategic Rail Authority to improve the on-train environment for rail passengers and staff. We already encourage the effective use of CCTV as part of the secure stations scheme accreditation process.

Rail Schemes

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which rail schemes involving new or reopened *(a)* lines and *(b)* stations the SRA will complete by 2015. [89100]

Mr. Jamieson: Details of all rail schemes involving the strategic rail authority (SRA) are in their strategic plan (copies of which are in the House Library). A revised version of that plan is due to be published early in 2003 and copies of the revised plan will also be placed in the House Library.

Road Congestion

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what work he has done to establish *(a)* the correlation between road space available and road congestion and *(b)* the impact on existing public transport alternatives along such corridors arising from the provision of extra road space. [89099]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department undertakes forecasting work for road traffic, for which available road space is an input. Forecasts were recently published in 'Delivering Better Transport: Progress Report', a copy of which is in the House Library. This forecasting work also estimates modal transfer arising from transport policies.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what additional volume of traffic he estimates will be generated using the SACTRA model in each of the road schemes announced in his recent statement to the House. [89101]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department accepted and has implemented the recommendations of the 1994 SACTRA report "Trunk Roads and the Generation of Traffic". As a result, road schemes are designed and appraised having regard to all sources of traffic, including generated traffic. It is no longer standard practice to make separate estimates excluding generated traffic. Thus, it is not possible to provide the information requested.

St. Pancras Cemetery

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received regarding the removal of graves from St. Pancras cemetery in connection with the building of the channel tunnel rail link. [89333]

Mr. Jamieson: The Secretary of State has received a small number of representations about this matter.

DEFENCE

Apache Helicopter

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence by what date he expects the Apache AH Mk 1's UK-specific secure communications system to have the ability to share voice and data information with other UK aircraft types and ground troops. [87976]

Mr. Ingram: The timescales for enhancements to enable Apache AH Mk 1 to share voice and data information with a range of United Kingdom aircraft and with ground forces are being defined but the aim is to introduce them as soon a possible.

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made to ensure that the Longbow fire-control radar allows the Apache AH Mk 1 attack helicopter to deal with surface threats. [87977]

Mr. Ingram: The Longbow fire control radar is being tested and evaluated, along with other sub-systems, as the Apache helicopter is brought into service. Any necessary modifications will be made to ensure that Longbow is able to deal consistently with the threats for which it was designed.

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what actions have been taken to ensure that the Apache AH Mk 1 attack helicopter achieves its planned initial operating capability in August 2004. [87978]

Mr. Ingram: To ensure that an initial operating capability for the Apache of August 2004 is met, action is being taken along six lines of development: delivery of the equipment; development of appropriate organisation structures and infrastructure; development of concepts and doctrine for how the equipment will be used; delivery of the required training; recruitment and retention of manpower; and supporting and sustaining the new capability once the equipment has been introduced into service.

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the problems experienced with the Apache Mk 1 attack helicopter; and when he expects each of these to be rectified. [87980]

Mr. Ingram: The report by the Comptroller and Auditor General: 'Building an Air Manoeuvre Capability: The Introduction of the Apache Helicopter' published on 31 October 2002 reflected the outstanding issues relating to the Apache helicopter. Action is in hand to address the issues highlighted in the report and to ensure the delivery of an initial operating capability in August 2004.

BAE Systems

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the discussions his Department has had with BAE Systems since 1 December; and what subject areas were discussed. [88226]

Mr. Hoon: BAE Systems is a major supplier to the Ministry of Defence. As is to be expected, numerous discussions with the company have taken place since 1 December 2002, and continue to do so, concerning a wide range of subjects.

British Nuclear Tests (Compensation)

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what restrictions apply on the provision of the medical records of ex-servicemen or ex-military medical auxiliaries who were present at British nuclear tests conducted at Christmas and Maiden Islands. [89018]

Dr. Moonie: There are no restrictions that apply specifically to the provision of the medical records of those ex-Service personnel who were present at the British nuclear tests on Christmas Island and Maiden Island. However, the normal restrictions on access to medical records do apply.

Christmas Expenses

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many departmental Christmas cards he and his Ministers intend to send in 2002; how much these cards will cost *(a)* to buy, *(b)* to post and *(c)* in staff time to sign, address and place in envelopes; and if he will place in the Library a sample copy of the official Christmas card he has sent this year. [88106]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 19 December 2002]*: Defence Ministers sent a total of 520 departmental Christmas cards. All expenditure incurred in the purchase and despatch of these cards was made in accordance with departmental guidance on financial procedures and propriety, based on the principles set out in Government Accounting.

The cards were purchased from The Royal Star and Garter Home, a charity for disabled ex-service men and women at an equivalent cost of 67p per card. A copy of the card used will be placed in the Library of the House.

It is estimated it took around four minutes of staff time to prepare each card for posting.

Defence Bills Agency

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the total spending was of the Defence Bills Agency for the last year for which figures are available; and how much of that was spent in Scotland. [86061]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 10 December 2002]*: The total value of Defence contractors' bills settled by the Defence Bills Agency for the year ending 31 March 2002 was £16,849 billion. Data on how much of this figure was spent in Scotland or any United Kingdom region is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Enron

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contracts the Department has placed with Enron since 1997. [87112]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence has not placed any contracts with Enron since 1997.

Eurofighter

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with BAE Systems on the numbers of Eurofighter Typhoons projected to be in *(a)* Tranche 2 and *(b)* Tranche 3. [88224]

Mr. Ingram: We have regular discussions with BAE Systems on a wide range of issues associated with the Eurofighter Typhoon programme. The planned numbers of aircraft to be procured in Tranche 2 and Tranche 3 are set down in international memoranda of understanding between the four Typhoon partner

nations and in the over-arching framework contracts placed with industry. For the United Kingdom these provide for 89 aircraft in Tranche 2 and 88 in Tranche 3.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the implications for the Eurofighter Typhoon project of developing an enhanced ground attack capability for the aircraft. [88225]

Mr. Ingram: The Eurofighter Typhoon will be a multi-role aircraft. Although primarily designed for air superiority, the aircraft will progressively benefit from enhanced ground attack capabilities as part of the planned procurement programme. The United Kingdom and other nations involved in the procurement will continue to keep under review the possibility of further enhancements to Typhoon's capability.

Gracemoor Consultants

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the former employees of his Department who have taken up positions with Gracemoor Consultants, stating in each case the name and date of leaving. [82152]

Dr. Moonie: Under the Cabinet Office rules on the acceptance of outside appointments by Crown servants ("the Business Appointment Rules"), all Ministry of Defence non-industrial civilians and officers in the Armed Forces are required, within two years of leaving the Department, to apply for permission before taking up employment with an organisation connected with their official duties. Some of these applications are speculative and not all lead to external appointments being taken up. The rules require only senior officials whose applications are approved by the Prime Minister to confirm to their former department that they have taken up a new appointment on leaving the MOD. Details of such appointments are published by the Cabinet Office in the annual reports of the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Green Ministers

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which Minister in his Department is the nominated Green Minister; how often he has attended meetings of the Green Ministers; and which official has responsibility for the Defra rural proofing check-list in his Department. [88455]

Dr. Moonie: I am the nominated Green Minister for the Ministry of Defence. The Green Ministers Committee (now ENV(G)) is a Cabinet sub-committee. It is established practice under Exemption 2 of Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information not to disclose information, including ministerial attendance, relating to the proceedings of the Cabinet and its committees.

A list of the names of departmental contacts, who meet regularly to discuss issues such as rural proofing, is not published as personnel and machinery of Government changes mean that any list would be out of date fairly quickly.

Knightsbridge Barracks

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the result is of his investigation into circumstances of the shooting incident at Knightsbridge Barracks involving a civilian, Mr. Rajko Novakovic; who *(a)* issued and *(b)* owned the firearm; how many soldiers were involved in the incident; how many civilian complaints concerning the improper use of firearms have been received in the past five years; what disciplinary action has been taken following the conviction of trooper Adam Everett by Horseferry Road magistrates; what ranks of officer have apologised to Mr. Novakovic; and when trooper Everett offered an apology. [89254]

Dr. Moonie: The investigation into the shooting incident at Knightsbridge Barracks leading to the conviction of Trooper Adam Everett was conducted by the civilian police.

An internal investigation was conducted into the storage security of the firearm. The matter of internal disciplinary or administrative action now lies with the chain of command, and this properly remains a private matter between Trooper Everett and the Army. The matter of the soldier issuing an apology is also a private one between him and Mr. Novakovic.

The figures relating to the number of complaints concerning the improper use of firearms received by the Service relate to the period 1 January 1998 to 31 December 2002. Worldwide, a total of 16 incidents of offences against the person involving firearms, where there was a civilian complainant and the suspect was a Service person (this includes dependants and United Kingdom based civilians), were reported to Service Police. You may also wish to be aware that, during the same time frame, there were 27 complaints made of similar incidents where the complainants were Service persons (this includes dependants and UK based civilians) and the suspect*(s)* civilian. These figures include incidents both inside and outside of barracks, but do not include incidents leading to an individual being charged or investigated for murder or attempted murder.

Military Airfields

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what liaison takes place between his Department and *(a)* local hon. Members and *(b)* local authorities in the use of domestic military airfields when being used by the aircraft of a foreign power. [88321]

Mr. Ingram: Regular liaison takes place between RAF stations and local authorities. This includes notification of foreign aircraft activity, where it varies from the routine.

Members of Parliament are similarly advised of such non-routine activity by either my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Defence or myself.

Military Recruits

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost was per capita of training a

successful military recruit to the agreed standard *(a)* in 1997 and *(b)* in the last 12 months; and what the difference was expressed in percentage terms. [88334]

Dr. Moonie: The information is not held in the format requested. However, the average cost of initial training for successful recruits is set out as follows:

£000

	Officer	*Other rank*
1999–2000[1]		
Royal Navy	25.3	4.4
Royal Marine	97.9	31.8
2001–02		
Royal Navy	31.1	6.9
Royal Marine	103	33

[1] RN/RM figures for 1997–98 and 1998–99 are not readily available

£000

	Officer	*Other rank*
1997–98		
Army	40.6	5.6
RAF	15.8	3.8
2001–02		
Army	52.6	7.3
RAF	17.9	4.5

The 2001–02 costs were calculated on a resource basis (thus including overheads), whereas costs for previous years were only based on cash. It would, therefore, be inappropriate to make a percentage comparison between the two sets of figures. There are also significant differences between the services in the scope of initial training so that it is generally inappropriate to use these figures to make inter-service comparisons.

MOD Contracts

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the ROF sites that supply his Department; and what the length of contract is at each site. [88572]

Mr. Ingram: The former Royal Ordnance Factories (now owned by RO Defence, within BAE Systems), which are involved in the supply of munitions to the Ministry of Defence are: Birtley, Bridgwater, Chorley, Glascoed and Radway Green. The MOD has a variety of contracts for the supply of munitions with RO Defence, most of which are covered by the MOD/ROD Framework Partnering Agreement. These contracts are not site specific, and it is for RO Defence to decide on the point of assembly and manufacture of components.

RAF Fairford

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the terms of agreement are between his Department and the US Air Force in the use of RAF Fairford. [88320]

Mr. Ingram: The presence of the United States Air Force at RAF Fairford is, as with all bases made available to United States visiting forces in the United Kingdom, governed by the NATO Status of Forces Agreement 1951 and additional confidential arrangements.

S-type Contracts

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many serving members of *(a)* the armed forces and *(b)* the infantry are employed on an S-Type contract having been manning controlled. [89280]

Dr. Moonie: As explained in the answer given on 27 November 2002, *Official Report*, columns 332–34W, only the Army uses Manning Control Point reviews. The Royal Navy and Royal Air Force have their own manning policies that are designed to meet their different requirements.

There are 351 serving members of the Army who are employed on an S-Type engagement following termination of their notice or open engagement after a Manning Control review. Of these, 291 are Infantry personnel.

Soldier Discharges

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many soldiers in the last five years signed an AFB120A form under QR 9.413; and how many soldiers who were discharged under QR 9.413 applied for a war pension after discharge. [89275]

Dr. Moonie: I assume the hon. Member is referring to AFB 130A form, which is completed when soldiers are to be discharged for a number of reasons, including Queen's Regulations 9.413, 'Not required for a full Army career'. For consistency with the period covered in the answer of 16 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 507W, the number of such forms signed by soldiers discharged under Queen's Regulations, paragraph 9.413 in each year since 1997 is shown in the table.

	Number of AF103As discharged under QR 9.413
1997	231
1998	175
1999	93
2000	66
2001	47
2002	3
Total	615

An AFB 130A form may have been signed in some cases in which discharge action was terminated. Figures for such cases are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The Veterans' Agency does not collate data on the reason for discharge of veterans who claim a war pension. Therefore, the number of soldiers who were discharged under Queen's Regulations, paragraph 9.413, and who applied for a war pension after discharge, is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

UBS Warburg

Syd Rapson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when his Department was informed that the Department of Trade and Industry had hired UBS Warburg to advise it about the relationship between

BAE Systems and his Department; which MOD officials met officials from UBS Warburg; and when these meetings took place. [88665]

Mr. Hoon: UBS Warburg were retained in early December 2002 to provide specialist financial advice to the Government as a whole, not to individual Departments. Ministry of Defence officials, representatives of the MOD Equipment Capability Customer Organisation, the Defence Procurement Agency and the MOD Press Office have been involved in a number of meetings at which USB Warburg representatives have been present.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Union Learning Funds

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assistance has been given by his Department to union learning funds; and if he will make a statement. [88808]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 7 January 2003]:* Trade unions have a key role to play in promoting the development of learning and skills in the workplace. To help them do this, my Department has provided financial support through the union learning fund since 1998. Between 1998 and March 2002, £16.5million was made available; £9 million is available for 2002–03 and a further £33. 6 million has been allocated for the next three years up to 2005–06.

The union learning fund is a highly successful scheme and has become an established part of the lifelong learning agenda. Regular evaluation of this initiative has taken place and copies of the reports are available in the House of Commons Library.

Christmas Expenses

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many departmental Christmas cards he and his Ministers intend to send in 2002; how much these cards will cost *(a)* to buy, *(b)* to post and *(c)* in staff time to sign, address and place in envelopes; and if he will place in the Library a sample copy of the official Christmas card he has sent this year. [88109]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* This year Ministers at the Department for Education and Skills sent around 1,550 official Christmas cards. These cards cost £1,659. The cards were sent via the governmental inter-departmental Service or the Royal Mail. No breakdown of the delivery methods is available which would enable an accurate assessment to be made of the postage costs. Equally no record is available of the staff time involved to sign, address and place cards in envelopes. A copy of the official Christmas card has been made available to the Library.

All expenditure incurred in the purchase and despatch of official Christmas cards is made in accordance with the departmental guidance on financial procedures and propriety, based on the principles set out in "Government Accounting".

Connexions

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time employees were employed by Connexions in each region *(i)* this year and (ii) last year. [88993]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 7 January 2003]:* The following table gives the number of full-time and part-time staff employed by Connexions during the current year. The figures are taken from an annual staff survey undertaken by 27 partnerships that were operational by August 2002. The Connexions Service is expected to be operational in all 47 areas by April 2003.

Comparable information is not available for 2001. Another survey of all Connexions partnerships is planned for the end of April 2003.

Connexions partnerships operational by August 2002

	Full-time staff	*Part-time staff*
England	5,023	2,021
South-east	230	204
Milton Keynes, Oxon and Bucks	230	204
London	790	315
Central London	176	55
North London	143	50
South London	184	93
East London	287	117
East of England	431	172
Cambs and Peterborough	214	74
Hertfordshire	107	66
Suffolk	110	32
South-west	599	288
Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole	97	25
Cornwall and Devon	244	102
Somerset	84	51
West of England	174	110
West Midlands	846	335
Black Country	225	75
Coventry and Warwick	182	112
Hereford and Worcester	102	60
Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin	109	51
Staffordshire	228	37
East Midlands	314	94
Lincolnshire and Rutland	148	41
Nottinghamshire	166	53
Yorks and Humber	479	265
Humberside	226	155
South Yorkshire	253	110
North-west	968	265
Cheshire and Warrington	204	61
Cumbria	134	49
Greater Merseyside	368	81
Lancashire	262	74
North-east	366	83
County Durham	118	33
Tyne and Wear	248	50

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of people who have received advice through the Connexions service were *(a)* under 19 and *(b)* defined as socially excluded in the latest 12 months for which figures are available, broken down by region. [88996]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 7 January 2003]:* The table shows the number and proportion of young people receiving individual advice through operational Connexions Services for the period April 2002 to

November 2002—the latest period for which this information is available. The table also shows the numbers of those identified as needing intensive support from the service.

Intensive support is defined as integrated and specialist support for those facing substantial multiple problems which prevent them from engaging with learning. These young people are likely to be involved with a number of different professionals engaged in education, social welfare, health and housing.

Young people also receive advice and guidance in a variety of group activities, through targeted mail shots and via Connexions websites, however this information is not collected by age group.

	All young people advised by Connexions in a one to one situation[1]	*Number of under 19s advised by Connexions in a one to one situation*	*Number identified as needing intensive support*	*Percentage*
England	1,799,647	1,726,652	448,254	24.9
South East	100,432	96,838	29,287	29.2
London	154,167	144,920	32,056	20.8
East of England	106,796	102,548	16,959	15.9
South West	238,711	225,097	68,832	28.8
West Midlands	263,257	252,377	35,055	13.3
East Midlands	150,312	145,069	36,811	24.5
Yorks and Humber	235,772	226,669	95,222	40.4
North West	431,343	416,597	102,000	23.6
North East	118,857	116,537	32,032	27.0

[1] Connexions Services cover 13 to 19-year-olds and young people up to the age of 25 with learning difficulties and disabilities.

Departmental Meetings (Wales and Scotland)

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials from his Department last met representatives from (i) the Welsh Assembly and (ii) the Scottish Parliament. [89335]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Ministers in this Department are in regular contact with representatives from the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament, most recently on 31 October 2002 and 18 December 2002 respectively.

Officials in the Department work regularly with the Devolved Administrations on matters of mutual interest. Information about the frequency of meetings is not held centrally.

Grammar Schools

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what recent discussions he has had with local education authorities about the future of grammar schools; [87851]

(2) what recent representations he has received from local education authorities seeking an end to academic selection. [87852]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 17 December 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not held any specific discussions with local education authorities, nor has he had any representations from them, about the future of grammar schools or ending academic selection. However, he has recently had a meeting with representatives of Kent LEA about how school standards in general can be raised.

Legislation does not allow for LEAs to propose that grammar schools stop being selective; that is a matter for the schools themselves, or local parents, through the ballot system.

Language Teaching

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what estimate he has made of the percentage of children in maintained schools learning a foreign language at Key Stage 2; and what he expects the percentage to be in *(a)* September 2003, *(b)* September 2004 and *(c)* September 2005; [89328]

(2) by what date he expects that every primary school should have a language co-ordinator. [89332]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: While the Department does not hold precise information about the numbers of children learning a modern foreign language at Key Stage 2, we are aware from a recent survey conducted by Warwick University that approximately 20 per cent. of primary schools currently offer some form of language teaching. We plan to carry out research this year to verify that percentage, and Ofsted will take account of language learning programmes in the primary schools they inspect. This will allow us to estimate the percentage of children who will be learning a foreign language at Key Stage 2 for the years cited and beyond.

We expect that, by the end of the decade ,every pupil at Key Stage 2 will be offered the opportunity to study at least one foreign language. To support this offer, we are concentrating on building capacity and supporting best practice, enabling schools to introduce early language learning at a pace which is right for them.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the overseas visits on departmental business undertaken by Ministers in his Department during the last 12 months. [89323]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: In the last 12 months, Ministers in this Department have travelled on departmental business to Belgium, France, Slovakia, Italy, Australia and the United States.

All trips undertaken by Ministers comply with the requirements of the Ministerial Code.

School Funding

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the SSA average grant per pupil in *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools will be in each LEA in England and Wales in *(i)* 2003–04 and (ii) subsequent years for which figures are available. [88325]

Mr. Miliband: The average primary and secondary formula spending share per pupil for LEAs in England are set out in the tables for 2003–04: figures for future years will become available at the time of the Local Government Finance Settlement for each year. These figures are not comparable with primary and secondary SSA per pupil for 2002–03 and previous years. The new system of funding for LEAs consists of a basic entitlement which is the same for all pupils, plus a top up for all deprived pupils, which is the same for all deprived pupils, and a further top up for those LEAs in areas with additional costs for recruitment and retention of staff. Where the average formula spending share per pupil is higher, that reflects a higher number of deprived pupils, and higher area costs. The system in Wales is different and is the responsibility of the Welsh Assembly.

LEA	*Average primary formula spending share per pupil*	*Average secondary formula spending share per pupil*
City of London	3,252	4,322
Camden	3,187	3,952
Greenwich	2,985	3,866
Hackney	3,336	4,208
Hammersmith and Fulham	3,087	3,935
Islington	3,217	4,156
Kensington and Chelsea	2,957	3,771
Lambeth	3,232	4,129
Lewisham	3,011	3,956
Southwark	3,160	4,147
Tower Hamlets	3,625	4,441
Wandsworth	2,923	3,890
Westminster	3,255	4,060
Barking and Dagenham	2,482	3,204
Barnet	2,555	3,250
Bexley	2,280	2,986
Brent	2,814	3,545
Bromley	2,237	2,968
Croydon	2,410	3,213
Ealing	2,757	3,442
Enfield	2,538	3,218
Haringey	2,823	3,572
Harrow	2,590	3,290
Havering	2,240	2,961
Hillingdon	2,496	3,193
Hounslow	2,714	3,373
Kingston upon Thames	2,387	3,117
Merton	2,504	3,285
Newham	2,928	3,611
Redbridge	2,505	3,160
Richmond upon Thames	2,318	3,092
Sutton	2,357	3,112
Waltham Forest	2,609	3,393
Birmingham	2,475	3,156
Coventry	2,273	2,912
Dudley	2,180	2,849
Sandwell	2,378	3,022
Solihull	2,115	2,751
Walsall	2,302	2,944
Wolverhampton	2,327	2,992
Knowsley	2,381	3,022
Liverpool	2,385	3,048
St. Helens	2,195	2,841
Sefton	2,156	2,812
Wirral	2,217	2,873
Bolton	2,269	2,883
Bury	2,169	2,833
Manchester	2,540	3,235
Oldham	2,351	2,985
Rochdale	2,323	2,988
Salford	2,281	2,936
Stockport	2,108	2,769
Tameside	2,220	2,876
Trafford	2,149	2,817
Wigan	2,149	2,808
Barnsley	2,195	2,829
Doncaster	2,244	2,836
Rotherham	2,198	2,834
Sheffield	2,217	2,877
Bradford	2,409	3,039
Calderdale	2,233	2,857
Kirklees	2,275	2,881
Leeds	2,191	2,837
Wakefield	2,167	2,812
Gateshead	2,199	2,838
Newcastle upon Tyne	2,297	2,926
North Tyneside	2,151	2,798
South Tyneside	2,233	2,881
Sunderland	2,210	2,855
Isles of Scilly	3,366	3,989
Bath and North East Somerset	2,111	2,747
City of Bristol	2,251	2,949
North Somerset	2,119	2,741
South Gloucestershire	2,107	2,729
Hartlepool	2,255	2,888
Middlesbrough	2,326	2,972
Redcar and Cleveland	2,225	2,842
Stockton-on-Tees	2,193	2,824
City of Kingston-upon-Hull	2,292	2,938
East Riding of Yorkshire	2,163	2,681
North East Lincolnshire	2,210	2,831
North Lincolnshire	2,210	2,758
North Yorkshire	2,214	2,662
York	2,074	2,702
Bedfordshire	2,219	2,831
Luton	2,432	3,149
Buckinghamshire	2,276	2,939
Milton Keynes	2,319	2,984
Derbyshire	2,128	2,715
Derby	2,233	2,885
Dorset	2,136	2,669
Poole	2,059	2,709
Bournemouth	2,122	2,763
Durham	2,208	2,797
Darlington	2,190	2,802
East Sussex	2,159	2,752
Brighton and Hove	2,183	2,850
Hampshire	2,141	2,764
Portsmouth	2,237	2,908
Southampton	2,296	2,957
Leicestershire	2,083	2,663
Leicester	2,443	2,966
Rutland	2,204	2,659
Staffordshire	2,102	2,698
Stoke on Trent	2,254	2,904
Wiltshire	2,214	2,731
Swindon	2,153	2,788
Bracknell Forest	2,287	3,019
Windsor and Maidenhead	2,321	3,019
West Berkshire	2,333	2,970
Reading	2,412	3,161
Slough	2,623	3,326
Wokingham	2,273	2,970
Cambridgeshire	2,224	2,779
Peterborough	2,375	3,011
Cheshire	2,133	2,738
Halton	2,286	2,946
Warrington	2,101	2,761
Devon	2,217	2,708
Plymouth	2,166	2,813
Torbay	2,162	2,807
Essex	2,164	2,784
Southend	2,195	2,847
Thurrock	2,267	2,938
Herefordshire	2,246	2,683
Worcestershire	2,088	2,689
Kent	2,184	2,803
Medway	2,167	2,812
Lancashire	2,183	2,778
Blackburn	2,389	2,942

LEA	Average primary formula spending share per pupil	Average secondary formula spending share per pupil
Blackpool	2,211	2,862
Nottinghamshire	2,133	2,746
Nottingham City	2,393	3,075
Shropshire	2,201	2,667
The Wrekin	2,196	2,806
Cornwall	2,233	2,758
Cumbria	2,220	2,721
Gloucestershire	2,160	2,743
Hertfordshire	2,257	2,948
Isle of Wight Council	2,210	2,779
Lincolnshire	2,226	2,714
Norfolk	2,211	2,727
Northamptonshire	2,183	2,789
Northumberland	2,206	2,734
Oxfordshire	2,266	2,884
Somerset	2,159	2,689
Suffolk	2,144	2,698
Surrey	2,307	3,019
Warwickshire	2,173	2,752
West Sussex	2,176	2,806

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Air Quality (Lancashire)

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the most recent figures are for air quality in Lancashire. [88651]

Alun Michael: Defra currently operates two automated, continuous air quality monitoring sites in Lancashire: one in Preston, the other in Blackpool. These sites measure carbon monoxide, oxides of nitrogen, ozone, particulate matter (PM_{10}), and sulphur dioxide. Current and historic air quality information from these sites is available at Defra's air quality archive, www.airquality.co.uk. The information is updated hourly.

In 2002 all automated measurements of carbon monoxide, oxides of nitrogen and sulphur dioxide were in the 'low' category of air pollution. 'High' levels of PM_{10} occurred at Preston on one day in 2002, where levels peaked at 80 micrograms per cubic metre. 'Moderate' levels of PM_{10} were recorded at Preston on three days in 2002. 'Moderate' levels of PM_{10} were measured at Blackpool on one day in 2002, peaking at 51 micrograms per cubic metre. 'Moderate' levels of ozone were measured in Preston on 47 separate days in 2002, peaking at 67 parts per billion. In Blackpool, 'moderate' levels of ozone were measured on 62 separate days in 2002, peaking at 78 parts per billion. Data for 2002 are provisional. Definitions of 'low', 'moderate' and 'high' pollution levels are provided at Defra's air quality archive.

Bird Registration

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to her answer of 11 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 311W, on bird registration, what the significant increase in enforcement action was that caused the increase in costs of running her Department's bird registration scheme between 2000–01 and 2001–02; how many police forces were involved; and how many *(a)* pending court cases and *(b)* convictions have resulted from this action. [89282]

Mr. Morley: The increase in enforcement costs from 2000–01 to 2001–02 was due partly to increased pay and overhead costs and partly to the recruitment of a number of new inspectors to widen the spread of expertise available to the Department.

Increased enforcement does not necessarily result in a higher number of court cases as the chief aim of the wildlife inspectors is to deter crime. The number of pending court cases and convictions and the number of police forces involved in taking them forward in 2000–01 and 2001–02 were as follows:

	2000–01	2001–02
Pending cases	0	3
Convictions	3	1
Police forces	3	1

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to her answer of 11 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 312W, on bird registration, what evidence she collated that de-registration of bird species currently listed on schedule 4 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 will not lead to an increase in illegal taking from the wild; and what assessment her Department has made of the cost implications for *(a)* enforcement and *(b)* conservation agencies of de-registration. [89283]

Mr. Morley: The reason for the consultation was to obtain views and evidence on the possible impact of any changes to Schedule 4. We are still analysing the responses.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the likely impact on the United Kingdom peregrine falcon population of removing that species from schedule 4 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. [89284]

Mr. Morley: No assessment has been made. The development of any future proposals for species to be excluded from Schedule 4 would be accompanied by an appropriate assessment.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to her answer of 11 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 311W, on bird registration, what percentage of her Department's bird registration fees were paid by birdkeepers in *(a)* 1991–92 and *(b)* 2001–02. [89285]

Mr. Morley: In 1991–92, 33 per cent. of the costs of providing the service were recovered and 2001–02, 14 per cent. of costs were recovered.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to her answer of 11 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 311W, on bird registration, whether changes were made to the fees charged following the consultation on Review of Bird Registration and CITES licensing fees undertaken in July 1999. [89286]

Mr. Morley: No changes were made to any fees following the consultation on the review of bird registration and CITES licensing fees undertaken in 1999 because of concerns expressed by consultees.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to her answer of 11 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 311W, on bird registration, how many birds were registered with her Department's bird registration scheme in *(a)* 1991–92 and *(b)* 2001–02; and what cost savings her Department has made in the running of the scheme following the 1994 review of Schedule 4 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. [89287]

Mr. Morley: The Department no longer holds data on how many birds were registered in 1991–92. Before the changes to Schedule 4 in 1993 there were 19,466 birds registered. At 1 January 2002, 6,918 birds were registered.

In 1991–92 the total costs of Bird Registration were £309,769 and in 2001–02 total costs were £441,557. Because of changes to the species and numbers of birds being registered it is impossible to assess meaningful figures for savings achieved.

Coley

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mechanism is for the disposal of diseased coley taken from within salmon cages; and what assessment she has made of the effect diseased coley has on domestic farm animals in Shetland. [88723]

Mr. Morley: The disposal of diseased fish from fish farming operations in Great Britain must be carried out in accordance with the Animal By-Products Order 1999 (SI 1999/646). The disposal of diseased fish in Shetland is the responsibility of the Scottish Executive.

Fisheries

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the terms of fisheries quota swaps undertaken between Spain and Portugal for Western Waters in 1996. [88197]

Mr. Morley: I regret that this information is not centrally available.

Hunting

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of who will take over the role of disposing of fallen stock if the number of hunts are reduced as a consequence of the bill. [89011]

Alun Michael: The European Union's Animal By-products Regulation will ban routine on-farm burial and burning of animal carcases from 30 April 2003. This will mean that the existing fallen stock service provided by a number of hunts could only continue with considerable investment in new equipment. So the future of the hunts' service is in doubt irrespective of the Hunting Bill. The Government has been holding discussions with the livestock and disposal industry with the aim of developing a national fallen stock scheme.

Marine Wildlife

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to secure greater protection for marine wildlife. [88862]

Mr. Morley: The Government's first Marine Stewardship Report, "Safeguarding our Seas", was published in May 2002. It sets out our strategy for the conservation and sustainable development of the marine environment and reiterated the commitment, made at the 5th North Sea Conference, to establish a network of well-managed marine protected areas by 2010.

The Report contained a package of initiatives to better protect marine wildlife. In particular, it confirms our commitment to consult on the Regulations to extend the Habitats Directive out to the limit of jurisdiction of UK waters. We are also finalising our UK-wide Small Cetacean Bycatch Response Strategy. This will identify what measures can be taken to reduce the incidental capture of small cetaceans in fishing nets.

In addition, our Review of Marine Nature Conservation is currently examining how effectively the current system for marine nature conservation is working and how improvements might be made where conservation objectives are not being met.

Nobel House

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether a Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method document has been prepared for the refurbishment of Nobel House. [89079]

Alun Michael: The latest refurbishment in Nobel House was for areas of the sixth and eighth floors. This was undertaken for MAFF in 1997. As only parts of floors were refurbished it was concluded that it would not be appropriate to seek a Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM) assessment. In the summer of 2002 "fit out" work was undertaken to allow Defra to occupy the top four floors of 9 Millbank, which is next door to Nobel House. Again, it was concluded that it would not be appropriate to seek a BREEAM assessment because Defra are not responsible for the building fabric and the building services; these remain the responsibility of the major occupier, Ofgem. Defra does seek BREEAM assessments for the major new or refurbishment schemes for which we are responsible.

Officials

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many officials in her Department work *(a)* in the Strategic Development Unit and *(b)* on Regulatory Impact Assessment matters. [89092]

Alun Michael: There is no unit within Defra specifically called the Strategic Development Unit. The Policy and Corporate Strategy Unit in Defra employs 59 officials of whom approximately 21 work on strategic policy. Their functions include promoting the development of strategic capability across the Department as a whole.

Five people work full time in the Better Regulation Unit, which is responsible for advice and guidance within Defra on the Regulatory Impact Assessment process. The unit is supervised by a member of the senior civil service who is also engaged in other duties. Responsibility for preparing individual RIAs rests with officials in the policy divisions who draw on other expertise as necessary, for example economic advisers.

Pigs

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many pigs were slaughtered in abattoirs in the United Kingdom in each year between 1990 to 2001. [87291]

Mr. Morley: The information requested is given in the table below:

Number of pigs slaughtered in abattoirs in the United Kingdom 1990–2001

Unit: Thousand head

	Clean Pigs	*Sows and Adult Boars*	*Total Pigs*
1990	13,879	325	14,203
1991	14,091	366	14,457
1992[1]	14,143	373	14,515
1993	14,265	356	14,620
1994	14,681	389	15,069
1995	14,021	355	14,376
1996	13,897	324	14,221
1997	15,132	363	15,496
1998[2]	15,872	415	16,286
1999	14,350	379	14,728
2000	12,369	321	12,691
2001	10,449	180	10,628

Notes:
[1] 53 week statistical year
[2] Figures have been rounded individually and totals will not necessarily agree with the addition of separate figures.

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many pigs were on holdings in England and Wales in June of each year from 1990. [87294]

Mr. Morley: Total pigs in England are shown in the table below. Figures for Wales are a matter for the devolved authority.

Total Pigs (England)

	Number
1990	6,308,324
1991	6,411,758
1992	6,408,233
1993	6,517,778
1994	6,591,384
1995	6,341,131
1996	6,275,376
1997	6,631,920
1998	6,729,927
1999	6,163,443
2000	5,442,468
2001	4,822,870
2002	4,629,707

Source:
June agricultural and horticultural census.

Water Quality (Lancashire)

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the most recent figures are for water quality on the Lancashire beaches that are regularly tested. [88652]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 7 January 2003]:* I announced on 11 November the best ever bathing water quality results in England and the North West, with all the Lancashire beaches passing the Directive's main mandatory standards in the 2002 season. Details of the weekly results of the sample testing for individual bathing waters are available on the Environment Agency's internet site at www.environment-agency.gov.uk (then follow "What's in your backyard?"). In addition, my Department will be placing in the Library early in the new year our annual publication "Bathing Water Directive (76/160/EEC) Detailed Summary of Survey Results—United Kingdom". This lists all identified bathing waters and the results of micro-biological and physico-chemical sample testing.

Working Time Directive

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact of a Working Time Directive on the farm community *(a)* in its general application and *(b)* specifically in relation to the movement of livestock to and from another auction; and if she will make a statement. [89006]

Alun Michael: No sectoral analysis has been provided by the Department. The Department for Trade and Industry has overall responsibility for implementing the Working Time Directive 1998 and has produced a Regulatory Impact Assessment on the 1998 regulations. As a result of the flexibilities included in the regulations in relation to agricultural work it is anticipated that the additional cost to agriculture and associated sectors will have been small.

The Working Time Regulations 1998 currently exclude a number of sectors including road transport. A new working time directive (known as the Horizontal Amending Directive) covering the excluded sectors, has been adopted together with three sector specific directives, including the Road Transport Directive. The Horizontal Amending Directive is due to come into effect on 1 August 2003. The Department for Trade and Industry is currently consulting on the draft regulations to implement the Directive.

The Road Transport Directive is due to come into effect in March 2005 and the Department for Transport will be consulting on its proposals to do this in due course.

TREASURY

PFI Projects

Mrs. May: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon) of 11 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 252, if he will list the PFI projects being carried out in the constituency of Maidenhead. [89015]

Mr. Boateng: No PFI projects are currently being carried out in the constituency of Maidenhead. However, the constituency benefits from PFI investment both in neighbouring constituencies and at a national level.

Locally, for example, PFI has helped to channel extra money into hospitals administered by the South Buckinghamshire NHS Trust, which take patients from Maidenhead, and has financed the widening and resurfacing of the nearby M40 motorway. At a national level, PFI has provided vital investment to deliver public services whose benefits extend beyond the constituencies in which they are located, in sectors such as defence and the administration of justice. To date, PFI deals delivering over £20 billion worth of capital investment across the country have been signed.

Climate Change Levy

Norman Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what *(a)* advantages and *(b)* disadvantages he identified in deciding to introduce the climate change levy in preference to a carbon tax. [89098]

John Healey: The Government's decision to introduce the climate change levy as a 'downstream' energy tax took account of the conclusions of Lord Marshall in his 1998 report 'Economic Instruments and the Business Use of Energy'. Lord Marshall concluded that a downstream tax on supplies of energy to the non-domestic sector would be necessary to avoid any tax impacting on domestic energy users. While under such a scheme it is difficult to determine the carbon content of electricity supplies other than as a broad average, it does encourage all non-domestic energy users to improve energy efficiency and thereby reduce carbon emissions. The climate change levy is also consistent with the Government's policy of maintaining a level playing field between different energy sources.

Environmental Taxation

Norman Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his policy is on the application of tax to *(a)* plastic bags and *(b)* aviation fuel. [89093]

John Healey: The Government currently have no plans to introduce a plastic bag tax.

The 2002 pre-Budget report announced that the Government will discuss with stakeholders the most effective economic instruments for ensuring that the aviation industry is encouraged to take account of, and where appropriate reduce, its contribution to global warming, local air and noise pollution. The Government will set out its plans in its Air Transport White Paper later this year.

SDA Target SDAB3

Norman Lamb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures other than implementation of the Financial Services and Marketing Act were used to determine whether Spending Review 2000 SDA Target SDAB3 was met, as stated on page 20 of the HM Treasury Departmental Report 2002. [89265]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 7 January 2003]*: The measure used in assessing Spending Review 2000 SDA Target SDAB3 was whether the Financial Services and Markets Act was implemented successfully.

The target was met on 1 December 2001 (known as N2). This was the point at which the Financial Services Authority acquired all its powers and is when the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 was fully implemented.

Tunes Plateau (Wind Farm)

David Burnside: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what deposit was required from the B9 Consortium with regard to the proposed wind farm on the Tunes Plateau off the County Londonderry coast; and if he will make a statement on the tendering process. [88872]

John Healey: I am advised that the development consortium (comprising B9 Energy, Renewable Energy Systems Ltd. and Powergen Renewables Ltd.) have made a premium payment of £30,000 in return for a 12-month exclusivity agreement for the Tunes Plateau site, in order to complete a comprehensive feasibility study.

Voluntary Organisations

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the impact of the increased insurance costs on voluntary sector organisations. [88505]

Ruth Kelly: The Government are aware of recent rises in premiums for liability insurance, which have affected some businesses and voluntary sector organisations. As announced in the Pre-Budget Report, the Department for Work and Pensions is undertaking a formal review of the operation of Employers' Liability Compulsory Insurance.

WALES

ASW Cardiff

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether the Welsh Environment Agency has agreed to fund the cleaning of the Combustion Chamber at ASW Cardiff. [85482]

Peter Hain *[holding answer 5 December 2002]*: I have been asked to reply. While the Welsh Development Agency would join me in welcoming Celsa's potential future investment in Cardiff, the agency's involvement would be strictly limited by European rules on state aid to assigning the lease on the Castle Works site on purely commercial terms to the new purchasers.

The Welsh Development Agency has made it clear that the same terms would be available to any potential purchaser.

The Welsh Development Agency is not able to offer financial inducements to a steel company.

Green Ministers

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which Minister in his Department is the nominated Green Minister; how often he has attended meetings of the Green Ministers; and which official has responsibility for the Defra rural proofing check-list in his Department. [88456]

Peter Hain: My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Wales is the nominated Green Minister for my Department and regularly attends meetings of the Cabinet sub-committee.

Rural impacts of policies, which apply across England and Wales, are assessed by the relevant lead Government Department. The development of distinctively Welsh policies is undertaken in conjunction with the National Assembly for Wales whose own integrated appraisal tool includes full consideration of the impacts on rural areas.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Christmas Expenses

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much will be spent on *(a)* entertaining, *(b)* Christmas decorations and *(c)* other festive activities this Christmas season by her Department and Government agencies answerable to her Department; and of this sum, how much will be spent in Ministers' (i) private offices and (ii) official residences. [88124]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* The Department, including the Royal Parks, will have spent £9,944.26 on entertaining, £1,430 on Christmas decorations and £3,369.31 on other festive activities in this Christmas season. Of these amounts, £64.26 will have been spent in Ministers' private offices. No Minister in the Department has an official residence.

All of this expenditure is strictly for official purposes only and made in accordance with the departmental guidance on financial procedures and propriety, based on the principles set out in Government Accounting.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Hawk Exports

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what equipment has been exported under the OIEL for the transfer of Hawk components and production equipment to India, which was formally issued on 6 September 2001. [87612]

Nigel Griffiths: *[holding answer 17 December 2002]:* I refer the right hon. and learned Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) on 18 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 53W.

Battery Recycling

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answer of 19 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 107W, if she will make a statement on the proposed disposal or reuse of this material. [87762]

Mr. Wilson: The aim of industrial nickel cadmium battery collection schemes including Bat-Re-Back in the UK and the Collect Nicad schemes in other EU states is to create a closed loop process which will see the collected batteries sent to a recycling facility where the cadmium is extracted for use in the manufacture of new batteries and the nickel is recycled and sold to the steel industry. The batteries collected from Bat-Re-Back are sent to the SNAM recycling facility in France. Although consumer nickel cadmium batteries are not widely collected in the UK they can be subject to the same recycling process.

British Energy

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the costs to British Energy of *(a)* storage of all AGR nuclear fuel and *(b)* continuation with current reprocessing contracts in each year of the projected life of each of British Energy's advanced gas-cooled reactors. [87144]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* Details of the restructuring proposal, including those relating to historic and future spent AGR fuel management, were set out by British Energy in its announcement on 28 November 2002.

The spent fuel management contracts between British Energy and BNFL are a matter for the companies. The Government intend to look at how the historic spent fuel contracts are managed as a part of the creation of the Liabilities Management Authority.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the likely effects on the public purse of British Energy going bankrupt. [89103]

Mr. Wilson: British Energy submitted a plan to Government for the solvent restructuring of the company. The Department and its financial advisers assessed the implications and decided to support it. Should British Energy not be able to deliver the restructuring plan, the Government are prepared to see the company go into administration, and would need to consider further the future structure of the business, its assets and liabilities.

Coal Health Compensation Scheme

Andy Burnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much compensation was paid to people resident in the *(a)* Leigh, *(b)* Markerfield, *(c)* Wigan parliamentary constituencies and *(d)* the

Wigan borough under the Coal Health Compensation Scheme, by 15 December *(i)* 2000, (ii) 2001 and (iii) 2002. [87244]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 17 December 2002]:* It is not possible to provide the statistics requested for the year 2000. In the timescale available it is not possible to provide statistics for the year 2002 up until 15 December 2002. However, we are able to provide figures for Wigan Borough up to 12 December 2002 and figures for the constituencies up to 30 November 2002.

£

	Parliamentary Constituency			
Damages Paid	*Leigh*	*Markerfield*	*Wigan*	*Wigan Borough*
Cummulatively to 31 December 2001				
COPD	1,600,923	1,341,454	962,818	495,762
VWF	1,570,421	1,427,337	716,237	127,799
1 January 2002 to 30 November 2002				
COPD	2,168,399	1,433,227	1,351,650	
VWF	588,329	713,145	295,420	
1 January 2002 to 12 December 2002				
COPD				657,904
VWF				6,801

Construction (Skills Gap)

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures her Department is taking to address the construction industry's skills gap; and if she will make a statement. [88732]

Mr. Wilson: In order to recruit and retain people with the necessary skills at all levels, the construction industry needs to address the underlying issues which prevent it being seen as a career of first choice. Rethinking Construction and the Construction Best Practice Programme, which DTI supports, are working to tackle these issues. DTI is also working with the Strategic Forum for Construction which intends to develop and implement strategies to enable the industry to recruit and retain the 300,000 qualified people that CITB estimate are required by the end of 2006, and result in a 50 per cent. increase in suitable applications to build environment, higher and further education courses by 2007.

The DTI also works closely with the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB—the statutory industry training board) and other industry bodies to ensure that workers in construction receive the training they need. For example, DTI gives support to "National Construction Week", a major national event showcasing career opportunities for the industry; the "Making Connections" initiative, which aims to attract and retain higher quality graduates in greater numbers; and a "language skills audit" to assess the perceived need for language skills in construction, where the first language of significant numbers of workers is not English.

The DTI, together with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), is taking forward a pan-industry skills and workforce development agenda that is relevant to the construction sector. The DTI recognises the particular importance of high quality leadership and management, and has just published a Government response to the final report of the Council for Excellence in Management and Leadership (CEML).

Crown Copyright

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry who sits on the HMSO's Crown Copyright User Group from *(a)* her Department and *(b)* industry; and if she will make a statement. [88815]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 7 January 2003]*: The Crown Copyright User Group, has industry members from:

Barbour Index plc;

Rouse & Co International Ltd;

The Stationery Office Ltd;

Thomson Professional Information UK;

The Publishers' Association;

Reuters Ltd;

Technical Indexes;

Electronic Publishing Services Ltd, also representing the Information and

Communication Industries Association.

The Department of Trade and Industry member was from Communication and Information Industries Directorate.

Dounreay (Decommissioning)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what implications costs arising from the decommissioning of Dounreay have for the estimated cost of decommissioning other publicly held nuclear liabilities; and if she will make a statement. [88051]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* The programme for decommissioning nuclear licensed sites is a matter for the nuclear site license holders and their regulators, taking into account Government policy on nuclear decommissioning. The programme at Dounreay has no special implications for the cost of dealing with other publicly held nuclear liabilities.

Electricity Prices

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the change in *(a)* the wholesale price of electricity and *(b)* the price of electricity charged to retail customers since 1998. [88049]

Mr. Wilson [holding answer 19 December 2002]: Since 1998 the month ahead baseload prices for electricity supplied by generators to energy suppliers have fallen by 40 per cent. in real terms up to March 2002.

The average price of electricity charged to domestic customers has fallen by 11 per cent. in real terms between Q3 1998 and Q3 2002, while that for industrial customers (excluding the Climate Change Levy) has fallen by 23 per cent. in real terms between Q2 1998 and Q2 2002. Domestic customers who switch electricity supplies can save more. At the end of March 2002 over one third of domestic customers were with suppliers other than their traditional home supplier, saving on

average around £23 (9 per cent.) on an annual electricity bill in 2002 compared to customers remaining with their traditional home supplier.

Fireworks

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the restrictions are on the times of year when fireworks can be sold; what assessment she has made of the adequacy of these restrictions in tackling misuse of fireworks; and what plans she has to make all parts of the 1976 Firework Package Deal legally binding. [86951]

Miss Melanie Johnson: There are no legal restrictions on the times of year when fireworks can be sold. However, the voluntary sales agreement, introduced in 1976, limits the sales of fireworks to three weeks before November 5, and for a few days afterwards. This plays a role in containing the period when fireworks are available for sale, and hence, limiting misuse. To make the voluntary sales period mandatory would require primary legislation.

Gas Supply (Winter)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she had made of the capability of the gas pipeline infrastructure to meet peak winter demand; what contingency plans are in place if the infrastructure fails; and if she will make a statement. [88044]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 19 December 2002]*: The design and investment in the gas pipeline infrastructure is a matter for Transco. Their operating licence obligates them to maintain the network to withstand peak demand and conditions in the sort of severe winter we would face once in a 20 year period. Historic weather patterns dating back to 1928 are used in assessing the risks.

Copies of Transco's emergency plans are already in the Libraries of the House. I have now also placed copies of the recently updated Gas Industry Emergency Committee plans in the Library. These show how the Government and the wider gas community would work with Transco in handling an emergency affecting the gas transmission system. The plans were last tested in September 2002.

Insolvency Service

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the progress of the annual pay negotiations for the Insolvency Service. [88498]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Pay negotiations commenced on 13 December. Both parties are working to reach a settlement as soon as possible.

Kyoto Targets

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list her Department's policies that have as one of their objectives helping Britain meet its Kyoto carbon dioxide emission targets. [87733]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 19 December 2002]*: The UK Climate Change Programme, which the Government published in November 2000 sets out the Government's integrated package of policies and measures to deliver the UK's commitment to reduce its emissions of greenhouse gases under the Kyoto Protocol.

DTI leads on energy policy, where it has encouraged the growth of renewable energy, which will have an important role in meeting our Kyoto targets. In particular, under the Renewables Obligation, electricity suppliers will be obliged to provide a specific proportion of their power supplies from renewable sources.

The Government is currently carrying out a review of energy policy with a view to issuing a White Paper in the New Year. The White Paper will set out the Government's future energy policies including those relating to the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions both globally and nationally in the 21st century.

The DTI has worked with other Departments to develop and implement policies and measures in the Climate Change Programme, in particular those affecting business. In this context, it has worked with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and HM Treasury on the climate change levy and emissions trading, the establishment of the Carbon Trust and the implementation of the Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control regulatory regime.

Miners (Industrial Diseases)

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the average delay between a current or former miner agreeing to a final settlement payment for industrial disease and receiving it was in the last 12 months *(a)* in the UK, *(b)* in the East Midlands and *(c)* in Bassetlaw. [88976]

Mr. Wilson: The figures in the table are the number of days between the Department's claim handler's, IRISC, receiving the acceptance letter and the final payment being made.

I understand my hon. Friend has indicated to the Department that he no longer requires these figures for the East Midlands.

	COPD		*VWF*
	Expedited Payment	*Full and Final Offer*	*Full and Final Offer*
UK	8 Days	9 Days	4 Days
Bassetlaw	6 Days	7 Days	4 Days

Nuclear Plant Security

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to deploy *(a)* anti-aircraft and *(b)* ground-to-air missile batteries around nuclear power plants and nuclear fuel cycle facilities in response to the terrorist threat. [87565]

Mr. Wilson: None. Security at civil nuclear sites is ensured in a number of ways, all of which are kept under review.

Nuclear Power

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the excess of generating capacity over consumption if all electricity from UK nuclear power stations were to cease. [89087]

Mr. Wilson: UK generation capacity currently exceeds peak demand by more than 20 per cent. Nuclear currently makes up around 15 per cent. of UK capacity. Reflecting overall excess capacity wholesale electricity prices are low and some capacity has been mothballed. The impact on capacity margins of a cessation of electricity from nuclear power stations will therefore depend on the timescale over which nuclear output were to decline. Mothballed plant could return to operation. In the longer term new plant would be built.

Output from nuclear power stations is forecast to decline from its current level of around 20 per cent. of total generation to around 7 per cent. by 2020 as existing stations close, unless the regulatory authorities approve extensions to the life of these stations or new capacity is introduced.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what sum has been identified as representing the maximum cost to public spending over the next 10 years of supporting the nuclear industry. [89090]

Mr. Wilson: On current projections, the clean up of nuclear liabilities at BNFL and UK Atomic Energy Authority sites is expected to cost some £1.3 billion per year over the next 10 to 15 years. In addition, the cost of the Government's contribution to British Energy's historic nuclear fuel liabilities is expected to average £150 million to £200 million per year for the next 10 years and fall thereafter.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her policy is on the time a discontinued nuclear power station should remain untouched before dismantling begins. [89091]

Mr. Wilson: Decommissioning of a nuclear power station, including details of timing, is a matter for the operator, taking into account the requirements of the regulatory authorities.

Renewable Energy

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with ministerial colleagues on the potential impact on the development of renewable energy sources of the implementation of an indicative planning process; and if she will make a statement. [88050]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* DTI Ministers have met and discussed the impact of renewable energy developments on the planning process with colleagues in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. These discussions have taken place in the context of: preparing the Energy White Paper, which the Government plan to publish early in the new year, the re-drafting of Planning Policy Statement 22 which sets out statutory planning guidance on renewables in England and the ODPM's wider planning reforms.

Scottish Electricity Grid

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on proposals to improve the Scottish electricity grid. [88052]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* It is vitally important that there are no barriers to Scotland's renewable electricity output being brought to centres of demand further south. Following a report, which was published by my Department in February, into the possibility of building a subsea cable to take electricity generated in Scotland down the west coast to link up with the onshore grid system further south, my Department set up the Transmission Issues Working Group to consider the implications for the grid infrastructure of significant increases in renewable energy generating capacity throughout Great Britain.

The Working Group considered the costs of reinforcing both marine links and the grid onshore to bring electricity generated in Scotland to markets in the south and the transmission system operators in both Scotland and England are currently in discussions with their regulator, Ofgem, on the regulatory framework for making this happen. The report of the Transmission Issues Working Group will be published early next year.

Small Retail Businesses

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimates she has made of the value of small retail businesses to the UK economy. [88645]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 7 January 2003]:* Small and medium-sized enterprises are critical to the UK economy, generating new jobs and contributing to over half of the UK business revenue. Recent figures estimate there were 3.7 million enterprises employing nearly 23 million people, and with an annual turnover of over £2 trillion. Small retail businesses (sector 52 with 0 to 249 employees) represent 8 per cent. of all enterprises, 5 per cent. of all work force jobs and account for 4 per cent. of the UK turnover.

Solar PV Industry

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what criteria she will use to judge the success of phase one of her Department's solar PV major demonstration programme. [87717]

Mr. Wilson: The success of the first phase of the major PV demonstration programme will be judged by a number of criteria including: whether the target number of installations have been completed within the budget, whether the overall cost of the PV systems has reduced significantly, and whether a strong PV industry in both installation and manufacture has been established.

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures her Department has put in place since 1997 to encourage investment in the off-grid solar PV market; and if she will make a statement. [87719]

Mr. Wilson: The Department has funded a number of research and development projects under its Renewable Energy Programme, such as Hybrolight and Aviation Beacon/Landing Lights, Transport Refrigeration,

Vaccine Fridge, Desalination System and UK leadership of an International Energy Agency PV Power Systems Task on PV for Developing Countries.

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether a decision to move to phase 2 of the solar PV major demonstration programme will be made in consultation with the UK solar PV industry. [87723]

Mr. Wilson: We take it as read that the UK solar PV industry would welcome a second phase of the major PV demonstration programme. Should there be one, we will endeavour to consult them as far as is practicable about its shape and operation.

Transco

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of attendances by Transco at uncontrolled gas escapes were achieved within one hour in the last 12 months. [87484]

Mr. Wilson: According to figures reported to Ofgem, in the 12 months to 30 November 2002, Transco attended 98.51 per cent. of uncontrolled gas escapes within one hour, against a target of 97 per cent.

TXU Energy

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations her Department received concerning TXU energy before 19November; and if she will make a statement. [88139]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* My officials and I were kept informed as to the developing situation at TXU Europe throughout the period of its difficulties.

Wind Farms

Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry further to her answer of 11 December, *Official Report*, column 329W, if she will set out the conclusions of the research; and if she will make a statement. [87881]

Mr. Wilson: The Wind Energy, Defence and Civil Aviation Interests Working Group, which was set up and is chaired by the Department, published in October Interim Guidelines on Wind Energy and Aviation Interests. The guidelines are intended to be a "living document" which will be updated and amended to reflect the outcome of research into the interaction between wind turbines and aviation (particularly radar). Copies of the document have been deposited in the Libraries of the House.

The Working Group will be considering arrangements for the release of the studies as they are completed. The ongoing research includes studies to produce a model which will be used to predict the impact of wind turbines on radar systems; to investigate the various technical approaches which could reduce these impacts, and a study to examine European experience and practice regarding the impact of wind turbines on aviation interests.

[Continued in column 251W]

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Burma

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much her Department gave through multilateral agencies in *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2001 and *(c)* 2002 to (i) the Government of Burma and (ii) the Burmese internally displaced people. [88771]

Clare Short: In calendar year 2000 my Department provided approximately £1.8 million through global funding of the UN and ECHO for poor and vulnerable people in Burma. The figures for 2001 and 2002 are not yet available. We also gave humanitarian funding to ICRC in support of its work with the very vulnerable and war affected in Burma. Additionally, we provided humanitarian funding for UNHCR and WHO in support of their work with refugees and the very vulnerable within Burma and across the Thai border. The breakdown by financial years is as follows:

£ million

	2000–01	*2001–02*	*2002–03 (to date)*
UNHCR	0	0.805	0.407
WHO	0.3	0	0.27
ICRC	0	0.8	0.5

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much her Department is proposing to give in 2003 to *(a)* the Government of Burma and *(b)* the Burmese internally displaced people. [88772]

Clare Short: DFID's funding to assist the poor in Burma is not channelled through the Government but through selected non-governmental organisations, United Nation's agencies, and the EU (ECHO). This policy will not be altered unless there is substantive political change.

During 2003–04 DFID expects to spend more than £2 million on the extremely vulnerable including refugees and otherwise displaced people within Burma and on both sides of the border with Thailand.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the use of child soldiers in Burma. [88774]

Clare Short: There is credible information, including from Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the United Nations that this is a serious problem in Burma, both with the Burmese army and also Burmese insurgent groups. In November, the EU co-sponsored a resolution on Burma at the United Nations General Assembly that expressed grave concern over the human rights situation in Burma, including the use of child soldiers.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of human rights abuses by Burmese soldiers, with particular reference to sexual violence against ethnic minority women and girls. [88775]

Clare Short: The use of sexual violence by members of the Burmese armed forces requires a thorough and independent investigation. The EU co-sponsored a resolution on the human rights situation in Burma in November 2002 at the United Nations General Assembly that condemned the Burmese regime's human rights record, including the instances of sexual violence by members of the armed forces.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent discussions she has held with *(a)* groups working in Burma and *(b)* the Burmese internally displaced people. [88776]

Clare Short: None.

Child Soldiers

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the recent UN report on child soldiers. [88777]

Clare Short: The latest UN Secretary General's report on children and armed conflict covers a range of issues, including child soldiers, on which we are actively engaged. My Department finds the report a useful source of information and guidance. The emphasis on the "era of application" is particularly to be welcomed and supported.

While the report provides some cause for optimism, for instance the coming into force of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, there is much more to be done to reduce the impact of armed conflict on children, their families and communities. The best way to achieve this is by the prevention, reduction and resolution of armed conflicts. My Department has intensified its work with other Government Departments to this end. While the Secretary General's report, pursuant to UN Security Council Resolution 1379, identifies various countries where the direct use of children in conflict continues, it is to be welcomed that the report also focuses on those aspects of children and armed conflict that tend to receive less attention, such as the impact of land-mines and the sexual exploitation of girls.

Mrs. Caroline Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with the Governments of *(a)* Afghanistan, *(b)* Burundi, *(c)* the Democratic Republic of Congo, *(d)* Liberia, *(e)* Somalia, *(f)* Burma and *(g)* Colombia on the recent UN Report on child soldiers; and what efforts she is making to end the practice of using child soldiers. [88778]

Clare Short: No direct discussions have been held with the above-mentioned Governments and Administrations specifically on the recent report. In Afghanistan the UK will be sending an expert to support the UN and the transitional authority with the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of former and current combatants. The new Afghan National Army will have no child soldiers in its ranks.

The UK is both very actively engaged in the peace processes in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi and a major contributor to the process of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration in the Great Lakes region. We are also playing a part in the Somalia peace process. Information from a number of sources, including Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the United Nations, indicates that use of child soldiers is a serious problem in Burma, both by the Burmese army and various Burmese insurgent groups. In November, the EU co-sponsored a resolution on Burma at the United Nations General Assembly that expressed grave concern over the human rights situation in Burma, including the use of child soldiers.

In addition UNICEF has recently produced, with our assistance, a publication on the use of child soldiers in the East Asia and Pacific region. The Quaker United Nations Office has recently produced a ground-breaking report—with my Department's support—on the lives of girl child soldiers in Colombia, Angola, Sri Lanka and the Philippines. For instance, the report describes particularly the relationship between sexual or physical abuse and exploitation at home and girls' willingness to become involved in armed conflict and how living in poverty played a key role in girls joining a movement or being abducted.

Children (Trauma)

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what her Department is doing to help children suffering grave psychological trauma as a result of conflict situations; [88635]

(2) what her Department is doing to help women and girls who have been victims of rape and sexual violence as a deliberate instrument of war; [88636]

(3) what her Department is doing to help children *(a)* orphaned, *(b)* seriously injured and *(c)* permanently disabled as a result of conflict situations. [88779]

Clare Short: Armed conflict often seriously affects the development of children including by the infliction of serious damage to their physical and mental health. Children are damaged through land-mines, direct targeting of their homes and schools, sexual violence including rape and being forced to take part in direct hostilities. The best way to protect children from the impact of armed conflict is to prevent, reduce and resolve conflict. My Department has intensified its work with other Government Departments to this end. DFID also provides humanitarian assistance to children displaced by conflict or who have lost their families. We support efforts by the International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent to try to ensure compliance with international humanitarian law. DFID also supports the work of UNICEF, UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies of the United Nations, as well as humanitarian NGOs. Many of these provide direct assistance to children who have been subjected to acts of physical and mental violence and their families and communities. This assistance can take the form of the provision of a safe place to live, health care, education, psycho-social assistance and food aid. For instance my Department has a global commitment to UNHCR of £14 million per year. This is in addition to targeted contributions in response to specific regional situations. Our work with UNICEF, UNHCR and humanitarian non-governmental organisations is also concerned with increasing their capacity to respond appropriately to children who have been treated so egregiously in armed conflict situations.

Women and girls are targeted for sexual abuse and exploitation in situations of armed conflict, often as a deliberate strategy to terrorise them and their families. This issue was highlighted during the recent open debate on women peace and security at the UN Security Council in October when the UK had the Chair. The UK has also been instrumental in encouraging the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on this issue, which emphasised the use of sexual violence against women and girls. DFID is supporting the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in its multi-year programme to identify the causes and impact of sexual violence against women and girls in conflict situations. It also supports the UN Department of Peace-Keeping Operations and non-governmental organisations to highlight gender issues, including sexual violence, associated with conflict.

Eritrea

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the numbers of children aged *(a)* 1 to 3 and *(b)* 4 to 5 years old suffering from malnutrition in Eritrea; and if she will make a statement. [88683]

Clare Short: We do not have a specific breakdown by age of the number of children suffering from malnutrition in Eritrea. However, UNICEF have reported that, as of July 2002, three out of the six zones of Eritrea were showing levels of malnutrition in children above 15 per cent., and that more recent surveys have shown an increase.

UN Relief and Works Agency

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on Government funding for the UN Relief and Works Agency. [88611]

Clare Short: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed) earlier today.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to make changes to the use of asylum centres to process applications; how many asylum seekers are housed in accommodation centres; and where asylum seekers are placed when the centres are full. [88859]

Beverley Hughes: Accommodation centres will be introduced on a trial basis with a total capacity of around 3,000 in the trial period. We have made clear our intention that accommodation centres will contribute to faster processing of asylum claims with caseworking and appeal hearings taking place on-site at the centres unless there are sound pragmatic reasons for not doing so. Destitute asylum seekers who qualify for support but who are not placed in the accommodation centres will be supported under existing dispersal arrangements.

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers needing accommodation were dispersed to each region of UK in each month since the introduction of the NASS. [89409]

Beverley Hughes: Figures are only available on a quarterly basis.

The table shows the number of asylum seekers (including dependants) who were supported in the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) accommodation as at the end of each quarter since June 2000.[1] Figures are not available for the number of new asylum seekers who were dispersed in each quarter.

Region	*June 2000*	*September 2000*	*December 2000*	*March 2001*	*June 2001*
East Midlands	140	300	760	1,140	1,485
East of England	0	0	0	140	205
Greater London	70	140	245	405	620
North East	600	1,120	2,420	3,210	4,055
North West	1,090	1,785	3,415	4,580	5,870
Northern Ireland	0	0	0	40	50
Scotland	605	915	1,200	2,395	3,530
South Central	140	175	195	220	365
South West	5	100	380	425	485
Wales	0	*	15	20	295
West Midlands	95	500	1,350	2,125	3,610
Yorkshire and Humberside	570	1,660	3,550	4,845	5,930
Overall total	3,315	6,700	13,535	19,540	26,505

Region	*September 2001*	*December 2001*	*March 2002*	*June 2002*	*September 2002*
East Midlands	2,255	3,215	3,740	4,045	4,400
East of England	235	320	470	520	550
Greater London	870	1,470	1,870	2,230	2,365
North East	4,330	4,765	5,435	5,750	5,700
North West	6,885	8,155	8,870	9,500	10,250
Northern Ireland	65	75	85	90	125
Scotland	4,185	4,750	4,885	5,040	5,240
South Central	605	800	1,015	1,040	1,055
South West	595	665	765	815	830
Wales	455	705	1,015	1,150	1,405
West Midlands	5,295	6,930	8,035	9,340	9,975
Yorkshire and Humberside	7,115	8,470	9,455	9,560	9,690
Overall total	32,890	40,325	45,640	49,085	51,590

[1] All figures have been rounded to the nearest five. Figures between one and two are represented by a *. Figures for each quarter exclude cases where support has been ceased before the end of that quarter.

Statistics on the number of asylum seekers supported by NASS in each region are published quarterly on the Home Office's immigration statistics website: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 7 October from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mohammed Asim Qureshi. [87658]

Beverley Hughes: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 13 December 2002.

Immigration

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will abolish his rule that prevents those awaiting decisions of the UK immigration authorities from carrying out voluntary work. [87274]

Beverley Hughes: We are keen to see asylum seekers and recognised refugees take an active interest in the welfare of their own communities and the local community by undertaking voluntary activity while they are in the UK. All asylum seekers, whether or not they are the principal applicant, may take part in voluntary activity at any point during their time in the UK. Others whose conditions of entry or stay prohibit employment paid or unpaid may not undertake voluntary work while their applications are being considered and we have no plans to change this.

Missing Persons

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce a common reporting procedure for police services for missing persons. [88190]

Mr. Denham: There is an agreed procedure: details of all missing persons should be recorded on the Police National Computer (PNC) as soon as possible and in any case within 48 hours of their disappearance.

Notification of all outstanding missing persons should be sent to the Police National Missing Persons Bureau (PNMPB), based at New Scotland Yard, within 14 days. Most missing persons are found locally within this period. Forces will not, however, be precluded from forwarding information to the PNMPB in a shorter time if a particular case appears to warrant more urgent attention.

Details of unidentified persons or bodies found should be reported to the PNMPB within 48 hours of being found.

Police Stations

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many police stations have *(a)* opened and *(b)* closed in Lancashire in each year from 1997 to 2002; [87908]

(2) how many police stations have *(a)* opened and *(b)* closed in the north-west of England in 2002. [87909]

Mr. Denham: Chief constables in the north-west have provided information on the number of police stations that have opened and closed in the region in 2002. This is given in the table:

Calendar year 2002

Force	*Opened*	*Closed*	*Total*
Cheshire	0	1	34
Cumbria	1	2	24
Greater Manchester	1	1	68
Lancashire	0	1	88
Merseyside	0	0	43

The chief constable of Lancashire has provided information on the number of police stations opened and closed in each year from 1997 to 2002. This is set out in the table.

Police station numbers in Lancashire 1997 to 2002

Financial year to:	*Opened*	*Closed*	*Total*
March 1997	0	−3	102
March 1998	0	−4	98
March 1999	0	−5	93
March 2000	0	−3	90
March 2001	0	−1	89
March 2002	0	0	89
2002 to date	0	−1	88

It is the Government's role to allocate grant to police force areas as a whole. Capital grant and credit approval in 2002–03 for all police authorities in England and Wales totalled £199 million, including £20 million specifically for premises improvement and associated items. It is for the chief constable to decide how best to deploy available resources according to operational priorities and objectives. Accordingly, the decision to close a police station or restrict opening hours is an operational matter for the chief constable and not one in which it would be appropriate for the Home Office or Ministers to become involved.

Public Footpaths

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many prosecutions there have been in the Greater London area of cyclists for cycling on the public highway without lights on their bicycles in the last 12 months; [88441]

(2) how many prosecutions there have been of adults for cycling on public footpaths in the Greater London area during the last 12 months. [88442]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The available information, relating to the Greater London Area (Metropolitan and City of London police forces) for 2001 is contained in the table.

This relates to riding on footpaths (which will include riding on pavements and using footpaths designated for pedestrians) and lighting and reflector offences (which will include cycling without lights).

Information for 2002 will be published in the late autumn of 2003.

Persons proceeded against for offences connected with pedal cycles, Greater London 2001

Offence description/Principal statute	*2001*
Lighting and reflector offences Road Traffic Act 1988 Sec. 81 and RVL Regs. 1989	2
Riding on footpath (persons aged 18 and over only) Highways Act, 1835 Sec 72; (as amended by Local Government Act 1888 S.85(1), the Statute Law Revision (No2) Act 1888, Highways Act 1959 Sch25, Criminal Justice Act 1967, 3rd Sch. and Criminal Justice Act 1982, ss 39 and 46 and Sch.3); Metropolitan Police Act, 1839, Sec.54(7) and Byelaws.	11

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the policy is of the Metropolitan police in seeking to deter adults from cycling on public footpaths; and if he will make a statement. [88443]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Cycling inconsiderately or irresponsibly on public footpaths is a criminal offence. The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis informs me that the Metropolitan police view the offence seriously, particularly where it is likely to result in danger being caused. Any Metropolitan police officer who is called to or witnesses such an offence will take whatever action is appropriate in the circumstances. The offence can be dealt with by way of a fixed penalty of £30. To help the police with enforcement we have made it possible for community support officers (CSOs) appointed under the Police Reform Act 2002 to issue these penalties. We have provided the Metropolitan police with additional funding for the recruitment of 500 CSOs.

Sporting Events (Violence)

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been legally prevented from travelling abroad to football matches since 1997 as a result of prosecution for violent behaviour. [88724]

Mr. Denham: 1,401 individuals are currently prevented from travelling abroad by the conditions of their football banning orders. Since 1 January 2000, a further 175 orders preventing travel have expired. All individuals subject to an order have at least one conviction for an offence of violence or disorder. No information is available for the period 1997–99.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions he has had with European colleagues regarding prevention of violence at football and other sporting events. [88725]

Mr. Denham: The Government work very closely with their European counterparts in tackling football disorder through active participation in Council of the European Union (ED) and Council of Europe fora. In the last 12 months this has resulted in a number of European-wide initiatives, including an updated "European Handbook on International Police Co-operation in connection with Football Matches" and the setting-up in each EU member and candidate state of a "National Football Police Information Point" for exchanging football-related intelligence and other information. The United Kingdom is also playing a leading role in a Council of Europe working group on the role of football in delivering social policy and in a recently established European 'think tank' on tackling football related violence. There are regular bilateral meetings with European colleagues.

Transnational Sex Trade

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what legal assistance is provided to women that have entered Britain illegally as victims of sex trade. [89020]

Beverley Hughes: The White Paper "Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration With Diversity Within Modern Britain"—published in February 2002—sets out our general proposals for assisting the victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation. Briefly, where trafficked people are willing to come forward to the authorities, we shall where necessary make special arrangements for their protection including the provision of safe accommodation and health checks. We will consider, in the light of individual circumstances, whether it would be appropriate to allow them to remain here. Where they are to return home, we will assist them to do so, providing them with initial counselling, ensuring that they have suitable accommodation to return to, and providing help to enable them to reintegrate into their own community and find employment.

We propose to commission non-governmental organisations to provide a range of support services, including access to legal advice, for women who are victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation, when trafficking shortly becomes an offence, as anticipated, on commencement of the relevant provision of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

Violent Crime (Havering)

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many calls to police within the London borough of Havering were logged in the period 1 October 2001 to 30 September 2002 relating to incidents of *(a)* noise nuisance, *(b)* disturbance in a public place, *(c)* drunkenness, *(d)* criminal damage, *(e)* community problems and *(f)* other unlisted disturbances; and which localities are defined as hotspots for this type of offence. [85075]

Mr. Denham: The requested information is not collected centrally.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Asylum Support

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what responsibility his Department has for investigating fraud and error in the asylum support budget; and if he will make a statement. [88475]

Beverley Hughes: I have been asked to reply.

The Home Office is responsible for providing support to asylum seekers who are destitute. The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) is responsible for administering the support provided to asylum seekers. NASS has established a mechanism for investigating fraud and error in its asylum support system.

Green Ministers

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions which Minister in his Department is nominated Green Minister; how often he has attended meetings of the Green Ministers; and which official has responsibility for the DEFRA rural proofing check-list in his Department. [88464]

Maria Eagle: Our Green Minister is my noble Friend the Baroness Hollis of Heigham.

It is established practice under Exemption 2 of Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information not to disclose information relating to the proceedings of the Cabinet and its Committees—such as ministerial attendance at Committees.

A list of names of departmental rural contacts, who meet regularly, is not, published as personnel and machinery of Government changes mean that any published list would be out of date fairly quickly.

Pay Offer Information Pack

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will place a copy of the Department 2002 pay offer information pack in the Library. [88206]

Mr. McCartney: The information has been placed in the Library.

Pensions

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what action he is taking to help the poorest pensioners. [89049]

Mr. McCartney: The Government want all pensioners to have a decent and secure income in retirement and to share fairly in the rising prosperity of the country. The Government's first priority has been to help the poorest pensioners.

From April 2002, the Government are spending an extra £6 billion a year in real terms on pensioners as a result of policies introduced since 1997. This includes £2½ billion more on the poorest third of pensioners. This is three times more than a link between the basic state pension and average earnings since 1998 would have given them.

We have introduced a range of initiatives designed to encourage pensioners to take up their entitlements. For the minimum income guarantee (MIG) we have undertaken a national advertising campaign, which resulted in almost 140,000 successful claims, with an average gain of £20 per week. We have also reduced the MIG claim form from 40 to 10 pages, introduced a MIG specific leaflet, and we are identifying potential beneficiaries through key events, such as claiming state pension.

A key priority, for both Government and the Pension Service is the successful take up of the new pension credit, which will enhance and replace the MIG. It has been specifically designed to be easy for pensioners to claim and to be less intrusive. The weekly means test will be abolished for the over 65s and be replaced by a statement of their circumstances every five years. Capital rules will be relaxed and the upper capital limit abolished.

Our take-up plan for pension credit is extensive and makes use of a range of channels. We will transfer existing MIG recipients to pension credit, ready for payments to be made from October 2003; write to all pensioners not already receiving MIG by June 2004 to alert them to possible pension credit entitlement, supported by a national publicity campaign; work with local partners to help support the communications to pensioners, and tailor marketing and communications activity accordingly.

The Government have introduced other initiatives to help pensioners. These include winter fuel payments (WFPs), which will continue to be paid to qualifying households at £200 a year throughout this Parliament. In addition, we have introduced free TV licences for the over 75s, worth £104 a year. The WFPs and TV licences are non income-related and are tax free.

All of the above demonstrate the importance that we attach to encouraging pensioners to take-up their entitlements, which in turn helps the poorest pensioners.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH

Access to Children (Germany)

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what follow-up action will be taken to contact British parents who have reported prevention of access to their children in Germany to British Consulates, in order to identify the common problems they are experiencing and give them assistance in the future. [89025]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Responsibility for cases concerning parental access to children in Germany lies with the Lord Chancellor's Department, Germany being a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on international child abduction. The FCO will continue to provide such consular advice and support as it properly can, in conjunction with the Lord Chancellor's Department, to British nationals who request it.

Charles Knowles

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when his Department sent category D compensation claim number 3002250 on behalf of Mr. Charles Knowles to the United Nations Compensation Commission; and whether his Department received confirmation of receipt. [88604]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Mr. Charles Knowles' category D compensation claim, reference number 3002250, was sent to the United Nations Compensation Commission on 15 July 1993. The Department received written confirmation of receipt on 7 August 2002.

Convention on the Future of Europe

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will take action in the Convention on the Future of Europe to ensure that the proposed duty to further the aims of the EU does not include joining the euro. [88929]

Mr. MacShane: The UK would not agree to a Constitutional Treaty that would compel us to join the Euro.

Cote d'Ivoire

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on developments in Côte d'Ivoire; what the Government's policy is on *(a)* security and *(b)* international intervention in Côte d'Ivoire; and if he will make a statement. [88735]

Mr. Rammell: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, remains deeply concerned about the crisis in Cote d'Ivoire, and its implications both for the people of Cote d'Ivoire and for the wider region.

Recent fighting, particularly in the west of the country between the MPIGO/MJP rebel groups and Government forces, means that the security situation in Cote d'Ivoire remains extremely fragile. Since 9 December 2002, we have advised all UK nationals present in Cote d'Ivoire to use commercial means to leave the country.

We have consistently made clear that the UK opposes any attempt to overthrow the elected government by force. We continue to provide support to the efforts of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) leaders to promote a political settlement which addresses the causes of the crisis, and to restore peace and security. UK support includes up to

£2 million to assist the deployment of the Ghanaian contingent of the ECOWAS peace-monitoring force. We are working closely with France, and other partners, to ensure effective international support for these regional efforts. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development has also agreed to provide up to £1 million in humanitarian assistance for Cote d'Ivoire.

We remain gravely concerned at reports of mass killings and serious violations of human rights in Cote d'Ivoire. We welcome the UN Secretary-General's decision to request the High Commissioner for Human Rights to seek further information about these violations.

We have also been concerned at all breaches of the 17 October 2002 ceasefire agreement. We are pleased that President Gbagbo has agreed to submit a crisis resolution plan to all Ivorian players and to ECOWAS leaders, and to consult them on it. We also welcome the fresh commitments made by him and by the leaders of the MPCI rebel group, during the 3–4 January visit of the French Foreign Minister, to respect the ceasefire. France has now offered to host a conference from 15 January involving all Ivorian political forces. We urge all parties to engage seriously in the search for an inclusive political solution to the crisis.

Douglas Grindlay

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance Her Majesty's Ambassador to Berlin is giving to Mr. Douglas Grindlay. [88565]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: On 21 November 2002, a member of staff from our consulate in Hamburg accompanied Mr. Grindlay and his German lawyer to a hearing at the court in Pinnerberg. Consular staff in London and Hamburg are in regular contact with Mr. Grindlay and we will do all that we properly can to assist him.

Flanders

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made by the Government to the Belgian authorities concerning the potential impact on Pilckem Ridge of the projected route of the A19 motorway in Flanders. [84521]

Mr. MacShane: The Government have made no representations to the Belgian authorities regarding the proposal to extend the A19 motorway in the area around Pilckem Ridge. However, the Flemish authorities have reassured the Commonwealth War Graves Commission that while the proposed route has not been finalised, it will not encroach on any Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemeteries. The MOD and the FCO, with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, continue to monitor developments.

Ian Hook

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what advice he has given to Mr. Ian Hook's relatives about seeking redress for his killing. [88609]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him today (UIN 88952). When we have received the results of the IDF and UN inquiries, we will discuss follow-up action with Mr. Hook's family.

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his answer of 17 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 765W and 87111, when he expects to receive the results of the investigations into the killing of Mr. Ian Hook from *(a)* the IDF and *(b)* the UN. [88952]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We understand that both the Israeli and the UN reports are almost complete.

Indonesia

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many internal armed conflicts there are in Indonesia; what the origins were of each conflict and how long each has involved the use of armed force; and what steps he has taken to press the Indonesian Government to provide for civilian oversight and accountability of the security forces. [88307]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: There are a number of areas in Indonesia where the levels of violence give us cause for concern. These include Maluku, Sulawesi, West Papua and notably Aceh, where we welcome the recent agreement between GAM and the Government of Indonesia to end 26 years of conflict in that Province.

The origins of such conflicts vary and are complex: some are inter-ethnic or inter-religious while others may have economic causes. Our message to the Indonesian Government is clear and consistent: long-term stability can be achieved only through political negotiation and consultation with the people. Together with our European partners we are in regular, top-level dialogue with the Indonesian Government, and urge them to maintain law and order and promote reconciliation in order to ensure the territorial integrity of Indonesia.

We are implementing a strategy to tackle the causes of conflict; supporting reconstruction and reconciliation in troubled provinces such as Maluku, Aceh and Papua; and working with EU and other partners to help Indonesia build capacity to analyse and respond effectively to outbreaks of violence.

Sri Lanka

Mr. Andy Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what representations he has made to the Sri Lankan Government concerning *(a)* the publication in July 2001 of the Sinhala Commission Report and *(b)* the publication of similar anti-Christian material over the last 18 months; [88619]

(2) what recent representations he has made to the Sri Lankan Government concerning the increase in violent attacks perpetrated upon Christians by Buddhist extremists; [88618]

(3) what representations he has made to the Sri Lankan Government concerning the activities of the Bauddha Sanrakshana Sabhava, the Society for the Preservation of Buddhism; [88620]

(4) what representations he has made to the Sri Lankan Government concerning the difficulties faced by Christians in obtaining planning permission to build new churches. [88621]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We are aware of allegations of attacks on members of the Christian community in Sri Lanka. It appears that such attacks are not on the increase or part of a generalised problem or coherent strategy. There are some safeguards in place to protect people from all religious backgrounds, and there are dedicated ministries for Christian as well as Hindu, Muslim and Buddhist affairs. However, our High Commission continues to monitor the situation and raises the rights of religious minorities, and other human rights issues, with the Sri Lankan authorities. We regularly urge the authorities to ensure the rights of all minorities are upheld.

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress in the Sri Lankan peace talks. [89411]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Foreign Secretary and I were pleased to meet Professor Peiris, the Minister leading the Sri Lankan Government delegation, in December. This is an historic time for Sri Lanka. It is encouraging that the two sides have agreed to explore a solution founded on the principle of internal self-determination for the Tamil people, based on a federal structure within a united Sri Lanka. I am pleased that human rights are being addressed. I look forward to further progress at the next round of talks in January. The international community has an important role to play in offering both political and practical support to Sri Lanka. The UK has committed over £15 million in developmental assistance for 2003–04.

Sudan

Annette Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on recent fighting in Darfur, Sudan. [88267]

Mr. Rammell: There are 13 tribes living in the border area between Chad and Darfur, Sudan. The Embassy in Khartoum raised reports of clashes between camel herders from the north and the Fur in Jebel Marra with the Government of Sudan on 19 December. Tribal reconciliation conferences took place for the Fur in Jebel Marra on 16–22 August and for the Arabs in Kas on 1–13 September.

Annette Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations his Department has made concerning recent reports of arrests and torture of student activists in Khartoum by the Government of Sudan. [88268]

Mr. Rammell: Torture and arbitrary arrest were raised as part of the EU/Sudan dialogue discussions on 9–10 December 2002. We regularly urge the Government of Sudan to ratify the Convention Against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment and make representations to the Government of Sudan about individual cases.

Annette Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the timetable for the resumption of EU development aid to Sudan and the pre-conditions for resumption. [88269]

Mr. Rammell: When a peace agreement is reached between the Government of Sudan (GoS) and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army, the EU will respond quickly to underpin it through the initiation of a normalisation process and the release of development funds. The EU is also engaged in a political dialogue with the GoS involving benchmarks on democracy, the rule of law, human rights and the peace process. This dialogue is reviewed on an annual basis, most recently by an EU Troika mission to Khartoum on 9–10 December 2002.

Timber

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures the Government intends to take *(a)* unilaterally and *(b)* internationally to stop the import of Liberian conflict timber where it cannot be demonstrated that it is not being used for legitimate social, humanitarian and development purposes; and if he will make a statement. [89070]

Mr. Rammell: We have played a leading role in trying to restrict the Government of Liberia's sanction busting activities. We share the concern of the UN Panel of Experts Reports that the revenues from timber sales are being used to fund arms purchases in breach of UN sanctions. UN Security Council resolution 1408 calls on the Government of Liberia to undertake the audit of shipping and timber revenues and to use the revenues from the timber trade for social, development and humanitarian purposes.

We supports the Africa Forest Law Enforcement and Governance (AFLEG) process, calling on all African governments and trading partners to take actions to control illegal activities in the logging sector and associated trade. There will be a Ministerial Conference in April 2003, organised by the World Bank, to push this process forward.

Weapons of Mass Destruction

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the United States' recently announced national strategy to combat weapons of mass destruction in respect of the policy to discourage the worldwide accumulation of separated plutonium. [89016]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: This strategy is further evidence of the seriousness with which the United States is approaching the issue of the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. We welcome the renewed commitment to discourage the worldwide accumulation of plutonium and the use of highly-enriched uranium, in addition to the US programmes in Russia and other former Soviet states. The UK Government believe that proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the materials needed to make them, represents a serious threat. We support all efforts to counter that threat. On plutonium, we have committed £70 million over ten

years to help Russia dispose of thirty-four tonnes of plutonium, as part of the 2000 US-Russian agreement. UK officials met with G8 partners in Moscow in December 2002 to progress this important programme. This UK-supported plutonium disposition programme forms just one part of the G8 'Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction', to which the UK has committed up to $750 million over ten years.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Devolution

10. **Mr. Lazarowicz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent discussions he has had on devolved power being reinstated in Northern Ireland. [89186]

Mr. Tom Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent discussions he has held with Northern Ireland party leaders about the future of the devolved institutions. [89184]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I refer my hon. Friends to the answer I gave earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Helen Jackson), *Official Report*, Column 154.

Punishment Beatings

11. **Andrew Selous:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent representations he has received about punishment beatings in Northern Ireland. [89187]

Jane Kennedy: Both the Secretary of State and I hold regular meetings with our senior security advisers, elected representatives and members of political parties to discuss a wide range of security issues including attacks on communities by both Loyalist and Republican paramilitary groups.

Small Businesses

12. **Mr. Prisk:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what research his Department has carried out into the impact of regulations on small businesses in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [89188]

Mr. Pearson: When drawing up the Better Regulation Strategy, which currently operates in Northern Ireland, and which seeks to reduce the regulatory burden on business, my Department consulted the various Northern Ireland business representative organisations including the Northern Ireland Federation of Small Business, about the impact of regulations on business.

Castlereagh RUC Station

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has received the final report from Sir John Chilcott on the break-in at Castlereagh RUC station on 17 March 2002; and if he will make a statement. [89189]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The Government take the break-in at Castlereagh extremely seriously, which is why my predecessor as Secretary of State immediately announced an independent review to examine the implications to national security, how it happened, whether the measures taken following the incident have been adequate and whether there are wider lessons.

This review, conducted by Sir John Chilcot, is running in parallel to the ongoing police investigation.

I have not received Sir John's final report, but look forward to doing so in due course.

Good Friday Agreement

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what further progress has been made towards the implementation of outstanding elements of the Good Friday Agreement. [89178]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Substantial progress has been made in implementing the Agreement, but the restoration of the devolved institutions depends on the restoration of public trust in the commitment of participants to exclusively peaceful means and to stable inclusive institutions. If that can be achieved then, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has explained, we can implement the rest of the Agreement in its entirety together.

Security

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the current security situation in Northern Ireland. [89190]

Jane Kennedy: Dissident Republicans remain a threat to the peace process but for the most part their activities have been thwarted, intercepted or nullified by good policing operations. Sectarian violence and the Loyalist feud continue to affect communities in Northern Ireland. Interface areas remain tense but quiet.

It is now time for republican and loyalist paramilitary groups to make a commitment to end all forms of violence.

PRIME MINISTER

Cabinet Papers

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if he will place in the Library a copy of the Cabinet Office guidance issued to Cabinet committees requiring all Cabinet papers and letters to explain how proposals meet the economic, social and environmental objectives of sustainable development. [89094]

The Prime Minister: "Cabinet Committee Business: A Guide for Departments (February 2002)" is already available on the internet at http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/cabsec/2002/guide/index.htm. I am also placing copies in the Libraries of the House.

Environmental Policy

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister what recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the delivery of environmental policy, with particular

reference to the allocation of departmental responsibilities and the separation between policy making in DEFRA and policy delivery in other Departments. [89068]

The Prime Minister: The Government have made significant improvements across a range of environmental policy areas. The UK now has the cleanest rivers, beaches, air and drinking water since the industrial revolution. Greenhouse gas emissions were 13 per cent. below 1990 levels in 2000, with policies to improve energy efficiency taking 350,000 households out of fuel poverty since 1997, with a further 200,000 expected by 2004.

In addition we have delivered improvements to sites of special scientific interest (SSSIs), increases in the green belt, and increased the proportion of new housing built on brownfield land. The Government's Strategy for Sustainable Food and Farming, published in December 2002, set out further proposals for redirecting agricultural support to environmental goals.

Full assessment of the effectiveness of the delivery of environmental policy can be found in Defra's first annual report, at http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/deprep/2002/index.htm. This report provides an overview of the Department's objectives, and assesses progress against key targets. Responsibility for two of Defra's Public Service Agreement targets (PSAs) is shared with other Government Departments: with DTI for the target relating to greenhouse gases; and with DfT for the target relating to local air quality, reflecting the need for joint efforts to achieve the desired outcomes.

The independent Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) assessed the UK's environmental policy and delivery in November. This report highlights areas in which progress has been made since the previous review in 1994, as well as identifying areas where more remains to be done. A copy is in the Library of the House and is available at http://www.oecd.org/E/home/0,, EN-home-478-nodirectorate-no-no-no-21,00.html

World Peace

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Prime Minister what recent discussions he has had with President Bush concerning world peace. [89202]

The Prime Minister: I am in regular telephone contact with President Bush about threats to world peace, and had three meetings with him last year, most recently at the NATO summit in Prague in November. At a joint press conference there, we said that we shared the strong conviction that we must work together to make the world a more peaceful place.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Bedroom Standard

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister pursuant to his answer of 16 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 612W, if he will publish a table showing households in England below the bedroom standard broken down by *(a)* region and *(b)* tenure for the year 2001–02. [89524]

Mr. McNulty: The answer given on 16 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 612W, to my hon. Friend, gave information on households in England below the bedroom standard by region and tenure averaged over the years 1999–2000, 2000–01 and 2001–02 in order to provide a sufficiently large sample. Information at regional level for single years is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Councillors (Liabilities)

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the legal and financial liabilities of individual councillors appointed by their local authorities to serve on outside bodies by reason of their membership of that outside body. [88927]

Mr. Leslie: The potential liabilities of councillors as members of other bodies will depend on a number of issues, notably the terms on which they were appointed and the nature of the body concerned. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister intends shortly to consult on a draft of an Order to be made under section 101 of the Local Government Act 2000 to give authorities powers to provide indemnities to their members and officers. This will include provision in respect of functions performed by such individuals in their capacity as members or officers, including on outside bodies.

Housing (Stock Transfer)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list housing allocations created as a result of stock transfer from a local authority which have since been transferred to another housing association. [88322]

Mr. McNulty: None of the housing associations created to receive stock transferred from a local authority have since transferred the stock onto another housing association. Some of these associations have undergone a name change or have become a subsidiary of a group structure, but they have remained separate legal entities with individual boards.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what *(a)* the level of homelessness and *(b)* housing list numbers for those requiring housing were in each authority which has undergone stock transfer (i) at the time of transfer and (ii) at each year-end subsequent to unit transfers. [88323]

Mrs. Roche: A comprehensive table presenting available information since 1988/99 in respect of homelessness household accepted annually, those accommodated at 31 March, and total households on the housing register at 1 April deemed to be "in need" has been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what steps he has taken to ensure that there is no conflict of interest in the position of senior local authority officers promoting stock transfer. [88324]

Mr. McNulty: The current Housing Transfer Guidance includes detailed advice on how to deal with potential conflicts of interest when senior local authority officers are involved in a proposed housing

transfer. Specific advice is addressed to those officers proposing to move to the prospective new landlord. This advice also covers consultants advising the authority and the prospective new landlord over various aspects of the transfer.

Listed Buildings (Solar Panels)

Norman Baker: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what advice he provides to planning authorities on applications to install solar panels on listed buildings. [89074]

Mr. McNulty: General advice to local authorities about listed building controls is contained in PPG15, Planning and the Historic Environment. Specific advice about solar panels on listed buildings is provided in the new Annex to PPG22 Renewable Energy—Annex on Photovoltaics.

New Mortgage Lending

Mr. Steve Webb: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister pursuant to his Answer of 12th December, *Official Report*, column 470W, on new mortgage lending, if he will provide corresponding estimates for new mortgage lending that was not for house purchase; and if he will estimate the total amount of new mortgage lending in the last 12 months that was *(a)* for house purchase and *(b)* not for house purchase. [88931]

Mr. McNulty: Variable/Fixed rate lending. The estimated percentages of remortgages or further loans taken out in each of the past 12 months with an initial interest rate that was *(a)* variable and *(b)* fixed are shown in the table below. Also included, for comparison purposes, are the equivalent figures for new mortgages.

Month		*New mortgages for house purchase*		*Remortgages or further loans*	
		Variable	*Fixed*	*Variable*	*Fixed*
2001	Dec	83.6	16.4	91.6	8.4
2002	Jan	67.4	32.6	86.1	13.9
	Feb	70.2	29.8	88.8	11.2
	Mar	71.5	28.5	90.8	9.2
	April	73.9	26.1	91.9	8.1
	May	76.9	23.1	93.8	6.2
	June	79.1	20.9	94.4	5.6
	July	81.8	18.2	94.9	5.1
	Aug	82.6	17.4	94.5	5.5
	Sep	80.7	19.3	94.5	5.5
	Oct	77.3	22.7	92.5	7.5
	Nov	71.0	29.0	89.8	10.2

Source:
ODPM, Survey of Mortgage Lenders

It should be noted that loans taken out at an initial fixed rate of interest are likely to revert to a variable rate of interest after a fixed period of time, unless of course the borrower then chooses to remortgage (again) at another fixed rate of interest.

New mortgage lending, December 2001—November 2002

Gross mortgage lending in each of the last 12 months is shown in the table, together with the total for the 12 month period December 2001 to November 2002.

Month		*Mortgage lending for house purchase £million*	*Other new mortgage lending £million*
2001	Dec	5,964	5,970
2002	Jan	6,449	6,814
	Feb	8,908	6,940
	March	11,131	7,429
	April	12,162	8,200
	May	13,686	9,678
	June	11,185	8,006
	July	12,368	9,818
	Aug	9,685	8,914
	Sept	9,805	9,342
	Oct	11,089	11,333
	Nov	10,186	11,155
Total		111,618	103,599

Source:
Bank of England

HEALTH

Acute Hospital Services

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress he has made in developing indicators to reflect patient views on food and other issues in acute hospitals. [88762]

Mr. Lammy: National health service performance ratings published in July 2002 included a number of performance indicators relating to acute inpatient survey data. In addition to this, the Commission for Health Improvement (CHI) and the Department have recently announced a number of additional patient survey performance indicators for the next publication in 2003.

The CHI has now assumed responsibility for future publications of the performance ratings as well as the patient survey programme.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many acute hospitals have *(a)* closed and *(b)* opened since 1997. [88768]

Mr. Hutton: Information on hospital closures ceased to be collected in 1991 following the introduction of the national health service internal market and trusts.

What is usually referred to as a hospital closure often follows reprovision with the intention of providing higher quality care, in a more suitable setting for the benefit of patients.

Since May 1997, a total of 64 such major reprovision developments under the private finance initiative have been prioritised, of which 14 involving acute settings have now opened and a further nine are under construction. In addition, four major publicly funded schemes involving acute settings have also been given the go ahead of which three are now open. These, along with a number of medium size projects, comprise the NHS plan commitment to deliver over 100 new hospital schemes between 2000 and 2010.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the recommendation by the medical Royal Colleges that an acute hospital should serve a population of 500,000 people. [88182]

Mr. Hutton: "Provision of Acute General Hospital Services" was published in July 1998 by a joint working party of the British Medical Association, the Royal College of Physicians of London and the Royal College of Surgeons of England. It suggested that the ideal unit for a fully comprehensive medicine and surgery is a hospital or integrated group of hospitals serving a population of 450,000 to 500,000. The effective size to provide most of the acute services for medicine and surgery was recommended to be one serving a population of 250,000 to 300,000. These recommendations were made some time ago now and thinking about how to organise services safely and effectively has moved on.

In particular, the NHS Plan, published in July 2000, set the direction for the future development of hospital services, and Shifting the Balance of Power sited responsibility for local health service with primary care trusts.

The Department of Health's configuring hospitals project has been examining the complex issues around configuration of acute hospitals over the past few months, and will publish a consultation document shortly. Ultimately, it is for local health services to decide, with their local populations, and in the light of relevant guidance and standards, how acute hospital services should be organised.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the implications of the whole system redesign approach for the introduction of the European Working Time Directive to acute hospitals; [88358]

(2) what changes to working practices in acute hospitals will take place to accommodate the European working time directive. [88357]

Mr. Hutton: The Department is currently running 19 pilots exploring solutions to enable National Health Service trusts to implement the European working time directive (EWD) for doctors in training while protecting service delivery.

Details of the necessary changes in working practices are also set out in the HSC 2003/001 'Protecting Staff, Delivering Services—Implementing the European Working Time Directive for Doctors in Training'.

Ambulances

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of ambulance trusts are failing to meet the eight-minute response target. [88745]

Mr. Lammy: The latest information available about the proportion of emergency calls resulting in an ambulance arriving at the scene of the reported incident within the eight-minute response time for all ambulance trusts, is contained in the Department of Health Statistical Bulletin, "Ambulance Services, England 2001–02". A copy of the bulletin is available in the Library and also at www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0213.htm.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what changes there have been to average turnaround times by ambulances at accident and emergency units since 1997, broken down by acute trust area. [88355]

Mr. Lammy: Validated information providing complete coverage is not available centrally.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many ambulances are operating in England; and how many operated in each of the past six years. [88746]

Mr. Lammy: The number of accident and emergency ambulances owned or leased by ambulance trusts in England is 2,970. This information was collected in October 2000. No other information is available.

Bed Occupancy

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made of the optimal level of bed occupancy to reduce trolley waits for emergency admissions and cancelled operations. [88561]

Mr. Lammy: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) on 19 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 1039W.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the Government's target is for occupancy levels in *(a)* general and *(b)* acute NHS beds; and what the levels were in 1997. [87533]

Mr. Hutton: The Department has not issued any specific guidance on bed occupancy. As part of routine capacity planning each national health service trust needs to establish the levels of occupancy required for different specialties and types of care depending on their own particular circumstances. Appropriate levels of occupancy will depend on a number of factors including specialty, the balance between emergency and planned admissions and the size of the hospital.

In 1996–97 the bed occupancy level for general and acute NHS beds was 80.7 per cent. Over the last two years, the number of beds have increased, reversing a 40 year decline.

Cancelled Operations

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have had operations cancelled on more than two occasions in each of the past three years. [88769]

Mr. Hutton: Figures are collected on a quarterly basis on the number of patients whose operations are cancelled by the hospital for non-clinical reasons on the day of surgery and at the last minute, that is on the day patients are due to arrive or after arrival in hospital or on the day of their operation. This information is available in the Library and on the Department of Health website at: www.doh.gov.uk/hospitalactivity/data requests/cancelled operations.htm

These figures are not broken down to show whether a patient has been cancelled by the hospital more than once.

Children's Vision

Andy Burnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps he is taking to *(a)* implement a programme of vision screening among children with hearing impairments; and *(b)* ensure consistent access in different areas to specialist eye examinations for children with hearing impairments; [88580]

(2) how much public funding was allocated to raising awareness among parents, children and teachers of *(a)* the importance and purpose of vision screening in children, *(b)* the importance of children having regular eye tests and *(c)* children's entitlement to free NHS eye tests in each year since 1997; [88578]

(3) what steps he is taking to improve the *(a)* consistency and *(b)* quality of children's vision screening programmes in England. [88577]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 7 January 2003]:* The provision of vision screening programmes is a matter for local primary care trusts to consider in accordance with professional advice. This includes vision screening for children with hearing impairments and ensuring access to specialist eye examinations. The national screening committee recommends that all infants and children with a hearing loss should have an expert eye examination as a matter of routine. A national service framework for children, which will set standards aimed at raising the quality of the health and social care services that children receive, is currently under development. Information is not collected centrally on the amount of public funding allocated to raising awareness of vision screening and eligibility for free sight tests—which includes all children under the age of 16 and those aged under 19 in fulltime education.

Correspondence

Mr. Pope: To ask the Secretary of State for Health during the last year for which figures are available, how many letters from hon. Members were replied to *(a)* within six months, *(b)* within six to nine months, *(c)* within nine to 12 months and *(d)* in over 12 months; and what was the average time taken by ministers in the Department to reply to hon. Members' correspondence in that period. [87051]

Mr. Lammy: The information is shown in the table.

Period	*Number of letters*
(a) Within six months	15,080
(b) Within 6–9 months	489
(c) Between 9–12 months	205
(d) Over 12 months	74
Average time to reply for the 12 month period:	44.8 days

A Customer Service Project has been set up under the Department's change programme. The aim of this project is to significantly improve the Department's performance in handling telephone, written and e-mail inquiries from members of the public and their representatives and to maximise the potential of the Department's website and other forms of communication media.

Dental Surgeons

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of vacancies for dental surgeons. [87425]

Mr. Hutton: The data requested is shown in the table.

Department of health vacancies survey, March 2002. Vacancies in NHS trusts, consultant dental group of specialties 3 month vacancy rates, number and staff in post—England (excluding HA staff)

	3 month vacancy			
	Rate (percentage)	*Number*	*Staff in post*[1]	*Staff in post*[2]
Total consultants dental group	4.5	22	473	582
Of which:				
Oral and maxillo-facial surgery	2.2	5	222	255
Orthodontics	6.8	10	140	158
Restorative dentistry	0.0	0	57	86
Paediatric dentistry	6.3	1	15	24
Additional dental specialties	15.8	6	32	47
Oral surgery	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
Periodontics	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
Prosthodontics	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—

[1] Whole-time equivalent
[2] Headcount
[3] Figures where sum of staff in post and vacancies is less than 10.
Notes:
1. Three month vacancy information is as at 31 March 2002.
2. Three month vacancies are vacancies which trusts are actively trying to fill, which had lasted for three months or more (whole time equivalents).
3. Three month vacancy rates are three month vacancies expressed as a percentage of three month vacancies plus staff in post.
4. Three month vacancy rates are calculated using staff in post from the Vacancy Survey and the Consultant Census, March 2002.
5. Staff in post data is from the Mini Consultant Census, March 2002.
6. Staff in post data excludes staff employed by health authorities, as vacancy information was only collected from trusts, PCTs and special health authorities.
7. Medical and dental figures exclude staff in training.
8. Vacancy and staff in post numbers are rounded to the whole number.
9. Percentages are rounded to one decimal place.
10. — = figures where sum of staff in post and vacancies is zero
11. Calculating the vacancy rates using the above data may not equal the actual vacancy rates.

12. HA figures are based on trusts, and do not necessarily reflect the geographical provision of healthcare.
13. Figures may not match previously published data due to a different method of rounding used on the staff in post data.
Sources:
Vacancy numbers and rates: Department of Health Vacancies Survey March 2002 and Consultant census March 2002.
Medical and dental staff in post: Department of Health Consultant census March 2002

Junior Doctors

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health under what circumstances after August 2004 junior doctors will be subject to the limit on night workers of eight hours of work in any 24 hour period under the Working Time Directive. [83452]

Mr. Hutton: In order to implement the Working Time Directive (93/104EC) the Government propose to introduce legislation to extend the Working Time Regulations, including the provisions that apply to "night workers", to the activities of doctors in training from 1 August 2004, with the exception of the average weekly working time limit which will be introduced over a transitional period.

A worker covered by the Regulations will be subject to the controls on night working if they satisfy the meaning of "night worker" in the Regulations.

Under the Government's proposals, which are currently the subject of public consultation by the Department of Trade and Industry, the night work limits are excluded where there is a need for continuity of service as may be the case in hospitals, including the activities of doctors in training, but this is subject to the compensatory rest provisions.

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many junior doctors are in training; and how this compares with the number in 1997. [89243]

Mr. Hutton: The data requested is shown in the table.

The figures show an increase in the number of doctors in training between 1997 and 2001 of 9 per cent.

NHS Doctors in training, England (Headcount)

	1997	*2001*
Doctors in training of which	32,800	35,790
HCHS[1]	31,460	33,910
GP Registrars	1,340	1,880

[1] Hospital, Public Health medicine and Community Health Services medical and dental staff
Note:
Figures are for 30 September in the year stated except for GP registrars in 1997, which is for 1 October.
Source:
Department of Health medical and dental workforce census
Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics

Drugs Budget

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has assessed on spending levels on drugs in acute hospitals in *(a)* the last year for which figures are available and *(b)* each of the past three years. [88740]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table.

Total expenditure on drugs for NHS trusts in England

	£
Total expenditure on drugs for NHS trusts in England	
	£
1998–99	1,208,098,376
1999–2000	1,360,825,466
2000–01	1,515,722,071
2001–02	1,683,684,266

Source:
NHS Trust Financial Returns 1998–99 to 2001–02.

The data include total expenditure on drugs, gases and blood products (but not fresh blood from blood centres) for national health service trusts in England. Drugs expenditure alone cannot be identified.

E Coli

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce free prescriptions for those people who have suffered from the bacterium E coli-0157 when they reach adulthood and display illnesses associated with this bacterium. [88990]

Mr. Lammy: Our policy is to give priority to helping people who may have difficulty in paying charges, rather than extending the exemption arrangements to people suffering from other conditions, for example, those who display illnesses associated with the bacterium E coli-157.

Emergency Admissions

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to address the decline in the number of patients being admitted within two hours in accident and emergency units. [88743]

Mr. Lammy: Improving access to emergency care is one of the Department's top priorities. Three quarters of those who go to an accident and emergency (A&E) department, who need to be admitted to hospital, get a bed within four hours. By December 2004, all patients will be in and out of A&E within four hours.

To help support A&E departments across the country, a new national clinical director for emergency care was appointed in autumn 2002. Additional investment of £30 million was made to enable the launch of the Modernisation Agency programme to help reduce waiting times in every A&E.

General Practitioners

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many whole time equivalent general practitioners there were in *(a)* each region and *(b)* England in each of the last five years. [89029]

Mr. Hutton: The number of whole time equivalent general practitioners in each strategic health authority and in England in each of the last six years is shown in the table.

General Medical Practitioners (excluding GP Retainers) [1] *in England: 1997–2002 (by April 2002 boundaries)*

Estimated whole time equivalent

DHSC/Strategic Health Authority	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
North						
Northumberland, Tyne and Wear	782	802	807	812	836	852
Country Durham and Tees Valley	620	617	619	622	652	642
Cumbria and Lancashire	1,079	1,083	1,090	1,079	1,093	1,107
Greater Manchester	1,409	1,404	1,420	1,424	1,422	1,422
Cheshire and Merseyside	1,346	1,335	1,370	1,371	1,388	1,395
North and East Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire	944	934	951	959	968	985
West Yorkshire	1,188	1,198	1,221	1,227	1,248	1,266
South Yorkshire	716	711	720	725	734	728
Midlands and Eastern						
Shropshire and Staffordshire	757	776	787	792	779	781
Birmingham and the Black Country	1,260	1,272	1,279	1,299	1,305	1,317
Coventry, Warwickshire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire	859	853	853	869	878	903
Trent	1,363	1,382	1,386	1,408	1,434	1,405
Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Rutland	857	851	841	817	827	831
Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire	1,228	1,243	1,250	1,268	1,276	1,276
Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire	869	892	894	897	906	906
Essex	805	819	819	814	805	814
London						
North West London	1,107	1,097	1,055	1,044	1,064	1,043
North Central London	739	741	727	748	746	755
North East London	835	845	844	866	841	859
South East London	814	810	840	825	833	820
South West London	731	720	732	735	727	752
South						
Thames Valley	1,145	1,186	1,198	1,202	1,218	1,236
Hampshire and Isle of Wight	996	999	1,014	1,017	1,037	1,041
Kent and Medway	860	867	868	853	860	855
Surrey and Sussex	1,410	1,430	1,432	1,435	1,464	1,469
Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire	1,225	1,257	1,281	1,289	1,301	1,300
South West Peninsula	990	981	972	1,000	1,025	1,012
Dorset and Somerset	727	744	761	759	771	768
England total	27,660	27,848	28,033	28,154	28,439	28,540

[1] All Practitioners (excluding GP Retainers) include GMS Unrestricted Principals, PMS Contracted GPs, PMS Salaried GPs, Restricted Principals, Assistants, GP Registrars, Salaried Doctors (Para 52 SFA) and PMS Other.

Notes:

1. GP Retainers were first collected in the 1999 census and have been omitted for comparability purposes.
2. WTE data has been estimated using the results from the 1992–93 GMP Workload Survey; Full-time = 1.00 wte; three quarter time = 0.69 wte; job share = 0.65; half-time = 0.60 wte.
3. Data as at 1 October 1997–99, 30 September 2000–01 and 31 March 2002.

Source:

Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics

Homeless People

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has recently met with Ministers from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister concerning homeless people's access and use of GP services; and what plans there are to do so in the near future. [87471]

Mr. Hutton: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not recently met with Ministers from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to discuss homeless people's access and use of general practitioner services and currently has no plans to do so in the near future.

However the Cross-Cutting Spending Review on health inequalities, published on 20 November, identified vulnerable groups, including homeless people, as a priority. The Domestic Affairs Cabinet Subcommittee on Social Exclusion and Regeneration will drive forward the implementation of the review.

Medical Devices

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he has taken to publicise new regulations requiring CE marking on packaging for self-testing diagnostic medical devices. [88528]

Mr. Lammy: The Medical Devices Agency (MDA), which is the United Kingdom's competent authority for the medical devices regulations, has published the In Vitro Diagnostic Medical Devices Directive, which came into force on 7 June 2000, on its web site together with guidance documents on its implementation. In addition members of the MDA have given several presentations on the Directive's provisions to both manufacturers and users.

Medical Qualifications

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the proposals from the European

Commission on medical qualifications will require Britain to recognize levels of training below those required in the UK. [88172]

Mr. Hutton: Under legislation introduced in 1994 the United Kingdom automatically recognises training completed by nationals of European Economic Area (EEA) countries in other countries in the EEA which meets or exceeds the minimum standards specified in the relevant European Directive. Similarly, other EEA countries automatically recognise UK training. Most UK postgraduate medical training exceeds Directive minimum standards. The proposals from the Commission do not affect this position.

Mortuary Provision

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of mortuary facilities are contained in temporary buildings. [88423]

Mr. Hutton: This information is not collected centrally.

NHS Foreign Health Care Workers

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many foreign health care workers were recruited by the NHS, broken down by profession in each year since 1990. [88000]

Mr. Hutton. The Department does not collect data on the country of qualification for nurses, midwives and other health professionals.

The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) publishes an annual statistical report which includes information about the number of foreign nurses and midwives on the register. This data can be found on the NMC website at: www.nmc-uk.org.uk.

NHS Funding

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the proposed new funding system for the NHS will take into account the number of people who have private health insurance in a particular area. [88343]

Mr. Hutton: The new formula used to allocate revenue resources to primary care trusts for 2003–04 to 2005–06 is concerned with health care need and not availability of private care. The research on which it is based excluded all private episodes of care on the grounds that the need for national health service resources was being modelled. The research also takes account of supply factors such as private hospitals.

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what work is underway to review NHS funding formulae. [89244]

Mr. Hutton: The formula used to allocate National Health Service revenue resources has been reviewed by the Advisory Committee on Resource Allocation.

Following the review the allocations to primary care trusts for 2003–04 to 2005–06 were based on a new formula.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the new formula for allocation of health spending to health authorities and trusts. [88426]

Mr. Hutton: The 2003/2004 to 2005/2006 Primary Care Trust Revenue Resource Limites Exposition Book has been published. This shows how each Primary Care Trust's allocation has been calculated using the new formula. It can be found at .

Later this year we will publish a revised version of Resource Allocation: Weighted Capitation Formulas which will describe the new formula.

The team who carried out the research into the new formula have published Allocation of Resources to English Areas, a full report of their findings. It can be found at http://www.nhsis.co.uk/isd/_services/info_consult_AREAReport.htm

NHS Recruitment

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* administrators, *(b)* doctors and *(c)* nurses have been recruited by the NHS in the past 12 months. [88770]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the number of staff recruited to the national health service in the last 12 months is not separately available.

NHS Spending

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average amount of NHS spending was per head in *(a)* England, *(b)* the South-East, *(c)* East Sussex and *(d)* Eastbourne, in each of the last five years. [87592]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the average amount of national health service spending per weighted head of population in the East Sussex, Brighton and Hove Health Authority area, the South Eastern Region and in England is shown in the table. Information is not held centrally for East Sussex or Eastbourne.

£ per head

Year	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove Health Authority	584.27	641.16	813.92	827.74	869.19
South Eastern Region	599.07	656.57	759.83	810.94	890.46
England	607.85	659.76	763.79	825.38	885.83

Notes:

1. In many health authorities there are factors which distort the expenditure per head. These include:
the health authority acting in a lead capacity to commission healthcare or fund training on behalf of other health bodies; and
asset revaluations in NHS Trusts being funded through health authorities.
For these reasons expenditure per head cannot be compared reliably between health authorities.
2. Allocations per weighted head of population provide a much more reliable measure to identify differences between funding of health authorities.

3. Expenditure is taken from audited health authority and primary care trust summarisation forms which are prepared on a resource basis and therefore differ from cash allocations in the year. The expenditure is the total expenditure by the health authority and by the primary care trusts within the health authority and region area. The majority of General Dental Services expenditure is not included in the health authority or primary care trust summarisation forms and is separately accounted for by the Dental Practice Board. An element of pharmaceutical services expenditure is accounted for by the Prescription Pricing Authority and not by health authorities.
4. Health authorities and primary care trusts should account for their expenditure on a gross basis. This results in an element of double counting in 2000–01 and 2001–02 where one body acts as the main commissioner and is then reimbursed by other bodies. This element cannot be identified in 2000–01 but has been removed in 2001–02 following the submission of the relevant information.
Sources:
Health authority annual accounts 1997–98 to 1999–2000
Health authority summarisation forms 2000–01 to 2001–02
Primary care trust summarisation schedules 2000–01 to 2001–02
Weighted population figures for 1997–98 to 2001–02

Nursing Staff

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nursing students were studying at *(a)* diploma level and *(b)* degree level in the most recent year for which figures are available. [88660]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table.

2002–03 forecast nursing student population

	Whole-time equivalent
Total	53,868
Diploma	47,449
Degree	6,419

Figures are forecast and are subject to change. They are based on the planned number of places by workforce development confederations.

Pathology Services

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* mortuary technicians and *(b)* clinical pathologists were employed in each trust in each of the last five years. [88506]

Mr. Hutton: The information available has been placed in the Library. Separate information is not collected on mortuary technicians; they are included with pathology technicians.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many new pathology departments have been opened in the past year. [88422]

Mr. Hutton: This information is not collected centrally.

Dr. Liam Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which NHS hospital trusts with pathology services have not been accredited by Clinical Pathology Accreditation (UK) Ltd. [88424]

Mr. Hutton: We do not collect this information centrally. According to the latest information available from Clinical Pathology Accreditation (UK) Ltd, over 90 per cent, of National Health Service pathology laboratories are registered for accreditation. Full details are available on their website at www.cpa-uk.co.uk.

PCT Allocations

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list of primary care trust allocations for 2003–04, including *(a)* allocations per head and *(b)* a statement of the deprivation levels in each PCT area. [88342]

Mr. Hutton: Primary care trusts revenue allocations for 2003–04, 2004–05 and 2005–06 were announced on 11 December 2002.

Information by primary care trust on allocations, 2003–04 allocations per weighted head and unweighted head and need index in the funding formula which provides an indicator of deprivation have been placed in the Library.

Post Mortems (MRI Scans)

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce compulsory MRI scans during post mortems. [88420]

Mr. Lammy: We have no plans to introduce compulsory magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans during post mortems. The Department has commissioned a scoping study to look at the current level of research knowledge about minimally invasive post-mortem techniques, including MRI scanning. From this it is clear that at present there is limited research evidence as to the effectiveness of these minimally invasive techniques.

Practice Nurses

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many practice nurses there were in each of the last five years. [89028]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table.

Practice nurses employed by Unrestricted Principals and Equivalents (UPEs)[1] in England; 1997–2001

Numbers (headcount) and whole time equivalent

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Whole-time equivalent	10,082	10,358	10,689	10,711	11,163
Headcount	18,389	[2]18,894	[2]19,495	19,200	19,846

[1] UPEs includes GMS Unrestricted Principals, PMS Contracted GPs and PMS Salaried GPs.
[2] Headcount Practice Nurse figures are estimated for these years.
Note:
Data as at 1 October 1997–99 and 30 September 2000–01.
Source:
Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics.

Primary Care Services

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on the expansion of the range of services provided by the primary care sector. [83565]

Mr. Hutton: "Delivering the NHS Plan" confirmed our commitment to substantial increases in health service capacity. Our aim is, however, not simply to rely on expanding hospital capacity but to use the extra investment provided by the April 2002 budget to modernise the way services are provided to bring services closer to patients, expand the choices available to patients and make better use of the skills and capacity of the primary care work force.

The Department is therefore taking forward a programme to deliver a wider range of services in primary and community settings, using general practitioners and nurses with specialist skills, working from improved and modernised premises. This is expected to deliver for example, millions more out-patient appointments taking place in the community rather than in hospital.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the lines of accountability for primary care trust boards are. [88525]

Mr. Hutton: Primary care trusts are national health service bodies established by the Secretary of State. They are performance managed by strategic health authorities and through them are accountable to the Secretary of State.

Private Medical Insurance

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment his Department has made of the effect that the provision of private medical insurance has had on the standard of health in each primary care trust. [88344]

Mr. Hutton: The Department has made no such assessment.

Smallpox

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements exist to vaccinate people in remote areas in the event of a smallpox threat. [87247]

Mr. Hutton: Responsibility for putting in place appropriate local arrangements for vaccinations against smallpox will rest with the regional directors of public health (RDsPH). The Department of Health has recently published its draft guidance for dealing with smallpox and invited comment and discussion on the plans for dealing with any smallpox outbreak. RDsPH were involved in the drafting of the guidance. In this guidance, it is intended to establish 12 regional smallpox response groups across the United Kingdom, consisting of infectious disease physicians, paediatricians, public health physicians, microbiologists/virologists, acute care and communicable disease control nurses and occupational health staff who will be able to set up specialist care and vaccination centres for the regions in the event of a smallpox emergency.

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements have been made to distribute smallpox vaccine. [87248]

Mr. Hutton: The strategic stock of smallpox vaccine is held centrally and arrangements have been put in place whereby the vaccine can be delivered to anywhere in the mainland United Kingdom within 24 hours of a request for vaccine, 365 days of the year. As smallpox has been eradicated, this is only likely to be in response to a bioterrorist incident, whereupon the Chief Medical Officer or nominated Deputy would authorise the release of vaccine.

As part of plans for dealing with any smallpox incident, it is intended to establish 12 regional smallpox response groups across the UK. The staff in these groups, consisting of infectious disease physicians, paediatricians, public health physicians, microbiologists/virologists, acute care and communicable disease control nurses and occupational health staff will be able to set up vaccination centres for the regions in the event of a smallpox emergency.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to vaccinate the whole UK population against smallpox. [87407]

Mr. Hutton: There are no plans to vaccinate the whole population as a contingency measure against the threat of a bioterrorist incident involving smallpox. Mass vaccination of the population could be justifiable if there was a smallpox attack or outbreak but it would not be acceptable to expose people to the risk of vaccination in the absence of any possible exposure to the smallpox virus.

Smallpox vaccine has a much higher rate of serious complications than vaccines that are in regular use today. Certain groups are at even higher risk, such as those with weak immune systems or with severe eczema.

We have already announced that a small number of key frontline national health service staff and a small number of military personnel who would provide the first response in the event of a confirmed, suspected or threatened release of smallpox will be vaccinated shortly. We are discussing with other Government Departments how to identify key workers in the emergency services and agreeing circumstances and timing under which they might be vaccinated.

Our contingency plans for dealing with smallpox are detailed in the draft guidelines on smallpox available on http://www.doh.gov.uk/epcu/cbr/biol/smallpoxplan.htm

Terrorism

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent precautions have been taken by the NHS for dealing with a mass casualty terrorist incident. [88394]

Mr. Hutton: The planning for the response to a mass casualty incident involves the scaling up of the normal response to a major incident. Following the September 11 2001 terrorist attack on the United States, specific guidance was issued to the national health service on the public health response to the deliberate release of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear incidents, mass decontamination and mass casualties.

The Department has made available, through the emergency planning section of its website, www.doh.gov.uk/epcu a comprehensive package of guidance for clinicians on dealing with the consequences

of deliberate release. The information is regularly updated. The website contains a link to the Public Health Laboratory Service website, which provides additional clinical and other information.

Additional arrangements have been put in place for the provision of decontamination units and protective equipment for NHS staff and strategic stockpiles of medical supplies and other equipment.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 9 January 2003

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Parliamentary Security

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission pursuant to his answer of 5 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 980W, what arrangements are in place to ensure best value in the provision of security arrangements within the parliamentary estate. [87867]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: Regular monthly meetings are held between officials of both Houses and Metropolitan Police Administration to review costs, staff overtime and attendance.

Contracts for physical arrangements are let following the Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply's recommended procurement practices and Government recognised best practice. Contracts below the EC threshold are subject to competitive tender and value for money considerations. Contract management procedures are to be reviewed across the House next year to ensure the arrangements deliver the quality, service and cost benefits identified in business cases.

The House's Audit Committee, chaired by the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), is charged by the Commission with having general oversight of the work of internal audit and review, with particular emphasis on promoting economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

TRANSPORT

Air Traffic Control

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the comparative level of investment by the United Kingdom in national air traffic control equipment with that of the EU average. [89007]

Mr. Jamieson: There is little financial information available from national air navigation services providers across the EU on the magnitude of investment in air traffic control equipment. Even if comparative information were available, it would be difficult to make a meaningful assessment because the level of investment by any service provider depends where that provider is in its investment cycle, for example whether or not it is currently introducing major new facilities as NATS has recently done at Swanwick.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what co-operation there is between British and Dutch air traffic controllers; and what form this takes. [89002]

Mr. Jamieson: The Civil Aviation Authority has proposed new arrangements for the upper airspace over the North Sea and, as part of these changes, a small area of UK airspace amounting to less than 0.1 per cent. of North Sea airspace will, from 20 March 2003, be serviced by the Dutch national authorities. Co-operation between national air traffic control authorities is widespread and routine across Europe and is effected under the auspices of Eurocontrol and—in the case of the UK—the Civil Aviation Authority. The co-operation takes the form of one national authority handling traffic which is in the national airspace of another state where this will facilitate the most expeditious movement of air traffic.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many air traffic controllers were employed by NATS on *(a)* 1 May 1997 and *(b)* 1 May 2002; and how many hours of training was provided to air traffic controllers annually in the year ending *(a)* 1 May 1997 and *(b)* 1 May 2002 [89005]

Mr. Jamieson: NATS employed 1,735 air traffic controllers on 1 May 1997 and 1942 on 1 May 2002. These figures include trainee controllers. I am informed by NATS that trainee controllers received 145,054 hours of training in the year ending 1 May 1997 and 235,346 hours of training in the year ending 1 May 2002. Information about continuing in-service training of qualified controllers is not readily available.

Miss Anne McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what assessment he has made of the level of staff morale at NATS; and if he will make a statement; [89000]

(2) what the level is of medical ailments registered by employees at NATS on *(a)* 1 May 1997 and *(b)* 1 May 2002 in (i) the appropriate book and (ii) by other means. [89003]

Mr. Jamieson: Staffing issues are matters for NATS, as the employer. NATS inform me that on 1 May 1997, 112 staff were absent out of a total of 5,142 (2.18 per cent.). On 1 May 2002, 102 staff were absent out of a total of 5,294 (1.93 per cent).

Heathrow (Runway Alterations)

Martin Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the results of the two-year trial, beginning August 2000, to extend night period runway alternation at Heathrow to the hour between 6 am and 7 am; and if he will make a statement. [89536]

Mr. Jamieson: The trial was expected to run for about two years. During 2002 it was affected on approximately 35 per cent. of mornings by engineering works, including replacement of the instrument landing systems (ILS), runway resurfacing and replacement of runway lighting. Completion of the resurfacing work on the southern runway has also been delayed, and will resume in April. Consequently it is not possible at this stage to draw any firm conclusions from the trial, which will need to continue for a sustained period following the completion of the engineering works later this year.

Major Road Schemes

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which major road schemes in the local transport settlement for 2002 were *(a)* accepted, *(b)* provisionally approved, *(c)* considered work in progress and *(d)* rejected. [89535]

Mr. Jamieson: The Mansfield-Ashfield Regeneration Route was fully accepted in the 2002 Local Transport Settlement announced in December.

The following schemes were provisionally approved. It will now be for the relevant local authorities to progress the schemes through the remaining statutory procedures.

North Middlesbrough Accessibility Improvements—Middlesbrough

Sunderland Central Route—Sunderland

Cadishead Way—Salford

Ashton Northern Bypass Stage 2—Tameside

Wigan Inner Relief Road—Wigan

A58 Blackbrook Diversion—St. Helens

A165 Reighton Bypass—N. Yorks

A43 Corby Link Road—Northamptonshire

A24 Horsham-Capel Improvement—W. Sussex/Surrey

A24 Ashington/Southwater Improvement—W. Sussex

A228 Leybourne and West Mailing Bypass—Kent

Mereoak Roundabout Improvement—Wokingham

Insufficient information was available for a decision on the following schemes which are now classified as 'work in progress'. The schemes will be reconsidered when the local authorities concerned provide sufficient further information.

Halfpenny Link—Sheffield/Rotherham

Roscommon Way—Essex

A391 St Austell to A30 Link—Cornwall

Northern Gateway—North Tyneside

Manor Park Bends Improvement—Bradford

A605 Stanground Bypass—Peterborough

A38-A370 Link Road—North Somerset

No schemes were rejected.

Pollution

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what his estimate is of the level of CO_2 emissions from road transport in *(a)* 2005 and *(b)* 2010. [88438]

Mr. Jamieson: Our latest forecasts suggest that in 2010 CO_2 emissions from road transport in England could be in the range 29.3 to 30.2 million tonnes of carbon. We do not currently have interim forecasts for levels in 2005, but will produce these shortly.

Seaports and Harbours (Security)

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to improve security at small seaports and harbours to prevent *(a)* acts of terrorism and *(b)* importation of material for use in terrorism; and if he will make a statement. [89248]

Mr. Jamieson: The United Kingdom already has a comprehensive security regime in place covering ports and harbours which service international ferries and cruise ship calls. In addition, the three border agencies, police Special Branch, HM Customs and Excise and the Immigration Service, control the movement of passengers and goods through small ports. Their presence at the ports is determined by a risk assessment.

This national regime will be augmented by July 2004 with the implementation of the recently agreed International Maritime Organisation's (IMO) global maritime security regime. This agreement requires signatory nations to develop and implement maritime security procedures. All ships over 500 tonnes engaged in international voyages and all ports which service such ships will be party to the security requirements.

Transport (Newcastle)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the Local Transport Plan budget for Newcastle City in *(a)* 2001–02, *(b)* 2002–03 and *(c)* 2003–04; what the spending was in 2001–02; whether spending is likely to be reached in 2002–03; and what action was taken over underspending. [89105]

Mr. Jamieson: Capital funding for local transport is provided by Government in two main ways: for maintenance and schemes costing below £5 million, as a block of funds over which local authorities have discretion; and for major schemes costing over £5million, as scheme-specific funding. In recent years, up to and including 2001–02, authorities had permission to carry over their 'block' funds from one financial year to the next.

Newcastle city council were provided with the following allocations:

(a) £36.479 million in respect of maintenance and schemes costing below £5 million; and £5.159 million for major schemes.

(b) £5.992 million in respect of maintenance and schemes costing below £5 million; and £6.738 million for major schemes.

(c) £5.055 million in respect of maintenance and schemes costing below £5 million; and £1.400 million for major schemes.

In 2001–02, £3.938 million was spent on maintenance and schemes costing below £5 million; and £3.210 million was spent on major schemes. Newcastle city council have taken advantage of the flexibility available to carry funds forward into 2002–03 and plan to spend their full allocation in the current year. Outturn spending figures for 2002–03 will be available in July 2003. Ministers have made clear to all transport authorities the importance of having effective spending programmes and of making progress towards the targets and objectives set out in their local transport plans.

DEFENCE

Christmas Expenses

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much will be spent on *(a)* entertaining, *(b)* Christmas decorations and *(c)* other festive activities this Christmas season by his Department and

Government agencies answerable to his Department; and of this sum how much will be spent in Ministers' (i) private offices and (ii) official residences. [88132]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* Specific information on any official festive expenditure is not collected centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Any expenditure incurred on entertainment, decorations and any other festive activities is strictly for official purposes only, and is made in accordance with departmental guidance on financial procedures and propriety, based on the principles set out in Government accounting.

Fire Brigades Strike

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment has been made of the safety of movements of munitions between military bases during industrial action by the Fire Brigades Union. [89444]

Mr. Ingram: An assessment of the safety of movements of munitions between military bases during industrial action by the Fire Brigades Union has been made by the Ministry of Defence Explosives Storage and Transport Committee (ESTC), responsible for setting MOD policy, standards and regulations for the transport of military explosives. This concluded that the risk to the general public and MOD personnel is not increased during industrial action.

Iraq

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much ordnance has been dropped on Iraq by the RAF in each year since 1992. [88961]

Mr. Ingram: Between 1992 and the start of Operation Desert Fox at the end of 1998 no ordnance was released. Information on ordnance released during Operation Desert Fox is not held.

Since 1999 the RAF, responding in self-defence against air defence targets, has released the following tonnages of ordnance.

Year	*Tons*
1999	79.1
2000	18.3
2001	22.2
2002	55.8

Note:
The figure for 2002 covers up to 4 December only.

Landmines

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the *(a)* Landmines Act 1998 and *(b)* Ottawa Treaty permits United Kingdom armed forces or other British nationals acting in consort with the armed forces of another state to handle or otherwise provide support for the deployment of landmines. [89017]

Mr. Ingram: Under the Ottawa Convention, each State Party undertakes, inter alia, never under any circumstances to use anti-personnel mines (APM) or to assist, encourage or induce, in any way anyone to engage in any activity prohibited to a State Party to the Convention. On ratification of the Convention, the United Kingdom made a statement of understanding of our obligations indicating that

"the mere participation in the planning or execution of operations, exercises or other military activity by the UK's Armed Forces, or individual UK nationals, conducted in combination with armed forces of States not party to the Ottawa Convention, which engage in activity prohibited by that Convention, is not, by itself, assistance, encouragement or inducement".

This statement of understanding is reflected in section 5 of the Landmines Act 1998, which is designed to provide a defence to members of the armed forces in cases which would fall within the terms of the statement.

Our obligations under the Ottawa Convention are fulfilled not only through the Landmines Act but through training and instruction of the armed forces. Personnel are instructed that, as well as not being permitted to lay APM, they may not seek benefit from the use of APM by allies who are not bound by the Ottawa Convention by requesting the use of APM in direct support of UK forces. Moreover, UK forces may not engage in any physical activities specifically related to the emplacement of APM by allies not bound by the Ottawa Convention.

Manning Control Reviews

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to the answer of 16 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 515W, how many army personnel were issued with manning control warning certificates in each of the last 10 years, other than those discharged and listed in the answer of 27 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 332–33W, broken down by regiment. [89279]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 27 November 2002, *Official Report*, columns 332–34W which provides details of those issued with manning control warning certificates and discharged under Queen's Regulations 9.413 "Not required for a full Army career". The number of those issued with a manning control warning certificate but not subsequently discharged is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Missile Defence

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he intends to announce a decision on the US application to site national missile defence facilities in the UK. [89372]

Mr. Hoon: No specific date has yet been determined for a final decision on the United States request to upgrade the early warning radar at RAF Fylingdales. Once we have carefully considered the issues involved and taken account of parliamentary and public discussion, I will inform the House at the earliest opportunity.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what distribution, and in what languages, has been arranged by his Department of the consultation document Missile Defence; and if he will make a statement. [89381]

Mr. Hoon: I assume that my hon. Friend is referring to the public discussion paper published on 9 December. Copies of the paper have been placed in the Library of the House and in the main public libraries in the United Kingdom. It has been sent to Members of this House, other people and organisations with an expressed interest in missile defence, the media and to embassies in London. The paper is also available on the Ministry of Defence website. The paper is in English.

RAF Welford

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who is in command of munitions convoys entering and leaving the US Air Force Base at RAF Welford; and what arrangements are made for providing security and safety escorts for these convoys. [89445]

Mr. Ingram: Overall command of United States Visiting Forces munitions convoys entering and leaving RAF Welford is vested in Commander Third Air Force USAF. Ministry of Defence Police provide security escorts, if required, to suit the size and nature of the munitions being carried.

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recommendations the Defence Munitions Rationalisation Studies made concerning the RAF Welford site; and when he plans to implement them. [89446]

Dr. Moonie: An estate rationalisation exercise undertaken by Defence Munitions (DM) in 2000 identified over capacity within the national DM estate. Following consideration of a number of options it was decided that DM Welford should close with its tasks being transferred to other DM locations. The site was emptied of United Kingdom owned munitions by December 2000. The UK portion of the Welford site was transferred for use by the United States authorities in October 2002. The facilities offered by Welford therefore did not feature in a follow on DM rationalisation study carried out in 2002.

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who manages contracts for the haulage of munitions to and from RAF Welford; who is responsible for initiating and controlling an emergency response in the event of an accident involving munitions in transit to or from RAF Welford; and whether the West Berkshire emergency planning officer and the Berkshire fire and rescue service are informed of movements of such munitions. [89448]

Mr. Ingram: The Defence Transportation and Movements Agency manages the contract for haulage of military munitions throughout the United Kingdom. The United States visiting forces are a party to that contract. Initiation of emergency action in the event of an incident/accident is the responsibility of the driver, attendant or other person responsible for a vehicle carrying military munitions. The civil authority notified of the emergency would then be responsible for its control.

There is no requirement to notify the West Berkshire Emergency Planning Officer or Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service of munitions movement from or to RAF Welford.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Colombia and Bolivia

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what aid has been given to *(a)* Colombia and *(b)* Bolivia in the last three years; what proportion was to combat production of hard drugs; and if she will make a statement. [89412]

Clare Short: Over the last three financial years, gross bilateral aid to *(a)* Colombia and *(b)* Bolivia was:

Gross bilateral aid to Colombia and Bolivia

£000

	1999–2000		*2000–01*		*2001–02*	
	Total	*DFID*	*Total*	*DFID*	*Total*	*DFID*
Colombia	2,190	1,537	2,252	1,730	1,480	934
Bolivia	39,785	6,334	9,837	7,592	31,495	12,684

No DFID funds have supported direct activities to combat the production of hard drugs.

From 1998 to 2001 DFID gave £720,000 to support a UN alternative development programme, to provide sustainable alternative livelihoods to coca growing, in agro-forestry systems, in Bolivia. Since then DFID has not supported alternative development activities in Bolivia.

The FCO Drugs and Crime Fund (DCF), which is active in Colombia and Bolivia, is aimed at reducing the supply of class A drugs to the UK. DCF projects focus on increasing capacity to intercept drugs being trafficked and not on combating production. DCF funds do not come from the aid budget.

In addition, DFID contributes approx 19 per cent. to the EC. The latest available figures for Colombia and Bolivia are as follows:

	1998		*1999*		*2000*	
	£ million	*DFID share*	*£ million*	*DFID share*	*£ million*	*DFID share*
Colombia	6.33	1.14	10.94	1.97	9.64	1.78
Bolivia	17.86	3.19	18.60	3.39	16.77	3.10

Green Ministers

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which Minister in her Department is nominated Green Minister; how often she has attended meetings of the Green Ministers; and which official has responsibility for the DEFRA rural proofing check-list in her Department. [88463]

Clare Short: My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development represents DFID on the ENV(G) Committee. The Rural Proofing check-list is not relevant to DFID's activities and policies.

Unanswered Questions

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many *(a)* parliamentary questions and *(b)* letters from hon. Members, in Session 2001–02 remain unanswered, broken down by those

which are (i) one month old, (ii) two months old, (iii) three months old, (iv) four months old and (v) over six months old. [84752]

Clare Short *[holding answer 3 December 2002]:* There are 11 parliamentary questions in total:

10 are over six months old,

1 is two months old.

As of 3 December there are no letters which are one month old and which remain unanswered from hon. Members in Session 2001–02.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

National Minimum Wage

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many people in *(a)* Newcastle upon Tyne and *(b)* Gateshead have benefited from the introduction of the national minimum wage; and what was the average uplift on earnings. [89529]

Alan Johnson: We do not have information on numbers of national minimum wage (NMW) beneficiaries specific to Newcastle upon Tyne or Gateshead. For the north-east region as a whole, it is thought that around 80,000 people should have benefited from the introduction of the NMW in April 1999. The number who should have benefited from the NMW uprating in October 2001 is estimated to be 110,000.

In spring 1998, prior to the introduction of the NMW, the average wage for full-time employees on adult rates in Newcastle upon Tyne was £336.9 and in Gateshead it was £352.5. In spring 2002 the average wage in Newcastle was £409.9, an increase of nearly 22 per cent., and in Gateshead it had risen to £389.4, an increase of 10.5 per cent. over the period. Over the same period the average wage for the north east as a whole increased by nearly 18 per cent., to £399.3, and for Great Britain by 21 per cent., to £464.7.

Wage Payments

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she will take to encourage employers promptly to pay the wages due to those entering work; and if he will make a statement. [89291]

Alan Johnson: When employees are to be paid is a contractual matter for negotiation and agreement between employers and employees (or their representatives). If wages are not paid at the agreed time, employees can seek redress though the employment tribunals or the ordinary courts.

The intervals at which wages are paid must be set out out in the written statement of employment particulars to which employees have a statutory right. Measures in the Employment Act 2002, once brought into force, will provide an improved enforcement mechanism for the requirement to issue written statements.

Cats and Dogs (Products)

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what regulations there are to prevent the *(a)* importation and *(b)* sale of goods made from (i) cats and (ii) dogs; and if she will make a statement. [88377]

Nigel Griffiths: At present there is no provision in the EU to prevent either the importation or sale of goods on the basis that they are made from cats and dogs.

My noble Friend, the Minister for Trade and Investment in response to an oral question from Baroness Gale on 11 December 2001, *Official Report,* column 1234, has undertaken to report to Parliament on the Government's findings on how much cat and dog fur is coming into the UK; whether a similar ban to that enacted in the US would be effective; and to explore all options for stopping the trade, if there is evidence that it exists. She has invited those MPs and Peers who have written to Ministers on this topic to a meeting in the Houses of Parliament on 15 January 2003 to discuss the issue further.

People's Panel

Dr. Vincent Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry who the *(a)* current and *(b)* past members are of the People's Panel; and if she will make a statement. [88822]

Mr. Alexander: I have been asked to reply.

The People's Panel came to an end in January 2002. Over the course of its lifetime it was made up of a representative sample of more than 5,000 members, recruited at random from among the UK public. It is standard practice for the personal details of members of the public involved in such research to remain anonymous.

Post Office

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of *(a)* the savings to be achieved and *(b)* the number of sub post offices to be closed under the Post Office's network reinvention. [87340]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* Post Office Ltd. estimate that collectively savings from the urban reinvention programme together with savings from other measures and initiatives including reductions in administrative costs and overheads should make a substantial contribution to restoring the network business to profitability. The Network business made an operating loss of £82 million in the financial year 2000–01.

Post Office Ltd. does not have a predetermined list of offices which will close under their urban reinvention programme, nor is there any arithmetical formula which will determine the number of closures in any given area.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many post offices there are in each parliamentary constituency; how many of them transacted more than 40 per cent. of their work volumes on behalf of the Benefits Agency in the last 12 months; and if she will make a statement. [87865]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 18 December 2002]:* A special exercise was undertaken by the Post Office in 1999 to determine the numbers of post offices in each

Parliamentary constituency and how many of them derive more than 40 per cent. of their income from benefits work. That information is set out in the reply given to the then hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington on 29 November 1999, *Official Report*, column 22W, and remains the latest information available in that form.

Post Office Ltd. also compiled a list of post offices by Parliamentary constituency as of 20 April 2002 showing their classification as urban or rural offices. This exercise did not include information on percentage income derived from benefits payments. A copy of this list is held in the Libraries of the House.

Trade Unions

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions she has had with *(a)* the Confederation of British Industry, *(b)* the TUC and *(c)* the Institute of Directors regarding union recognition in the workplace. [89045]

Alan Johnson: The Department of Trade and Industry is currently undertaking a Review of the Employment Relations Act 1999, which includes the provisions for statutory trade union recognition. DTI officials have already held a number of informal consultation meetings with interested parties, including the CBI and the TUC.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State also holds regular meetings with employer and trade union representatives, including the TUC, CBI and IoD, at which employment matters are discussed.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Air Quality

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her most recent estimate is of the proportion of the population that in 2010 will be living in parts of the country that have achieved the air quality strategy objective for 2010. [88439]

Margaret Beckett: Different air quality objectives apply in respect of different pollutants, different dates and different parts of the country. For many pollutants, our latest modelling indicates that by 2010 100 per cent. of the population will be living in areas that meet the current air quality strategy objectives. But in respect of other pollutants, there remain some areas where the current objectives may not be met. In respect of particulate matter (PM_{10}), for example, our latest air quality projections estimate that in 2010, 88 per cent of the population of England (excluding London) will live in areas that meet the air quality strategy objective. Furthermore, it is estimated that 98 per cent. of the population of London will live in areas that meet the air quality strategy objective for PM_{10} for London in 2010. Additional measures will need to be developed over the coming years to increase the proportion of the population living in areas that meet the strategy targets for PM_{10}.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her most recent estimate is of the proportion of the population that will live in the parts of the country where the air quality strategy objective for NOx will have been achieved by 2005. [88440]

Margaret Beckett: My Department's latest air quality projections estimate that more than 98 per cent. of the population will live in parts of England where the air quality strategy objective for nitrogen dioxide will have been achieved in 2005. Additional measures will need to be developed over the coming years to increase the proportion of the population living in areas that meet the strategy objective.

Accreditation

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her Department is doing to support the Government's policy on accreditation. [88088]

Alun Michael: The United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) is recognised by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry as the sole national body for the accreditation, against international standards, of certification and inspection bodies, testing and calibration laboratories. Defra uses UKAS accreditation services whenever it is appropriate to do so.

Eggs

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of eggs sold were *(a)* free range and *(b)* intensively farmed in the last year for which records are available. [89086]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 8 January 2003]:* In 2001 the proportions of total throughput of UK egg packing stations by type of egg production system were as follows:

	Percentage
Free Range	22.9
Laying Cages	71.7
Barn	5.4

Farming

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she has taken to encourage the formation of co-operatives among farmers; and if she will make a statement. [88866]

Mr. Morley: We have been working with an industry led steering group on the development of proposals for a new body called English Farming and Food Partnerships to encourage greater co-operation and collaboration between producers. It will aim to enable farmers to become more competitive by advocating collaboration, providing specialist advice and project delivery, and through training and education. It is intended that the body will be launched early this year.

We have also announced that projects which aim to strengthen and expand collaborative activity among farmers will be one of the priorities of the new Agricultural Development Scheme. The Rural Enterprise Scheme offers grants for the formation or development of collaborative groups to market quality products. Collaborative groups of producers are also eligible to apply for capital grants under the Processing and Marketing Grant scheme.

We are also exploring what legislative or fiscal constraints or disincentives to the development of agricultural co-operatives might exist.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what reason slaughter premiums are included in foot and mouth disease valuations after April 2001, but not before. [88593]

Mr. Morley: This is not the case. Foot and mouth disease culled cattle did not meet the criteria for receipt of the slaughter premium subsidy. Compensation was based either on market valuation, and thus needed no adjustment, or, from 22 March to 29 July alternatively, the standard values, which were set at fixed rates including the value of the subsidy.

Pigmeat

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the average price per kilogram dead weight for pigmeat was in June each year from 1990. [87292]

Mr. Morley: The table shows the price for pigs in pence per kilogram deadweight for June each year from 1990.

Deadweight pig prices (pence per kilogram deadweight) for each June from 1990

Date (June)	*Price p/kg/dw £*
1990	138.24
1991	113.22
1992	121.21
1993	117.39
1994	109.84
1995	122.41
1996	150.40
1997	134.03
1998	91.38
1999	84.51
2000	98.96
2001	103.01
2002	103.39

Rural Economies

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department is taking to support rural economies, with special reference to communications links. [86776]

Alun Michael: The new rural Public Service Agreement sets targets for increasing productivity in the least well performing rural areas and improving service accessibility. Both sets of targets require good quality communications links, both physical and electronic.

Welfare Milk Scheme

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with the dairy industry about the impact of the proposed changes to the welfare milk scheme; and if she will make a statement. [88979]

Mr. Morley: The Dairy Industry Association was represented at a meeting which my noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Lord Whitty, held jointly with my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Public Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Mrs. Blears), on 24 October 2002 to discuss the proposed reform of the welfare food scheme. This followed earlier discussions my hon. Friend had had with the Association.

CABINET OFFICE

Accreditation

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the Office is doing to support the Government's policy on accreditation. [88093]

Mr. Alexander: The United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) is recognised by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry as the sole national body for the accreditation, against international standards, of certification and inspection bodies, testing and calibration laboratories. My Department has engaged in a number of useful discussions with UKAS and are currently developing with them new assessment procedures in relation to the Charter Mark scheme.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

British Indian Ocean Territories

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the planned assistance is to elected representatives of the Ilois people

by the British Indian Ocean Territories administration in the next financial year; and if he will make a statement. [89383]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: There are no specific plans to assist any representatives of the Chagossian community in the next financial year. However, the BIOT Government has stated that it will consider reinstating the visit to the outer islands of the archipelago of a group of Chagossians which had to be cancelled earlier this year.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance was offered to the group of British Indian Ocean Territories people who arrived in the UK on 16 September travelling on UK passports. [89384]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Although British citizens are not automatically entitled to benefits on arrival in the UK, the UK passport holders within this group were offered assistance from Crawley social services to find accommodation and employment. This help was also provided for their non-British family members.

Caspian Sea

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with EU representatives and countries surrounding the Caspian Sea regarding the securing of energy resources in the Caspian Sea region for European markets. [88860]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Ministers and officials discuss Caspian energy issues with governments in the Caspian region and with EU partners on a regular basis. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary met Kazakh Foreign Minister Tokaev on 2 December and discussed UK energy investment in Kazakhstan. My hon. Friend the Minister of Energy and Construction (Mr. Wilson) visited Moscow recently and discussed energy issues, including the Caspian, with the Russian Energy Minister. Caspian energy issues are regularly discussed between EU partners and those Caspian countries with which the EU has Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan).

EU Diplomatic Service

Mr Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his policy is on the establishment of *(a)* an EU diplomatic academy and *(b)* an EU diplomatic service. [89127]

Mr. MacShane: We are content with the idea of an EU diplomatic academy which would exist alongside member states' national training arrangements, as suggested in the report from the External Relations Working Group of the Convention on the Future of Europe. We will remain engaged in the debate on this issue as it develops.

On the establishment of an EU diplomatic service, we believe that it remains for EU member states to organise their respective bilateral diplomatic services at the national level, though co-ordination and co-location of diplomatic missions with EU partners may be appropriate. There are already 138 bilateral and 5 multilateral delegations overseas which represent the Commission abroad. As the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy develops under the Council of Ministers and its High Representative, currently Javier Solana, there will be increased demands upon the delegations of both the Commission and member states.

EU Enlargement

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what security concerns were raised regarding EU enlargement at the Copenhagen summit. [88951]

Mr. MacShane: There was no discussion at the Copenhagen European Council of security concerns regarding EU enlargement. The conclusions of the summit emphasise that enlargement

"testifies to the common determination of the peoples of Europe to come together in a Union that has become a driving force for peace, democracy, stability and prosperity on our continent".

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will identify the independent studies on migration referred to in his written statement of 16 December 2002, *Official Report*, columns 537–551, on EU enlargement and free movement of workers. [89247]

Mr. MacShane: Successive independent studies have indicated that there is unlikely to be a large influx of workers from the new member states to the UK after accession. Two recent examples include: Bauer, Thomas K and Zimmerman, Klaus F (1999), "Assessment of Possible Migration Pressures and its Labour Market Impact Following EU Enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe", and Boeri, Tito and Bruecker, Herbert (2000), "The Impact of Enlargement on Employment and Labour Markets in the EU Member States".

Murder (Overseas)

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps are open to the Government to seek legal redress in the event of a United Kingdom citizen being murdered overseas by the forces of an occupying power. [88610]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The steps available would depend on the circumstances of any particular case. The UK's rules applying to international claims were published in the International and Comparative Law Quarterly, Volume 37 (1998) 1006–08.

National Missile Defence

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contradiction there has been with NATO member states on national missile defence; and if he will make a statement. [89380]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Prague summit underlined the commitment of all our NATO allies to examining ways to address the threat posed by ballistic missile proliferation through an appropriate mix of political and defence efforts. As a follow on to work on protecting deployed forces using theatre missile defences, NATO partners agreed to set up a new

feasibility study to examine options for protecting alliance territory, forces and population centres against the full range of missile threats.

Somalia

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what UK representation there is at the peace negotiations on the future of Somalia; and if he will make a statement. [89375]

Mr. Rammell: The deputy high commissioner in Nairobi attended the opening ceremony of the Somalia National Reconciliation Conference on 15 October 2002 in Eldoret, Kenya. Experts from the UK attended some of the early sessions of the conference and we have had an expert in Eldoret since 2 December 2002.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what arrangements are in operation for UK diplomatic representation in Somalia; and if he will make a statement. [89376]

Mr. Rammell: The British Embassy in Mogadishu has been closed since 1990 for security reasons. Coverage of Somalia is provided by the British Embassy in Addis Ababa and by the British High Commission in Nairobi.

Syria (Elhannan Tannenbaum)

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to *(a)* the Syrian Government, *(b)* the Syrian ambassador in London, *(c)* the head of Hizballah and *(d)* the International Red Cross in respect of medical treatment for Mr. Elhannan Tannenbaum during his captivity. [88590]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: HMG has made a number of representations to governments in the middle east about the fate of the missing Israelis, including Elhannan Tannenbaum, and will continue to do so, pressing particularly for access to the hostages for the International Committee of the Red Cross. Most recently I raised them with the Syrian Foreign Minister, Farouk Al Shara'a, in London during the Syrian President's official visit to the UK on 16 to 18 December 2002. Our ambassadors in Beirut and Damascus also raised the missing men with their host governments, who took note of our interest on 3 October 2002 and 19 September 2002 respectively. On 12 December 2001, our ambassador in Beirut raised hostage taking in general terms with Hizballah. On each occasion we emphasised our absolute opposition to hostage taking, and that those holding hostages should free them at once.

Our ambassador in Tel Aviv met families of the missing men, including Mr. Tannenbaum's son, on 9 September 2002.

Timber

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the UK Government have taken to ensure that the Liberian Government, under UN Security Council resolution 1408 (2002), has established a transparent and internationally verifiable audit regime to ensure that revenue derived from the Liberian timber industry is used for legitimate social, humanitarian and development purposes, and not for purchasing arms, and if he will make a statement. [89069]

Mr. Rammell *[holding answer 7 January 2003]:* We regret that the Government of Liberia have not yet established an audit regime, and we remain concerned that revenues derived from logging activities are used to purchase arms in breach of UN sanctions. We have made repeated calls in the United Nations Security Council for the Government of Liberia to instigate an internationally verifiable and rigorous audit of their timber and shipping revenues as required under UNSCR 1408. We have briefed two potential auditors. Unfortunately, after discussion with the Government of Liberia, both decided not to undertake the contract.

Turkey/Cyprus

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on discussions with Turkey about the decision to admit Cyprus as a candidate member of the European Union. [88985]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary spoke to his Turkish counterpart during the Copenhagen European Council. They discussed the step forward Copenhagen signalled in Turkey's own candidacy and also touched on Cyprus, including the EU's continued wish to see a reunited island accede.

Western Sahara

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have been held with the Government of Algeria on the future of the western Sahara; and if he will make a statement. [89377]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I met Amine Kherbi the Algerian Presidential Special Envoy when he visited London to discuss western Sahara last July. Officials in London, Algiers and New York are in regular contact with their Algerian counterparts.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to receive proposals from the UN special representative on the future governance of the western Sahara; and if he will make a statement. [89379]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The mandate for MINURSO, the UN mission for a referendum in western Sahara is due to expire on 31 January 2003. We expect the UN Secretary General to report to the Security Council on the situation before that date.

PRIME MINISTER

Referendums

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Prime Minister pursuant to his answer of 18 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 811W, what criteria he *(a)* applied and *(b)* applies in determining whether referendums are appropriate on (i) devolution and (ii) further European union. [89317]

The Prime Minister: The Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA) provides a generic statutory framework for the conduct of referendums held across the United Kingdom, or a referendum held in Scotland, Wales, England or Northern Ireland, or in any region in England. There are no criteria, set out either in the PPERA or elsewhere, for deciding when it is appropriate to hold a referendum on a particular issue.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Community Sports Initiatives

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to develop a local agency approach for *(a)* gaining access to, and *(b)* supporting funding for community sports initiatives; and if she will make a statement. [89999]

Mr. Caborn: Sport England is, at my request, working on a programme of modernisation and restructuring. A key feature of the programme is the devolution of greater responsibility for funding decisions to the regions. To facilitate this process the regional sports boards are being reconstituted as sub-committees of Sport England. New chairs and members are being appointed, with the new boards becoming operational in April this year. Membership will comprise of representatives of local government, voluntary sport, education, health and private sectors. The boards will, in consultation with other regional agencies and local interests including regional assemblies, regional development agencies, regional cultural consortia, local, education and health authorities, produce regional sports strategies which will reflect national sporting priorities. The strategies will inform decision making by Sport England's regional offices on funding for community sports initiatives in their regions.

Mr. Wood: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much her Department intends to spend in the next year developing sport at *(a)* youth and *(b)* grassroots levels. [89553]

Mr. Caborn: My Department and the National Lottery will be investing the following resources in 2003–04 in the development of youth and grass roots sport.

Development	*Resources*
School Sport Co-ordinators	£40 million
Community Club Development Programme	£20 million
Step into Sport Volunteering Project	£4 million
Coach development	£3 million
New Opportunities Fund—School Sport and PE Programme	£581 million (between 2001 and 2005)
Space for Sport and the Arts	£130 million (between 2001 and 2004)
Sport England Grant in Aid	£38.275 million (much of this will be directed to programmes for young people and grassroots sport.)
Lottery Sports Fund	£178 million (almost 80 per cent. of this will be allocated to youth and grassroots sport)

The Department for Education and Skills will also be investing significant resources in sports provision in schools including £184 million for school sport co-ordinators and £115 million for specialist sports colleges over the next three years and £10 million for sporting playgrounds in 2003–04.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent discussions she has had with European colleagues regarding *(a)* resources for and *(b)* co-operation in securing international sporting events in European countries. [88730]

Mr. Caborn: I meet ministerial counterparts in EU member states at a range of international fora. In the course of these meetings, I have discussed major sporting events.

In the UK, sport's national governing bodies are responsible for securing the resources necessary for bidding for major international events, assisted where appropriate with Lottery and other funding from UK Sport and Sport England. Other EU member states have similar arrangements. It is the nature of the bidding process that national governing bodies compete for the rights to host events. As such, the scope for co-operation is limited to ensuring that fair criteria for bidding nations are applied by international sporting organisations.

Sporting Events

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent representations she has received regarding the staging of major sporting events in England; and if she will make a statement. [88306]

Mr. Caborn: Government are currently assessing whether or not to support a bid to host the 2012 Olympic Games in London. We will take forward the recommendation of the strategy unit to create a strategy for bidding for mega events and we will consider with UK Sport how to help organisations bid more effectively for major sporting events.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Appointments

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department to which bodies his Department makes appointments; how many members there are *(a)* in total and *(b)* in each body; and how many of those appointed are (i) businessmen, (ii) businessmen in SMEs and (iii) businessmen in micro-businesses. [87392]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mr. Alexander) on 16 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 607W.

Asylum Seekers (Somalia)

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people in each of the past ten years from Somalia have *(a)* applied for asylum, *(b)* been recognised as refugees, *(c)* been granted exceptional leave to remain, *(d)* been removed to a third country, *(e)* made a voluntary departure and *(f)* returned to Somalia. [89378]

Beverley Hughes: The table shows the asylum applications, and grants of asylum or exceptional leave to remain (ELR), for Somali nationals over the last ten years.

The number of Somali nationals removed between July 2001 and June 2002 was 25. Details of the destination country are not collected centrally.

"Removed" means principal applicants removed only and includes persons known to have departed 'voluntarily' after the initiation of enforcement action against them, and persons leaving under Assisted Voluntary Returns Programmes run by the International Organization for Migration. There are no reliable removal data available prior to these dates by nationality.

We do not know how many asylum applicants have left the United Kingdom voluntarily after they have been refused asylum or exceptional leave to remain without informing the Home Office.

Information on asylum applications and decisions is published quarterly. The next publication will be available from the end of February 2003 on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate web site at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Applications received for asylum in the United Kingdom, and initial decisions[1,2] 1992—2001, Somalia

		Initial Decisions				
		Cases considered under normal procedures[4,5]			*Backlog clearance exercise[6]*	
	Applications received[3]	*Granted asylum*	*Granted ELR*	*Refused*	*Granted asylum or ELR under backlog criteria*	*Refused under backlog criteria[7]*
1992	1,575	25	2,210	320	—	—
1993	1,465	45	3,075	210	—	—
1994	1,840	5	1,575	150	—	—
1995	3,468	10	2,205	185	—	—
1996	1,780	15	3,580	235	—	—
1997	2,730	985	1,015	305	—	—
1998	4,685	2,330	375	100	—	—
1999	7,495	130	55	120	35	5
2000	5,020	5,310	3,575	2,365	55	15
2001[P]	6,465	2,845	1,960	3,495	—	—

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest five.
[2] Decision figures do not necessarily relate to applications received in the same period.
[3] May exclude some cases lodged at Local Enforcement Offices between January 1999 and March 2002.
[4] Information is on initial decisions, excluding the outcome of appeals ore other subsequent decisions.
[5] Cases considered under normal procedures may include some cases decided under the backlog criteria.
[6] Cases decided under measures aimed at reducing the pre 1996 asylum application backlog.
[7] Included some cases where the application has been refused on substantive grounds.
[P] Provisional data.

CCTV Cameras

Mr. Denis Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many criminal prosecutions have been brought as a result of evidence obtained via CCTV cameras in each of the last five years. [88152]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the effectiveness of CCTV in combating crime in small retail businesses. [88649]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 7 January 2003]:* Under the Crime Reduction Programme Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) Initiative, a potential of £170 million will be spent funding 684 public area CCTV schemes. Many of these schemes cover shopping areas. Under the Small Retailers in Deprived Areas Initiative, £15 million is being provided to improve security of small retailers, including the provision of CCTV where appropriate. In year one of the Initiative (2001–02) approximately 50 per cent. of projects involved the installation or upgrading of CCTV. This figure rose to almost 70 per cent. in year two (2002–03).

Police operational experience and various other research studies show that CCTV has considerable crime reduction and detection potential, particularly when used as part of a wider strategy.

Early findings from a number of Home Office funded schemes are very encouraging:

Alhambra Shopping Centre, Barnsley: Retail property crime dropped by 35 per cent. in first two years after launch in 1999.

Thornton Estate, Hull: Shop theft has been reduced by 70 per cent. since inception in 2000.

Correspondence

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan of 9 July 2002, regarding his constituent Mr. A. Innes of Banff. [88644]

Beverley Hughes: The hon. Member was sent a reply to his letter on 31 December 2002. I am sorry for the delay in doing so.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 4 November from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Dr. Aisha Budhwani. [89236]

Mr. Blunkett: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 19 December 2002.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 11 November from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. Muhammad Khaziz. [89239]

Mr. Blunkett: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 17 December 2002.

Crime Reduction Partnerships

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what funds are available to crime reductions partnerships to *(a)* install CCTV in problem crime areas and *(b)* combat crime in deprived areas. [88650]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 7 January 2003]:* Under the Crime Reduction Programme Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) Initiative around £170 million will be spent between 1998 and 2003 funding 684 CCTV schemes. More than 520 of these schemes are already fully operational, with further schemes coming on line weekly.

Although this initiative is now closed, other opportunities for funding of crime reduction measures, including CCTV schemes, currently exist under the Safer Communities, Communities Against Drugs and the Small Retailers in Deprived Areas initiatives.

In 2002–03 the funds available under these three initiatives total £96-million Safe Communities Initiatives (SCI) £20 million, Communities Against Drugs (CAD) £70 million, Small Retailers in Deprived Areas (SRDA) £6 million.

The Updated Drug Strategy was published in November 2002, and makes further progress towards breaking the link between drugs and crime by introducing or extending a range of interventions aimed at getting offenders with drug problems into drug treatment, in particular taking forward the work we have already done on Arrest Referral and Drug Treatment and Testing Orders, building on the pilot Drug Testing projects by extending this approach more widely, and developing better systems for throughcare and aftercare.

In addition, in 2003–04, funding of £236 million has been made available from the National Pooled Budget for the treatment of adults and young people, from 1999, £20 million has been made available over three years for Arrest Referral schemes and £53.7 million for Drug Treatment and Testing Orders.

Foreign Prisoners (Deportation)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many foreign nationals serving prison sentences in prisons in England and Wales are to be deported on the completion of their prison sentence. [88838]

Beverley Hughes: As of 23 December 2002 there were 3,930 prisoners serving sentence who are known to be liable to be deported on completion of their custodial sentence. Each case is reviewed on its merits not sooner than 12 months before the prisoner might expect to be released having served the required period in custody.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the longest time was that a foreign national *(a)* man and *(b)* woman who had served a prison sentence waited on completion of that sentence to be deported from the UK in each of the last three years. [88839]

Beverley Hughes: I regret that the information requested is not available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many foreign nationals held in prisons in England and Wales are awaiting deportation and have completed their prison sentence. [88841]

Beverley Hughes: As of 23 December 2002 there are 94 prisoners detained beyond completion of their criminal sentences awaiting deportation.

Ministerial Engagements

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many engagements were undertaken outside London *(a)* by him or his predecessor and *(b)* by Ministers in his Department in January (i) 2000, (ii) 2001 and (iii) 2002. [87353]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer provided by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office on 16 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 608W.

Missing Persons

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce a national database of missing persons. [88186]

Mr. Denham: There are already arrangements nationally to record missing persons. Details of all missing persons should be recorded on the Police National Computer (PNC) as soon as possible and in any case within 48 hours of their disappearance.

Notification of all outstanding missing persons should be sent to the Police National Missing Persons Bureau (PNMPB) within 14 days. Most missing persons are found locally within this period. Forces will not, however, be precluded from forwarding information to the PNMPB in a shorter time if a particular case appears to warrant more urgent attention.

The National Missing Persons Helpline (NMPH) also maintain a database for all missing persons reported to them and these files are not closed until there is a definite resolution to each case.

The Home Office is currently working with key stakeholders within the area of missing persons, which includes the police and the NMPH, to increase co-operation and information sharing between Government Departments, and statutory and non-statutory agencies. £810,000 has been made available from the Invest to Save Budget (ISB), to put in place a new system for handling missing person cases. The aim of the project is the establishment of joint working arrangements between the United Kingdom police service and NMPH, together with improved recording and information sharing, to improve the service to missing persons and their families and to inform our understanding of the problem and develop strategies to address it. One of the key objectives of this project is to establish a unified national database of missing and unidentified people reported either to the police or to the NMPH.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for a common risk assessment between police services for missing persons. [88191]

Mr. Denham: The Association of Chief Police Officers' (ACPO) 'Manual of Guidance for the Management of Missing Persons' promotes the use of a three-tier risk assessment procedure consisting of 'low', 'medium', and 'high' risk categories with an additional list of factors that need to be considered when assessing this risk.

Nationality Applications

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the backlog is of applications for nationality. [88567]

Beverley Hughes: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave on 10 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 237W, which stated that information on the number of cases outstanding was not available.

This is because information on the number of applications for nationality outstanding is not routinely published.

Overseas British Citizens

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress he has made to end the status of Overseas British Citizen and to provide those affected with full British citizenship; what representations he has received about amending the status of Overseas British Citizens, and if he will make a statement. [88625]

Beverley Hughes: We have no plans to end the status of British Overseas Citizen. We received representations during the passage of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill about the plight of British nationals who had no right of abode in the United Kingdom or elsewhere. As a result we amended the Bill to confer an entitlement to British citizenship, and with it the right of abode in the United Kingdom, on British Overseas citizens, British subjects and British protected persons who have no other nationality and have not, since 4 July 2002, given up another nationality. The relevant section (s.12) will be commenced by order as soon as the administrative arrangements for receiving and considering applications are in place.

The remaining provisions in the British Nationality Act 1981 relating to the statuses of British Overseas Citizen, British subject and British protected person will continue in force to cater for those who are unable or unwilling to acquire British citizenship, and to facilitate the voluntary renunciation of those statuses.

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the number of people who would benefit from a change in the status of overseas British citizens. [88626]

Beverley Hughes: We estimate that there are now some 35,000 British overseas citizens and 10,000 British subjects and British protected persons who have no other citizenship. However, a margin of error must be allowed. These figures are based largely on personal contact with our overseas missions in the course of applications for passport and other consular services. There will be people who have not availed themselves of these services. Conversely, there will be people eligible for British citizenship who will not apply.

Police

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action his Department can take in circumstances where police forces refuse to investigate particular complaints. [88981]

Mr. Denham: The Secretary of State for the Home Department does not have the power to intervene in the recording or investigation of individual complaints.

Under section 69 of the Police Act 1996, the chief officer of the force is the appropriate authority for recording and investigating complaints, other than complaints against senior officers. All complaints about the conduct of police officers must be recorded. It is for the chief officer to determine whether a complaint relates to the conduct of officers. A complaint may be resolved informally if the complainant consents and the chief officer is satisfied that the conduct complained of would not justify criminal or disciplinary proceedings. Otherwise the complaint must be formally investigated.

A new police complaints system will be introduced in April 2004 under provisions in the Police Reform Act 2002. This system will operate under the guardianship of the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC).

Under the new system, if the chief officer considers that a complaint should not be recorded because it does not relate to the conduct of police officers, he will be required to give reasons for that decision to the complainant. The complainant will have the right to appeal against that decision to the IPCC. The IPCC will be able, if appropriate, to require the complaint to be recorded. It will also have the power to call in any complaint and to determine how any subsequent investigation should be handled.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many officer working days have been lost due to *(a)* stress and *(b)* illness (i) in each police force in England and Wales and (ii) in total in each of the last five years. [87912]

Mr. Denham: At present sickness absence in the police service is not broken down by categories such as stress or illness. Therefore it is not possible to express the number of working days lost due to stress or illness over the last five years.

Sickness absence tables for the last five reporting periods will be placed in the Library, which give overall sickness absence figures on a force-by-force and a national basis.

From next April forces will be expected to measure sickness absence according to a new dataset, issued by the Home Office last July. This dataset will recommend a series of sickness absence categories which it is recommended that forces use for internal management purposes in order to target treatment at the categories of sickness producing the most absence.

Forces using these categories will, from the reporting period commencing in April, be able to break down their sickness absence figures into categories such as psychological disorders or infection.

HMIC Matrix of Indicators 1997–98—sick leave

	Police days lost to sick leave		*Police days lost to long term sick leave*		*Average number of police officers*	*Police officers on long term sick leave*		*Support staff working days lost to sick leave*	
	Male	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*		*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*
Avon and Somerset	25,456	4,870	15,035	2,673	2,976	289	53	6,814	7,738
Bedfordshire	11,621	3,918	7,058	2,572	1,086	34	11	1,038	3,566
Cambridgeshire	11,462	2,556	4,449	1,098	1,297	16	5	2,134	5,691
Cheshire	22,670	5,746	13,983	2,758	2,078	81	23	2,861	10,077
City of London	8,635	1,691	4,686	722	869	17	1	1,555	2,227
Cleveland	14,323	3,387	8,305	1,743	1,494	35	9	1,663	5,989
Cumbria	9,508	2,362	5,866	1,497	1,166	17	8	1,340	2,807
Derbyshire	19,977	4,976	12,622	3,451	1,772	40	7	3,920	8,626
Devon and Cornwall	24,153	6,106	13,722	3,342	2,929	40	7	6,594	9,869
Dorset	11,764	2,639	6,025	1,277	1,287	80	19	3,462	5,368
Durham	12,854	4,250	7,663	2,759	1,486	141	47	2,416	3,878
Dyfed-Powys	8,831	1,755	4,936	779	1,007	92	22	856	3,832
Essex	26,240	7,827	14,045	3,980	2,959	52	14	5,680	15,629
Gloucestershire	9,748	2,186	5,633	999	1,123	92	18	1,860	4,516
Greater Manchester	81,843	25,051	55,050	17,493	6,930	999	274	18,448	41,793
Gwent	10,046	2,530	6,209	1,737	1,245	15	6	1,271	3,140
Hampshire	25,476	11,189	13,546	8,011	3,471	272	127	16,383	0
Hertfordshire	14,983	5,479	7,408	3,230	1,750	13	5	1,900	9,806
Humberside	20,258	3,954	9,575	1,871	2,056	28	6	3,805	5,801
Kent	28,115	8,449	14,355	4,601	3,285	45	6	5,136	11,906
Lancashire	29,335	8,084	12,850	3,483	3,344	271	80	4,622	10,011
Leicestershire	18,466	5,375	8,571	2,456	2,020	20	5	3,579	9,529
Lincolnshire	11,576	2,889	6,773	1,921	1,194	24	5	1,469	2,783
Merseyside	40,792	13,219	30,333	10,442	4,322	66	26	6,275	19,550
Metropolitan Police	310,220	84,348	185,460	54,325	27,028	2,273	592	70,874	170,711
Norfolk	12,432	2,621	4,259	704	1,451	61	9	2,322	5,039
Northamptonshire	12,107	2,637	5,013	1,028	1,182	17	8	1,946	4,024
Northumbria	35,457	7,872	27,636	5,691	3,437	524	110	5,897	11,884
North Wales	11,603	2,279	5,582	1,000	1,396	20	6	1,730	4,020
North Yorkshire	12,059	2,866	6,753	1,548	1,375	28	8	1,925	4,481
Nottinghamshire	22,928	6,601	13,795	4,332	2,341	31	14	5,101	12,320
South Wales	42,985	7,162	—	—	2,884	—	—	—	—
South Yorkshire	31,298	7,529	15,452	3,609	3,194	72	11	4,822	10,995
Staffordshire	22,074	6,794	7,203	2,607	2,258	134	47	2,655	8,773
Suffolk	7,829	2,752	4,613	1,745	1,189	18	7	1,942	3,208
Surrey	18,401	3,597	12,271	2,085	1,642	211	43	2,687	3,246
Sussex	29,587	7,248	15,182	3,834	3,063	283	77	6,059	13,378
Thames Valley	36,466	10,934	23,547	7,575	3,820	59	24	5,487	17,003
Warwickshire	11,132	2,344	5,263	1,114	933	22	5	1,748	4,239
West Mercia	19,040	4,544	8,331	1,599	2,036	19	7	4,433	8,776
West Midlands	66,784	23,097	33,729	11,166	7,194	463	148	9,443	37,901
West Yorkshire	47,587	12,949	21,219	5,739	5,215	331	79	10,116	17,622
Wiltshire	7,920	2,299	4,151	1,345	1,167	10	5	1,923	3,526

	Support staff working days lost to long term sick leave		*Average number of support staff*	*Support staff on long term sick leave*	
	Male	*Female*		*Male*	*Female*
Avon and Somerset	4,255	3,920	1,573	77	86
Bedfordshire	556	1,664	551	25	70
Cambridgeshire	784	1,987	649	1	6
Cheshire	1,482	5,356	815	6	22
City of London	669	1,320	349	3	4
Cleveland	744	3,161	657	4	12
Cumbria	892	1,328	521	3	7
Derbyshire	2,625	5,344	934	4	23

	Support staff working days lost to long term sick leave		Average number of support staff	Support staff on long term sick leave	
	Male	Female		Male	Female
Devon and Cornwall	3,861	4,698	1,384	8	23
Dorset	2,073	2,261	805	27	35
Durham	1,597	2,259	618	3	5
Dyfed-Powys	348	2,461	404	12	42
Essex	2,923	7,677	1,471	23	13
Gloucestershire	1,045	2,202	491	15	38
Greater Manchester	11,599	25,043	3,207	195	436
Gwent	723	1,588	523	1	3
Hampshire	2,049	6,639	1,493	41	129
Hertfordshire	733	4,356	959	2	8
Humberside	1,964	1,895	920	6	9
Kent	2,982	5,461	1,485	8	17
Lancashire	1,652	3,412	1,398	32	62
Leicestershire	2,025	4,434	855	4	15
Lincolnshire	588	1,250	579	5	5
Merseyside	4,009	12,077	1,533	9	37
Metropolitan Police	37,940	109,330	13,705	644	1,764
Norfolk	568	1,127	727	10	20
Northamptonshire	951	1,255	694	4	4
Northumbria	3,541	7,481	1,479	84	163
North Wales	635	1,318	526	0	0
North Yorkshire	944	2,317	610	2	8
Nottinghamshire	2,836	6,908	1,212	8	20
South Wales	—	—	1,241	—	—
South Yorkshire	1,906	2,836	1,638	7	6
Staffordshire	1,727	5,170	911	25	68
Suffolk	1,308	1,676	634	4	7
Surrey	1,574	1,082	806	65	114
Sussex	3,197	6,665	1,457	54	100
Thames Valley	2,566	8,108	2,082	5	16
Warwickshire	982	1,808	435	4	4
West Mercia	2,143	3,502	1,066	3	10
West Midlands	3,823	15,207	3,329	40	148
West Yorkshire	5,181	7,515	2,558	69	111
Wiltshire	1,169	1,561	576	5	5

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will ask the Government Actuary to investigate police pension costs. [88504]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 8 January 2003]:* As stated in the National Policing Plan, the Government are considering options for modernising police pensions to make them more flexible and affordable for future entrants. We are also seeking to meet the needs of police authorities and chief officers for a scheme which brings greater certainty about the financial impact on individual police forces.

The Government Actuary's Department is giving such advice as is necessary regarding police pension costs and options for reform.

Prince of Wales (Gifts)

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the police received a report of the existence of a written authority from the Prince of Wales to Harold Brown to dispose of a gold wedding ring; and if he will make a statement. [86245]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 10 December 2002]:* The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis informs me that, at the conclusion of the hearing on 3 December, the existence of a written authority from the Prince of Wales to Harold Brown to dispose of a gold wedding ring was made known to the court by defence counsel.

Settlement Applications

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how long on average his Department took to consider an application for settlement in each year since 1990. [89459]

Beverley Hughes: There is no published data on decision times specifically to determine applications for settlement. We aim to screen all postal applications within three weeks and decide those that are straightforward at that point. However, because of the high number of applications in the latter part of 2002, this is, regrettably, taking around 10 weeks on average. Some that need further inquiries or more detailed consideration can take around 12 months to decide. We are taking measures to improve this situation and expect to make significant progress towards our three-week target for initial screening over the next two to three months, and to reduce the turnaround time for deciding more complex cases.

Solicitors (Immigration Advice)

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking on solicitors who fail to give appropriate assistance to clients seeking to regulate their immigration status in the UK. [89062]

Beverley Hughes: Anyone dissatisfied with the immigration advice or immigration services provided by their solicitor may complain to the Office of the

Immigration Services Commissioner, which was established under Part V of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. Any subsequent disciplinary action is a matter for the relevan designated professional body. Complaints may also be submitted direct to the particular solicitor's professional body. The Commissioner must report annually to the Secretary of State as to the effectiveness of each designated professional body in regulating its members regarding the provision of immigration advice or immigration services. The Commissioner's first such report was incorporated in his Annual Report for 2001–02 which the Secretary of State presented to Parliament on 23 July 2002.

Terrorism

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures have been taken to ensure that communications between the emergency services and local authorities are compatible in the event of a terrorist attack. [88406]

Mr. Alexander: I have been asked to reply.

In a major incident, including a terrorist attack, it will fall to the police to co-ordinate the emergency response, as laid down in the Home Office guidance manual, "Dealing With Disaster". This is closely co-ordinated within the framework maintained by the Cabinet Office, working with the Home Office as Department with overall responsibility for counter terrorism. The Cabinet Office has regular contact with local authorities in England and Wales on this issue, through the provision of formal guidance, funding and co-ordination of local arrangements with national policy. The system for communications between the emergency services and local authorities has been well tried and tested through the many major incidents in which they are involved.

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultations he has had with local authorities on preparations for a terrorist attack. [88407]

Mr. Alexander: I have been asked to reply.

Local authorities have a general role in emergency planning, preparing to deal with the consequences of all emergencies, including those arising from terrorist attack. This is closely co-ordinated within the framework maintained by the Cabinet Office, working with the Home Office as Department with overall responsibility for counter terrorism. The Cabinet Office has regular contact with local authorities in England and Wales on this issue, through the provision of formal guidance, funding and co-ordination of local arrangements with national policy.

Visa Processing

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidelines are issued to hon. Members hotlines on what length of time must expire in the process of a visa application before an hon. Member's staff are permitted to make enquiries to the hon. Member's hotline; and what steps he has taken to communicate these guidelines to hon. Members. [88701]

Beverley Hughes: The Member of Parliament's hotline was set up to deal with general immigration inquiries of an urgent or compassionate nature. From 1 July 2002 this has been expanded to include urgent and compassionate enquiries about asylum, appeal or removal casework.

I wrote to all the hon. Members on 18 July setting out the new arrangements and enclosing copies of an updated leaflet "Information for Members of Parliament about immigration and nationality enquiries".

Hon. Members may make inquiries about the progress of applications at any time. However, applications for variation of leave to enter or remain are dealt with in order of receipt in the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND). Initial consideration is currently taking 10 weeks. Complex cases which cannot be decided at this stage can take around 12 months to be determined. However, if the inquiry is about an application which is still awaiting a decision by IND for over six months or where compelling evidence is provided of compassionate reasons for resolving the application quickly, the hotline and casework teams will endeavour to complete it or explain why that is not possible.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Incitement to Racial Hatred

21. **Mike Gapes:** To ask the Solicitor-General what plans she has to ensure that the Crown Prosecution Service works to secure a higher percentage of prosecutions in cases of alleged incitement to racial hatred. [89227]

The Solicitor-General: The Attorney-General and I regard it as of great importance that those who commit crimes of racial hatred are brought to justice.

Prosecutions of race hate crimes are monitored closely by the CPS. Last year Her Majesty's Inspectorate of the Crown Prosecution Service produced a report on such prosecutions and made recommendations which the CPS is acting on.

Fraud

24. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Solicitor-General when she next expects to meet representatives of the small firm sector to examine ways of combating fraud perpetrated against businesses. [89230]

The Solicitor-General: I have not met with representatives of small firms of organisations to discuss ways of combating fraud perpetrated against businesses. However, I meet regularly with the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Director of the Serious Fraud Office to examine methods on combating, investigating and prosecuting fraud.

The Serious Fraud Office investigates and prosecutes cases involving serious and complex fraud and is aware that small businesses are at risk from fraud, whether internal or external, in the same way as larger companies.

27. **Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Solicitor-General what expertise has been developed in the Crown Prosecution Service for dealing with fraud cases. [89233]

The Solicitor-General: The Crown Prosecution Service deals with fraud cases of all types, from simple "high street" frauds to major corporate frauds. The most complex cases do require highly specialised knowledge, for instance knowledge of Stock Exchange practices. The Casework Directorate of CPS Headquarters has a number of specialist lawyers, working with dedicated accountancy support, to deal with those cases.

Elsewhere in the CPS special casework lawyers deal with large fraud cases, particularly in the larger urban areas where these tend to arise. The capacity of the CPS to devote more senior lawyer resources to complex cases, including fraud, has increased following its restructuring in 1999 and a significant increase in resources in recent years. In response to the recent inspection of the Casework Directorate by HMCPS Inspectorate, the CPS will shortly be considering how best it can deploy its resources to deal with fraud cases in the future.

Prosecutions

25. **Dr. Palmer:** To ask the Solicitor-General what action she is taking to reduce the number of cases prosecuted but discontinued before trial. [89231]

The Solicitor-General: A number of steps are being taken to reduce the percentage of cases that are discontinued before trial:

To ensure the right evidence there is closer working between the police and CPS.

Better support for victims and witnesses.

More CPS lawyers to ensure good quality case preparation.

HEALTH

Ambulance Response Times

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the average response time was for ambulances in Clitheroe, Lancashire, at the latest date for which figures are available; and what the average response time was in each of the last five years; [83789]

(2) what the average response time is for ambulances in *(a)* Lancashire, *(b)* the north west of England and *(c)* each NHS trust in England at the latest date for which figures are available; and what the average response time was in each of the last five years. [83790]

Jacqui Smith: Information about ambulance response times is not available specifically for Clitheroe.

The latest information available about the proportion of emergency calls resulting in an ambulance arriving at the scene of the reported incident within the Government's target response times, including the Lancashire Ambulance NHS Trust and those covering the north west of England, is shown in the table.

Total number of emergency calls 1996–97 to 2001–02 (thousand)

Ambulance service NHS trust	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*Percentage increase*
Rural services							
Cumbria	19.0	20.7	26.0	25.6	26.9	29.6	9.8
Lancashire	96.7	107.7	113.9	119.4	125.3	136.4	8.8
Urban							
Greater Manchester	215.5	222.5	229.5	259.6	272.5	284.0	4.2
Mersey Regional	183.5	193.7	221.7	222.6	228.1	243.9	6.9

Source:
DOH Health statistical health bulletin "Ambulance Services, England 2001–02"-Form KA34

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on how his Department ensures that primary care teams are made aware of the rights of *(a)* refugees and *(b)* asylum seekers to permanent GP registration. [86161]

Ms Blears: National health service medical primary care services are available free to all persons who are ordinarily resident in the United Kingdom. Refugees and asylum seekers given leave to remain in the UK, or awaiting the results of an application to remain, are regarded as ordinarily resident and entitled to full NHS general practitioner treatment.

This will be re-emphasised in a resource pack for those who work with asylum seekers, which has been developed with the Refugee Council and will be issued early this year. Department of Health initiatives such as local development schemes and personal medical services contracts also help locally in registering refugees and asylum seekers with GPs.

Cancer Treatment

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the most recent national average referral rate for non-urgent cases of suspected breast cancer was. [87474]

Ms Blears: Cancer referral guidelines were issued in March 2000 to help general practitioners identify patients with suspected cancer, including breast cancer and to refer them urgently where appropriate. We do not collect data on those patients who are routinely referred for investigation. The cancer services collaborative is working in every cancer network to modernise cancer care by streamlining and redesigning the care pathway ensuring all patients receive speedy diagnosis and treatment.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he plans to publish information on waiting times for treatment of cancers not covered by NHS cancer plan targets before 2005. [87962]

Ms Blears: The NHS Cancer Plan set out new goals to reduce waiting times for cancer treatment. Data is currently published by geographical area on the Department of Health website for the two week outpatient waiting time standard and the treatment targets for 2001. Reporting of performance against the December 2002 target of a two month maximum wait, from urgent general practitioner referral to treatment for breast cancer, will begin in 2003. National reporting of performance against the 2005 targets, which relate to all cancers, will similarly begin when those targets come into force. Arrangements are being put in place to enable those providing and commissioning services for cancer patients to monitor progress in the interim.

Cancer Plan Website

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much it cost to set up the NHS Cancer Plan website. [89358]

Ms Blears: The NHS Cancer Plan website is part of the overall Department of Health website. It is not possible to calculate either the costs of developing or maintaining a particular area of the Department of Health website. The content and format of the Cancer Plan website is currently being revised and will be launched this year.

Cancer Registries

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health to which Department the Cancer Registries are responsible; whether they are covered by the code of practice on access to Government information; and if he will make a statement on the availability to the public of data from the Cancer Registries. [83249]

Ms Blears: Individual cancer registries in England are responsible to regional directors of public health who will act to ensure that both local and national requirements are met on behalf of the Department of Health.

Information collected by cancer registries in England is published either by the individual registries or via the Office for National Statistics (ONS), in an aggregate format to protect patient confidentiality.

Cancer registries conform to both the national health service code of practice on patient information and the code of practice defined by the United Kingdom Association of Cancer Registries (UKACR).

Information processed by ONS on behalf of the Welsh cancer registry is published both by that registry and via the National Assembly for Wales.

Care Plan Costs

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has commissioned over the past 10 years on the economic costs of complying with the NHS and Community Care Act 1990 in *(a)* performing assessments and *(b)* developing care plans for patients being discharged from hospital. [85706]

Jacqui Smith: While the Department has commissioned a range of research into the implementation of the changes introduced by the NHS and Community Care Act 1990, none of this research looked specifically at the costs of undertaking assessments and developing care plans for patients being discharged from hospital. In general, however, the research confirms the cost-effectiveness of well-organised assessment and care management for vulnerable older people and other adults in hospital or the community.

Carers

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* carers and *(b)* young carers of school age there are in (i) the Twickenham constituency, (ii) the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames and (iii) London; what support is given to (A) carers and (B) young carers of school age; and if he will make a statement. [88819]

Jacqui Smith: The information on numbers of carers is not held centrally. Carers are entitled to an assessment to determine their needs as carers and eligibility for support. The Carers Grant, worth £100 million next year, provides money for local councils to provide short breaks for carers to enable them to continue in their caring role. Following my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's announcement in July the Grant will continue until 2006, during which time it will more than double to £185 million to provide extended care and 130,000 further breaks to carers.

Additionally for young carers we are supporting the development of over 100 projects across the country to give carers of school age access to appropriate advice, information and support or leisure.

Complementary Medicine

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which complementary treatments and therapies are available through the NHS. [88362]

Ms Blears: Front-line health professionals decide which complementary therapies to provide, depending on the evidence of their effectiveness and the availability of properly regulated practitioners. A survey of primary care trusts, conducted by the University of Sheffield in 2001, found that acupuncture, homeopathy, medical herbalism and osteopathy or chiropractic were most widely used.

Delayed Discharges

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many days were lost in the NHS in *(a)* England and *(b)* Wales due to delayed discharges in the last 12 months; and what was the estimated cost to the NHS. [82836]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* There was an average of 5,989 delayed transfers of care of patients of all ages in England per day, between the quarter beginning September 2001 and ending in June 2002. The broad estimate of the cost to the national health service where these patients have experienced delayed discharge in an acute hospital bed for this period is around £600,000 per day.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in Shropshire were classed as delayed discharges in each NHS trust in the last year for which figures are available. [83186]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested for Shropshire is shown in the table. The figures are not directly comparable because of the structural changes within the national health service.

Numbers of delayed discharges of patients of all ages by primary care trust

	Number
Quarter 2 2002–03	10
Quarter 1 2002–03	5
Numbers of delayed discharges of patients of all ages by health authorities	
Quarter 4 2001–02	9
Quarter 3 2001–02	27

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 5 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 963W, on delayed discharges, (1) if he will *(a)* list the organisations his Department consulted and *(b)* set out the methodology his Department used when calculating the extra £100 million for social services; [86923]

(2) what *(a)* assumptions and *(b)* data were used to make his estimate of the £100 million cost of transfer from the NHS to social services. [88562]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer dated 16 December 2002]*: The additional £100 million funding for social services announced on 28 November was not the subject of a formal consultation.

The assumptions underlying the £100 million figure are as follows: assuming that local authorities reach the targets they have set themselves to reduced delayed transfers of care by March 2003, and which are conditions of their receiving Building Care Capacity Grant for that year, there will be a total of 4,200 delays on average per day. Of the 4,200 delays, it is assumed that 1,900 would be at the £100 rate per day and 2,300 at the £120 rate per day. Of these, it is assumed that social services might be responsible for some 60 per cent. On that basis and on the assumption that social services make no further progress in reducing delays beyond the March 2003 targets, the total sum that social services departments would have to pay in reimbursements to the National Health Service per year would be around £100 million.

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the rates of delayed discharge were for health authorities in each of the last four quarters in the areas of *(a)* 3 star social services, *(b)* 2 star social services, *(c)* 1 star social services and *(d)* 0 star social services; [87322]

(2) which 3 star social services departments chose not to allocate their funding for Delayed Discharges, Special Grant, 2002–03, to reducing delayed discharge; [87323]

(3) what assessment he has made of the effects of the special grant for delayed discharges made available to social services departments in 2002–03; and if he will make a statement. [87324]

Jacqui Smith: The grant was used in a variety of ways, consistent with its purpose. High proportions of the grant were used to fund residential and nursing care placements, and increase fees. The funding allocated to councils will provide for a continued reduction in the number of delayed discharges from hospitals, so that 20 per cent. fewer beds are blocked in March 2003, compared to March 2002.

The National Health Service Quarter 2 (September 2002) figures on delayed discharge and emergency readmission have been placed in the Library, along with earlier quarters' data. These data are not available by council areas. Delayed discharges are a joint health and social services indicator, but data are submitted to the Department on the basis of NHS organisations, the data having been agreed with their social services partners. No social services departments chose not to allocate their building care capacity grant funding to reduce delayed discharge, as this was a condition of their receipt of the grant.

Depo-Provera

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the availability of the Depo-Provera injection; what the effect is of the level of availability; and what steps his Department is taking in response. [88242]

Ms Blears: Departmental officials became aware in early November that there was a shortage of the injectable contraceptive Depo-Provera, which was caused by production problems. Officials have been in regular contact with the manufacturer of this product to assist rapid action to alleviate the shortage. Doctors were advised that if Depo-Provera was unavailable locally they should agree with women individually the most suitable alternative form of contraception for them. Supplies of this product are now available but due to the previous shortages, it may take several weeks for the situation to fully return to normal. Departmental officials will continue to closely monitor the situation.

Drug Treatment

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of people suffering from addiction to class A and B drugs are receiving treatment for that addiction. [88766]

Ms Blears: This information is not available centrally.

In England, during the year 2000–01 the overall number of drug users reported as being in treatment was around 118,500.

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health of those undergoing drug treatment, how many *(a)* were referred by a GP, *(b)* are under GP supervision, *(c)* are heroin addicts, *(d)* have a dual diagnosis, *(e)* are prescribed (i) methadone and (ii) Subutex and *(f)* are in residential rehabilitation. [86695]

Ms Blears: Information on drug users undergoing treatment is as follows:

In 2001–02, 16 per cent. of drug users presenting to drug treatment agencies in England were reported as having been referred by a general practitioner[1].

In the six month period ending 31 March 2001 around 35,100 clients were reported at drug treatment agencies in England; around 1,900, or five per cent. were reported to be clients presenting to general practitioners[2].

In 2001–02, 73 per cent. of individual drug users who presented to drug treatment agencies in England were reported as having heroin as their main problem drug[3].

Information about dual diagnosis is not available centrally.

In the six month period ending 31 March 2001, about 8,000 drug misusers presenting for treatment were reported as having been prescribed methadone, amounting to 60 per cent. of all those who had been prescribed a treatment drug, and 420 buprenorphine, or three per cent. Information was collected when the individual first presented for treatment and other drugs may subsequently have been prescribed, as treatment developed[4].

Sources:

[1] Statistical press release "Provisional Statistics from the National Drug Treatment Monitoring System in England, 2001/02". http://www.doh.gov.uk/public/spndrugs0212.htm.

[2] Statistical bulletin "Statistics from the Regional Drug Misuse Databases for the six months ending March 2001". http://www.doh.gov.uk,public/sb0207.htm.

[3] Statistical press release "Provisional Statistics from the National Drug Treatment Monitoring System in England, 2001/02" http://vvww.doh.gov.uk/public/spndrugs0212.htm.

[4] Regional Drug Misuse Databases.

Drug/Alcohol Treatment (Epsom)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 11 December 2002, *Official Report*, columns 392–93W, if he will make a statement on the future of the Greenbank Drug and Alcohol Inpatient Unit at West Park in Epsom. [88361]

Ms Blears: Information on unit closures is not routinely collected centrally. However, I am advised by Surrey and Sussex Strategic Health Authority that the Greenbank Unit is planned to close in March 2003. This decision was taken following a full public consultation.

Surrey Oaklands National Health Service Trust has been working closely with service users and a multi-agency steering group to restructure services to meet the needs of a wider range of service users. This includes a stronger focus on drug users and socially excluded groups.

Herbal Medicines Directive

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what pharmaceutical production and testing standards will be imposed on herbal remedies by the proposed Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products Directive. [88687]

Ms Blears: The production and testing standards under the proposed Directive on Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products would be those which apply to herbal medicines with a marketing authorisation, but modified to the extent that there would not be a requirement to demonstrate the efficacy of a product for which a traditional use registration was sought. The proposed requirements are intended to provide appropriate consumer protection, for example, by ensuring that the correct ingredients of appropriate quality and free from unacceptable levels of contamination are used and that the proposed shelf life of the product can be supported. The specific requirements include meeting European guidelines on Good Manufacturing Practice for herbal medicines and compliance with the European Pharmacopoeia monographs for products of herbal origin.

Home Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many households received older person home care in each of the last five years. [83765]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 28 November 2002]:* At 31 March 2002, 661,000 older people were helped to live at home through the provision of a variety of community-based social services, an increase of 4 per cent., from 638,000 in March 1999. Community-based social services include day care, meals, transport and equipment as well as home care.

Homeless People

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which studies are looking at screening homeless people more effectively; and when they will be finalised. [83324]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* I am not aware of any Government studies currently looking at the effectiveness of health screening programmes for homeless people.

Hospital Discharge and Readmission

Mr. Paul Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many delayed hospital discharges there were associated with *(a)* delays in housing adaptations, *(b)* assessment for re-housing needs, and *(c)* other services provided by local authority housing departments in each year since 1997; [85707]

(2) if he will place in the Library a copy of the quarter 2 2002–03 emergency readmission and delayed discharge figures for over 75s, broken down by *(a)* region and *(b)* trust. [86870]

Jacqui Smith: Information from quarter 2 of 2002–03 on the numbers and percentage of delayed discharges and emergency readmissions for over 75s, at primary care trust level, has been placed in the Library. No further breakdown of this data is collected centrally.

We have recently announced the introduction of the access and systems capacity grant, which is a special grant to local councils to expand community based social care services and reduce hospital discharge. This is the first specific departmental investment in home improvement agencies and will contribute to reductions in delayed discharges by prompt supply of housing repairs and adaptations.

Informed Consent

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans the Government have to legislate on the subject of informed consent by or on behalf of incompetent patients in advance of the implementation of European Directive 2001/20/CE. [86978]

Ms Blears: There are no plans to introduce such legislation prior to the introduction of the regulations to implement European Directive 2001/20/EC.

Mental Health

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children under the age of 16 are receiving treatment for mental health problems. [88526]

Jacqui Smith: Children and adolescents with mental health problems are seen in a wide variety of health, social care, education and other settings, mainly at primary care level, by a wide variety of professionals. Information on total amounts is not collected centrally.

National Drugs Treatment Monitoring System

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the budget for the national drugs treatment monitoring system is; and by how much the system is projected to exceed its budget. [88359]

Ms Blears: The development of the national drug treatment monitoring system (NDTMS) has been seen as a priority project and a substantial investment has been made not only to develop the system, but also to maintain it for the next seven years. The cost of the system was originally estimated as follows:

	£
Cost of Development	543,484
Cost of support and maintenance over 7 years	600,650
Total cost over 7 years	1,144,134

As with any large scale project there will always be unforeseen additional requirements, which will need further investments. In the case of the NDTMS project, additional investments have been required to maintain the interim system and to ensure the development of the full software system remains on track. At present it is estimated that the original budget for the project has been exceeded by some 8 per cent.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the nature and objectives of the national drugs treatment monitoring system. [88360]

Ms Blears: The national drug treatment monitoring system (NDTMS) is the national system for collecting information about problem drug users presenting for and entering into structured drug treatment services. The NDTMS will also gather information on the number of people who sustain and complete treatment programmes. The primary function of the NDTMS is to provide information on the national drugs strategy treatment target:

"To increase the participation of problem drug users in drug treatment programmes by 55 per cent. by 2004 and by 100 per cent. by 2008, and increase year on year the proportion of users successfully sustaining or completing treatment programmes".

The system will become fully operational on 1 April 2003.

NHS Pensions Agency

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many *(a)* nurses and *(b)* health care workers applied to the NHS Pensions Agency for permanent injury benefit for a disorder in the year from April 2001 to March 2002; and how many were successful at (i) their first application and (ii) subsequent appeal; [89108]

(2) how many *(a)* nurses and *(b)* health care workers applied to the NHS Pensions Agency for permanent injury benefit relating to muscular skeletal disorders in the year from April 2001 to March 2002; and how many were successful at (i) their first application and (ii) subsequent appeal. [89109]

Mr. Hutton: I will reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Reproductive Health Services

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much he gave in each of the last five years to *(a)* Marie Stopes International, *(b)* International Planned Parenthood Federation, *(c)* British Pregnancy Advisory Service, *(d)* Pregnancy Advisory Service, *(e)* United Nations Population Fund and *(f)* Family Planning Association (UK) for the purpose of (i) abortion, (ii) family planning and (iii) other reproductive health services; and how much was given by his Department to other organisations, in each of the last five years for which figures are available, to promote reproductive (A) health care, (B) abortion and (C) family planning, broken down by organisation. [86857]

Ms Blears: The Department has not provided any funding to Marie Stopes International, International Planned Parenthood Federation, British Pregnancy Advisory Service, the Pregnancy Advisory Service (which is no longer in existence) or the United Nations Population Fund in any of the last five years. Funding has been given to the organisations shown in the table.

Funding for Brook Advisory Centres includes funding for various projects and core funding under the Section 64 General Scheme (Section 64 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968) to support the central office of this organisation for the purpose of reproductive health services and advice for young people aged under 25. Funding for the fpa includes funding for various projects and Section 64 funding to support the central office of the organisation. Funding for the Contraceptive Education Service is for the purposes of providing reproductive health advice and

information to the public and health professionals. Funding for Education for Choice was to support specific projects for the purposes of education on pregnancy choices and funding for Fertility UK was Section 64 funding to support the central office of this organisation for the purposes of family planning.

£

	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02	2002–03	Total
Brook Advisory Centres	158,953	126,460	121,000	120,000	120,000	646,413
fpa (formerly the Family Planning Association)	189,400	315 ,500	212,000	209,000	80,000	1,005,900
fpa (Contraceptive Education Service)	900,000	900,000	900,000	900,000	975,000	4,575,000
Education for Choice			31,000	52,000		83,000
Fertility UK	25,000	35,000	30,000	30,000		120,000
	1,248,353	1,341,960	1,264,000	1,311,000	1,175,000	6,340,313

Royal Alexandra Children's Hospital

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what NHS funding is allocated for total parental care *(a)* within the NHS and *(b)* administered at The Royal Alexandra Children's Hospital, Brighton. [81931]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not available from the Department, as expenditure on total parenteral nutrition cannot be disaggregated centrally from funding allocations.

Sexual Health

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money has been spent by the Government on sexual health in each of the last six years. [86569]

Ms Blears: Prior to the development of the sexual health and HIV strategy, there was no central departmental budget for sexual health. Funding was available under the Section 64 General Scheme (section 64 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968) and other central budgets to fund a variety of projects and organisations involved in sexual health provision and health promotion. Allocations for HIV/AIDS, which were mainstreamed from April 2002; are shown in the table.

Following publication of the sexual health and HIV strategy, new investment of £47.5 million was announced to support initiatives in the strategy. During 2001–02, we invested £5.5 million to prepare for implementation. During 2002–03, we have invested a further £14 million, including over £5 million in genito-urinary medicine services, £1.5 million to roll out the chlamydia screening programme and £2 million to launch the national .information campaign.

The vast majority of funding for sexual health services is from mainstream national health service allocations to health authorities, up to March 2002, and primary care trusts.

HIV/AIDS funding, England

£ million

	NHS	Local authorities	Voluntary sector
1996–97	237.7	13.7	1.63
1997–98	251.9	13.7	1.52
1998–99	281.4	13.7	1.58
1999–2000	286.4	15.5	1.60
2000–01	289.4	16.0	1.32
2001–02	331.0	16.5	1.16

Social Work Admissions System

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many applications were received by the social work admissions system in each of the last five years. [84808]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 3 December 2002]:* The number of individual social worker applications received by the social work admissions system in each of the last five years were:

Year	Number
1998	6,254
1999	5,175
2000	4,723
2001	4,703
2002	5,093

We also know that additional applications are likely to have been made direct to the course providers.

Unpasteurised Milk and Cream

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans the Government have to ban the sale of unpasteurised *(a)* milk and *(b)* cream. [88950]

Ms Blears: There are no plans to ban sales of unpasteurised milk and cream in England and Wales.

In Northern Ireland, there are no known sales of these products.

In Scotland, sales of raw cows' drinking milk and cream are banned, and there are plans to extend a ban to all raw drinking milk and cream.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Fraud

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many telephone calls were made to the National Benefit Fraud Hotline in *(a)* January, *(b)* February and *(c)* March in (i) 1999, (ii) 2000, (iii) 2001, and (iv) 2002. [86994]

Malcolm Wicks *[pursuant to his reply, 17 December 2002, Official Report, c. 772W]:* The information requested is in the table.

Number of calls to the National Benefit Fraud Hotline

Year	*January*	*February*	*March*
1999	13,925	13,798	16,901
2000	14,272	19,285	23,118
2001	17,340	18,191	28,093
2002	18,621	15,871	18,199

Source:
National Benefit Fraud Hotline

Pension Credit

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners within the *(a)* Twickenham constituency, *(b)* London borough of Richmond upon Thames and *(c)* London will benefit from the introduction of the pension tax credit in October 2003; and if he will make a statement. [88817]

Mr. McCartney: Estimates of Pension Credit entitlement are not available on an individual constituency or regional basis due to the insufficient sample cases in the survey data used. However just under half of all pensioner households across Great Britain will be eligible for Pension Credit. Such information as is available relates to pensioners receiving the Minimum Income Guarantee and is as follows:

Area	*MIG Recipients*[1]
Twickenham PC	1,600
LB Richmond upon Thames	2,700
London Government Office Region	212,100

[1] As at August 2002

Source:
Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry, August 2002

Pension Service

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what criteria will be placed on deciding eligibility to a home visit from the Pension Service; and which benefit forms the visiting officers will be trained to help pensioners with. [86884]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 12 December 2002]:* Where a pensioner requires a home visit from The Pension Service we expect to be able to provide one. Pensioners will have that option. There is as such no set criteria for deciding eligibility to a home visit although we expect the vast majority of queries will be dealt with swiftly and effectively without the need for a home visit. Indeed a simple call to a pension centre is likely to be the most effective and satisfactory way of dealing with customers' inquiries without the delay of appointments.

Our local service staff will be trained on pensioner entitlements including how to help our customers fill out application forms. This training will include detailed completion of claim forms for Minimum Income Guarantee, Retirement Pension, Disability Living Allowance, Attendance Allowance, Invalid Care allowance and Pension Credit. In addition staff will be trained to signpost customers with possible entitlement to Industrial Injuries, Constant Attendance Allowance, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit, Social Fund, Bereavement Benefit and general NHS information.

Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the effect is of a short period of residence in the UK on the rate of retirement pension payable to a British citizen living overseas in a country where pensions in payment are not subject to annual uprating. [88793]

Mr. McCartney: When a British citizen who is eligible for a UK State Pension returns to the UK, their State Pension is uprated for the duration of their stay only.

Winter Fuel Payment

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners within the *(a)* Twickenham constituency, *(b)* London borough of Richmond upon Thames and *(c)* London failed to claim the winter fuel allowance for the 2001 period; and if he will make a statement. [88818]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not available in the format requested. Most, but not all, people aged 60 and over are eligible for a Winter Fuel Payment. The vast majority of those eligible receive their payment automatically, without the need to claim. Of those who need to claim, it is up to the individual to choose whether to do so.

However, for winter 2001–02, over 17,000 people in Twickenham constituency, some 29,000 people in Richmond upon Thames local authority area and just over one million people in London received Winter Fuel Payments.

Source:
Matching Intelligence Data Analysis Service Winter Fuel Payment 2001–02 exercise.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Students

15. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to change the Government's targets for students entering higher education. [89221]

Margaret Hodge: It remains the Government's aim, as set out in the Department's public service agreement, to increase higher education participation towards 50 per cent. of 18 to 30-year-olds by the end of the decade. I will be publishing a strategy for higher education later this month which will include our plans for achieving the target.

Truancy

16. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent research he has commissioned into truancy. [89222]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department has commissioned research on the causes of truancy from school as part of its research programme which will be published around the end of this month. We are also evaluating the outcomes of the recent national truancy sweep exercise.

Sure Start

17. **Huw Irranca-Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on progress with the sure start scheme. [89223]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The first sure start programme, announced in 1998, has worked by bringing together early education, child care, health and family support for the benefit of young children living in disadvantaged areas and their parents.

On 11 December the Government launched the new sure start programme (in England) which will support families from pregnancy until children are 14. The new sure start will bring together universal, free, early education and more and better child care, with greater support where there is greater need, through child care tax credit, children's centres, and on-going support for sure start local programmes.

Exclusion

18. **Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on progress with the education and behaviour of children excluded from mainstream schooling. [89224]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: All local education authorities were committed to offering a full timetable to permanently excluded pupils from September 2002. In targeted schools in 34 local authorities provision is also being made for those excluded on a temporary basis. These arrangements will be extended to a further 27 local authorities in the coming year.

Qualifications

19. **Dr. Palmer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the analysis he has made of the degree to which the provision of education and training will match the economic demand for qualifications in the next 10 years. [89225]

Mr. Miliband: The Government have established sector skills councils to ensure that economic demand is more clearly articulated and the learning and skills council to ensure that provision is responsive to meet demand.

We are also working with key partners to ensure that advances in new technology result in improved choice and quality for learners.

Research and analysis on the value of education and training will be summarised in a forthcoming Department for Education and Skills publication, "Education and Skills: The Economic Benefit".

Admissions

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when new admissions arrangements provided for under the Education Act 2002 will come into effect. [88941]

Mr. Miliband: Some sections of the Act dealing with admissions have already been commenced. Most depend for implementation on Regulations, to be read in conjunction with revised Codes of Practice on School Admissions and School Admission Appeals. Subject to Parliamentary approval, the Regulations and Codes of Practice are expected to come into force on 20 January. Most aspects of the Regulations and Codes are intended to apply to admission arrangements affecting intakes from September 2004, which means, for example, that each LEA must have an admission forum in place by 20 March 2003. The obligation to co-ordinate admission arrangements applies to intakes from 2005 but LEAs are encouraged to co-ordinate secondary intakes earlier.

Basic Needs Funding (Wokingham)

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of whether Wokingham Unitary Authority would qualify for the last round of Basic Needs funding; and what discussions he has had with Wokingham Unitary Authority on its ability to qualify for the last round of Basic Needs funding. [89252]

Mr. Miliband: All local education authorities (LEAs) were invited to bid for Basic Need funding when the guidance for 2003–04 was issued on 30 July 2002, and the deadline for LEAs to submit their bids was 30 September 2002. It was for LEAs to decide whether or not to bid for funding based on the criteria in the guidance. Wokingham LEA did not submit any bids for Basic Need funding in 2003–04. Officials within the Department confirmed with Helen Rowlay at the LEA that no bids were being made.

Classroom Assistants

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many classroom assistants were in service in England in each year since 1997 in *(a)* primary schools, *(b)* secondary schools and *(c)* all schools. [89308]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested is shown in the table.

Maintained schools: full-time equivalent[1] number of teaching assistants by type of school—1997–2002— position in January each year—England

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Teaching Assistants[2]						
Nursery	2,119.1	2,099.3	2,201.1	2,249.0	2,322.9	2,476.4
Primary[3]	39,751.2	42,726.6	44,444.4	51,127.3	63,175.9	69,307.0
Secondary[3]	7,820.8	8,973.4	10,590.1	12,451.7	15,466.6	19,527.6
Special[4]	11,302.8	12,140.2	12,681.0	13,424.9	14,227.4	14,246.9

Maintained schools: full-time equivalent[1] number of teaching assistants by type of school—1997–2002— position in January each year— England

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Pupil Referral Units	267.8	366.1	428.9	538.6	622.7	891.7
Total Teaching Assistants	61,261.7	66,305.6	70,345.4	79,791.6	95,815.5	106,449.6

[1] Includes both full-time and the full-time equivalent of part-time non-teaching staff.
[2] Includes nursery assistants, special needs support staff, minority ethnic pupil support staff and non-teaching assistants. Excludes administrative staff, technicians and other non-teaching staff.
[3] Includes middle schools as deemed.
[4] Includes non-maintained special schools and special and general hospital schools.
Source:
Annual Schools Census

Departmental Advertising

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much money his Department has spent on *(a)* advertising, *(b)* marketing and *(c)* public relations in each year since 1997; and on which projects this money has been spent. [89297]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Expenditure from the Department's central advertising and publicity budget is as follows:

	£000
1997–98	10,879
1998–99	13,426
1999–2000	9,902
2000–01	14,595
2001–02	11,688
2002–03[1]	4,413

[1] Year to date

In addition to expenditure from this central budget, expenditure from budgets allocated to individual programmes will also include spend on publicity related activity. However, it is not possible, except at disproportionate cost, to separately identify all such publicity related expenditure.

What is possible is to identify expenditure on advertising and public relations drawn from all budgets and this is as follows:

£000

	Advertising	Public Relations
1997–98	9,992	0
1998–99	15,673	549
1999–2000	11,900	88
2000–01	29,066	794
2001–02	20,489	1,574
2002–03[1]	8,817	1,567

[1] Year to date

Campaigns over £500,000 are:

	£
1997–98	
Disability Discrimination	521,000
Modern Apprenticeships	912,000
National Traineeships	800,000
New Deal	6,409,000
1998–99	
New Deal	4,772,000
Reading and Literacy	3,648,000
Disability Discrimination	1,924,000
National Traineeships	1,502,000
Learning Direct	619,000
Career Development Loans	604,000
Millennium Bug Busters	585,000
1999–2000	
Disability Discrimination	2,643,000
Maths Year 2000	2,322,000
Age Diversity	1,128,000
National Traineeships	1,077,000
One	873,000
Childcare Link	810,000
Time Off for Study	702,000
2000–01	
Don't Quit Now	2,700,000
New Deal 50+	2,400,000
ICT Employability	2,011,000
Childcare Recruitment	1,821,000
Disability Discrimination	1,242,000
Modern Apprenticeships	856,000
Individual Learning Accounts	612,000
Fast Track Teachers	1,056,000
Parents' Magazine	1,484,000
2001–02	
Childcare Recruitment	2,505,000
New Deal 50+	673,000
Adult Basic Skills	5,096,000
Foundation Degrees	1,816,000
Modern Apprenticeships	1,560,000
Science Year 2001–02	1,803,000
Childcare Link	584,000
Connexions	1,277,000
Fast Track Teachers	1,250,000
Parents Magazine	770,000
Aim Higher	1,750,000
Millennium Volunteers	848,000
2002–03[1]	
Childcare Recruitment	666,000
Aim Higher	2,650,000
Foundation Degrees	542,000
Connexions	1,166,000
Adult Basic Skills	3,369,000

[1] Year to date

Dyslexia

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what guidance has been issued to local education authorities on the undertaking of tests to determine whether a school pupil is dyslexic; [89340]

(2) what his policy is on *(a)* updating assessments of children who have previously been assessed as dyslexic and *(b)* the incorporation of support for dyslexia in statements of special educational needs. [89341]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Guidance on identifying and assessing children's special educational needs is given in the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice, to which schools and local education authorities must have regard. The guidance is organised under four broad areas of need—communication and interaction; cognition and learning; behaviour, emotional and social development; and sensory and/or physical needs—to recognise that children often have needs in one or more areas. Dyslexia is referred to specifically in relation to communication and interaction and cognition and learning. The Department has also produced specific guidance to support pupils with dyslexia as part of the National Literacy Strategy.

Local education authorities (LEAs) must review statements of special educational needs at least annually to ensure that the educational provision specified remains appropriate. It is for individual LEAs to decide whether to reassess children previously assessed as dyslexic, taking into account the provisions of section 328 and 329A of the Educational Act 1996, and the advice contained in the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice. LEAs must also decide upon the appropriate level of support to include in statements for such pupils, having regard to the statutory guidance contained in the Code of Practice and the advice they have obtained as part of the statutory assessment of the child's special educational needs.

Education Act 2002

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list *(a)* schools and *(b)* local education authorities which have expressed an interest in establishing companies under the provisions of the Education Act 2002; and for what purpose. [88883]

Mr. Miliband: Provisions of the Education Act 2002 concerning school companies will commence on 20 January 2003, at the same time as relevant regulations come into force, and therefore no such school companies yet exist.

Although some schools and LEAs have contacted officials to discuss the power to form or join school companies, these inquiries are purely informal.

Regulation 25 of The School Companies Regulations 2002 and Regulation 17 of The School Companies (Private Finance Initiative Companies) Regulations 2002 provide for the supervising authority of a school company to notify the Secretary of State of certain details concerning the school company. Through this notification the Secretary of State will know the number of school companies in existence at any one time.

Education Facilities (Wokingham)

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to his answer of 20 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 142–43W, on education facilities (Wokingham), if he will place in the Library the list of criteria against which the PFI proposals were judged; why these criteria were chosen, what the *(a)* scoring system and *(b)* methodology used to assess the criteria were against which the PFI proposals were judged; and what weighting was given to each criterion when converting the scores into the ranking of the PFI proposal. [89253]

Mr. Miliband: Proposals from local education authorities for the 2003–04 schools PFI bidding round were assessed against five main criteria:

(a) the extent to which the project would contribute to raising educational standards and to tackling the most urgent premises related needs;

(b) the contribution to wider DfES and school priorities and initiatives;

(c) the contribution to wider Government priorities and initiatives;

(d) value-for-money;

(e) the contribution to the future development of public private partnerships, including PFI.

I have today placed a full copy of the bidding guidance for the 2003–04 PFI round in the Library.

Each proposal was evaluated independently by two officials from the Department's schools private finance unit and moderated through discussion with the full team of assessors. Technical assessment was provided by external quantity surveyors and the advice of other officials in the Department was sought, where appropriate.

The scores were weighted across the first three criteria, as follows:

(a) 40 per cent.

(b) 30 per cent.

(c) 30 per cent.

Criteria *(d)* and *(e)* were not included in the above weightings but assessed on a pass or fail basis.

Education Funding

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the education funding provision is in 2003–04 *(a)* for Leicestershire and *(b)* on average for English counties for (i) primary and (ii) secondary pupils. [88622]

Mr. Miliband: The average primary and secondary formula spending share per pupil for Leicestershire and for upper tier authorities is set out in the table.

£

	Average level of primary formula spending share per pupil	*Average level of secondary formula spending share per pupil*
Leicestershire	2,083	2,663
Upper tier authorities	2,184	2,771

The new system of funding for LEAs consists of a basic entitlement which is the same for all pupils, plus a top up for all deprived pupils, which is the same for all deprived pupils, and a further top up for those LEAs in areas with additional costs for recruitment and retention of staff. The average formula spending share per pupil for upper tier authorities is higher than for Leicestershire, because most upper tier authorities have a higher percentage of deprived pupils, and some have higher area costs.

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the *(a)* cash and *(b)* percentage change in education funding for Leicestershire County Council local education authority in each year from 1991–92 to the latest year for which figures are available. [88623]

Mr. Miliband: The tables show the Department's total Education Standard Spending Assessment (ESSA), revenue and capital grant allocated to Leicestershire local education authority for the financial years 1997–98 to 2002–03 along with cash and percentage change for these years. 2002–03 figures are to date and provisional. The local government reorganisation and changes in ESSA methodology means that data for financial years 1991–92 to 1996–97 does not conform to current boundaries so comparable figures are not available.

Education standard spending assessment and revenue grant

£ million

	Total cash	*Year on year cash change*	*Year on year percentage change*
1997–98	207.9	N/A	N/A
1998–99	221.8	+13.9	+7
1999–2000	238.6	+16.8	+8
2000–01	266.1	27.5	+12
2001–02	290.2	24.1	+9
2002–03	310.4	20.2	+7

Note:

Revenue funding comprises Standards Fund Grant (Departmental contribution), School Standards Grant, School Budget Support Grant, Education Budget Support Grant, Post 16 Budget Support Grant, Nursery Education Grant, Childcare Grant, Teachers Pay Reform Grant, Education Maintenance Allowance, Transitional Funding and Transitional Insurance Grant.

Capital

£ million

	Total cash	*Year on year cash change*	*Year on year percentage change*
1997–98	2.9	N/A	N/A
1998–99	6.5	+3.6	+124
1999–2000	9.0	+2.5	+38
2000–01	21.0	+12.0	+133
2001–02	15.7	-5.3	-25
2002–03	25.0	+9.3	+59

Note:

Funding includes Basic Need (ACG), Standards Fund Grant (Departmental contribution), Voluntary Aided School Grant, Schools Access Initiative, Supplementary Credit Approvals and, New Deal for Schools Grant.

General Teaching Council

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the unit cost is of collecting General Teaching Council registration fees by *(a)* compulsory deduction and *(b)* voluntary payments. [88887]

Mr. Miliband: I am informed by the General Teaching Council that it estimates the direct cost to the Council of collecting the registration fee for 2002–03 through voluntary payments from 153,000 teachers to be £90,000. The direct cost incurred by the Council in respect of a further 227,000 teachers whose fee was deducted from salary is estimated to be £166,000. The Council expects administrative costs to reduce next year as fee collection processes bed down.

Individual Learning Accounts

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimates he has made of the money lost through fraudulent activities associated with the individual learning account scheme. [89309]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The precise extent of fraudulent activity within the Individual Learning Account programme will not be known until the Department's investigations are complete. However, the Department estimates that fraud and serious irregularities may amount to some £67 million.

Modern Apprenticeships

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what hourly rate of pay an individual who signs up for a modern apprenticeship is entitled to receive during the course of his or her training. [88731]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: There is no national or average hourly rate of pay for modern apprentices. The rate of pay for a modern apprentice is agreed by the employer and the individual apprentice. Modern apprentices are either paid a wage by their employer or receive a training allowance. The minimum training allowance is £40 per week.

Music Teaching

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent research his Department has undertaken to assess the music literacy of children in schools; and if he will make a statement. [88679]

Mr. Miliband: The Department for Education and Skills has carried out no recent research into the music literacy of children in schools. However, the effectiveness of National Curriculum music continues to be monitored through teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3.

Last year, the Department conducted a national survey of instrumental lessons and other music activities provided by LEA Music Services. A summary of the results is available on the DfES website at www.dfes.gov.uk/musicservices

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps he is taking to encourage *(a)* teaching, *(b)* listening to and

(c) participation in music in schools; and how much his Department has spent on music in schools in each year since 1997. [88680]

Mr. Miliband: Music is a statutory entitlement for all pupils up to the age of 14, and can be taken as an option at Key Stage 4.

My Department is strongly committed to music education and has a number of projects underway to encourage the teaching and learning of music in schools. For example, we have made a commitment, over time, to offer every primary school child the opportunity to learn a musical instrument. We have commissioned the QCA to produce new units for the music schemes of work to help teachers work more effectively with peripatetic music specialists and to develop their confidence and skills; and we are exploring best practice in music education through the inspection of LEA Music Services; through a network of advanced skills teachers for music; and through six pilot projects focusing primarily on instrumental tuition at Key Stage 2.

With regard to the amount spent on music in schools, it is for individual schools to use their budgets as they judge appropriate, in music as in other areas. Additional funds from this Department come primarily through the Music Standards Fund (MSF) and the Music and Dance Scheme (MDS). Since it was set up in 1999, this Department has provided around £125 million through the MSF for the protection and expansion of LEA Music Services; while the MDS has allocated just under £65 million to gifted and talented young musicians since 1997 through its Aided Pupil Scheme.

National Insurance (Teachers)

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much the increases in national insurance on teachers' salaries will cost, expressed on a per pupil basis, in the next financial year. [89216]

Mr. Miliband: The estimated costs of the increase in national insurance contributions for teachers will be in the region of £15 per pupil in 2003–04 when overall funding per pupil will rise by an average of £140 in real terms.

Pupil Violence

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many serious injuries to teachers caused by violence were reported to the Health and Safety Executive in each year from 1999–2000 to 2001–02. [88885]

Mr. Miliband: The Health and Safety Executive statistics for all school and post-school teaching sectors in Great Britain cover reported injuries that lead to an absence from work of more than three days. In 1999–2000 there were 160 such reported injuries. In 2000–01 there were 171. The provisional figure for 2001–02 is 143.

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* teachers and *(b)* head teachers have encountered violence or abuse from pupils in each year since 1997. [89212]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The information requested is not centrally collected. But any act of violence or abuse against heads, teachers or other school staff is one too many. Pupils must respect the authority of school staff, and parents must take their share of responsibility. That is why we are proposing to extend Parenting Orders.

School Exams (Re-marked Papers)

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of re-marked papers at *(a)* GCSE, *(b)* AS-level and *(c)* A-level resulted in marks being (i) increased and (ii) decreased in each of the last three years. [88939]

Mr. Miliband: The data for 2002 are currently being collated by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and will be included in the authority's annual report on inquiries on results and appeals to be published in April. Re-mark or inquiries on results outcomes have only included the possibility of a reduction in grade since 2001. Data for 2000 and 2001 are set out as follows.

	2000		*2001*		
	Percentage of entries involved in inquiries	*Percentage of inquiries where grade raised*	*Percentage of entries involved in inquiries*	*Percentage of inquiries where grade raised*	*Percentage of inquiries where grade lowered*
A-level	3.8	16	2.6	18.8	1.2
AS-level	1.5	15	2.5	16.5	0.5
GCSE	1.0	11	0.8	16.9	0.1

Schools (Race Relations)

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schools did not have a written statement of race relations policy in place by 31 May. [88889]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The Commission for Racial Equality has responsibility for the enforcement of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2002. Ofsted is responsible, through their routine school inspections, for ensuring that schools have a written race equality policy in place. There is no information currently available to indicate how many schools have not complied with this specific duty.

Schools (Specialist Status)

Mr. Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schools have been granted specialist status in each year since 1997, broken down by *(a)* local education authority and *(b)* category of specialism. [89302]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Secondary Schools (Admission Policies)

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what advice he gives to local education authorities on admission policies to secondary schools from out of area children; and if he will make a statement. [89373]

Mr. Miliband: Local education authorities (LEAs) and admission authorities for schools may set their own admission arrangements, as long as they comply with legislation and have regard to the statutory Code of Practice on School Admissions. The Code gives advice to LEAs and schools on setting admission arrangements, and refers to the 'Greenwich Judgement' of 1989 which ruled that LEA maintained schools could not refuse applications simply because a child did not live in the Authority's administrative area. However, admission policies may give priority for entry to oversubscribed schools to children who live within a specified catchment area, to those who live closest to the school, or (for secondary schools) to those who attend named "feeder" schools. These, and the many other criteria which are used to determine priority for admission to schools, may include children who live both inside and outside a LEA's area.

Teachers' Hours

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average working week for teachers in England was in each year since 1997 in *(a)* primary schools, *(b)* secondary schools and *(c)* all schools. [89307]

Mr. Miliband: Information on the average working week for teachers for each year since 1997 is not available. The School Teachers' Review Body has carried out diary studies on over 3,000 teachers in 300 schools based on one week in March 1994, 1996 and 2000. Their findings in respect of the average hours per week worked were as follows:

	Primary	*Secondary*
Classroom teachers		
1994	48.8	48.9
1996	50.8	50.3
2000	52.8	51.3
Headteachers		
1994	55.4	61.1
1996	55.7	61.7
2000	58.9	60.8

Threshold Assessments

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills in what proportion of cases the threshold assessment made by a headteacher has been overturned in each round of applications. [88940]

Mr. Miliband: Details about the proportion of threshold assessments made by headteachers in England and Wales which were overturned in each round of applications can be found in the following table:

Round	*Percentage Overturned headteacher assessments*
1	0.24%
2	0.29%
3	†

* England only. Information in Wales not collected in Round 1
† Information not available until summer 2003

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Affordable Housing

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has *(a)* to increase the supply of affordable housing in areas of shortage and *(b)* to make changes to reduce the loss of housing stock through the Right to Buy. [88546]

Mr. McNulty: In his statement to the House about sustainable communities on 18 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 438, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister promised to return to the House with a comprehensive long-term programme of action to tackle a number of housing and planning issues in order to deliver a step change in the Government's policies for building successful, thriving and inclusive communities in all regions. The statement, which will be made shortly, will set out how the additional funding announced in the 2002 spending review will be used and what it will buy over the three years up to 2005–06. It will cover the provision of affordable housing in areas of shortage.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is concerned about some aspects of the way in which the Right to Buy is operating, and about exploitation of the rules, and is looking at ways of addressing this.

Homeless People

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many homeless people, broken down by local authority, have been placed in hotel annexes of self-contained accommodation where meals were not provided in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [89125]

Mrs. Roche: Information distinguishing the number of households accommodated in self-contained hotel annexes has only been collected since March 2002 (previously, local authorities recorded such accommodation either as bed and breakfast or as private sector accommodation). These annexes are not necessarily directly attached to a hotel, and meals may or may not be provided, but the household has exclusive use of all facilities.

Information on households in such accommodation confirmed, or not reported, by local authorities in England at the end of each quarter since March 2002 is presented in the table; authorities not listed reported nil returns.

Homeless households accommodated by local authorities in self-contained hotel annexes during 2002, as at

	30 March	*30 June*	*30 September*
Adur	2	[1]—	[1]—
Arun	0	[1]—	0
Babergh	[1]—	[1]—	0
Barking and Dagenham	1	0	0
Barnet	482	[1]—	682
Basildon	[1]—	0	[1]—
Bexley	40	34	34
Boston	0	[1]—	0
Bradford	0	0	5
Brent	16	11	4
Bromley	36	37	30
Broxbourne	17	9	22
Calderdale	2	0	0
Camden	310	305	376
Carrick	0	0	[1]—

Homeless households accommodated by local authorities in self-contained hotel annexes during 2002, as at

	30 March	30 June	30 September
Chelmsford	[1]—	0	0
Chesterfield	[1]—	[1]—	0
Christchurch	3	0	8
City of London	13	12	12
Colchester	0	0	[1]—
Craven	0	0	[1]—
Crawley	0	[1]—	[1]—
Dartford	1	[1]—	1
Doncaster	2	2	0
Dudley	0	0	[1]—
Ealing	9	19	68
Easington	0	0	1
East Cambridgeshire	0	18	0
East Riding of Yorkshire	0	[1]—	0
East Staffordshire	1	0	0
Eastbourne	22	0	0
Elmbridge	0	0	[1]—
Enfield	820	833	827
Epsom and Ewell	0	0	1
Erewash	[1]—	[1]—	0
Fylde	[1]—	0	0
Greenwich	3	29	2
Guildford	0	0	1
Hackney	[1]—	[1]—	92
Halton	[1]—	0	[1]—
Hammersmith and Fulham	[1]—	0	0
Harborough	[1]—	0	0
Haringey	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Harrow	4	10	8
Havering	[1]—	0	0
Hertsmere	0	6	7
Hillingdon	120	119	88
Hounslow	0	0	45
Ipswich	0	0	1
Islington	[1]—	[1]—	297
Kensington and Chelsea	0	294	349
Kirklees	0	0	[1]—
Knowsley	2	[1]—	0
Lambeth	[1]—	130	183
Leicester	[1]—	[1]—	0
Lewes	1	0	0
Lewisham	[1]—	0	0
Luton	66	37	69
Macclesfield	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Medway	7	[1]—	[1]—
Merton	0	6	2
Mid Sussex	1	0	0
Newcastle upon Tyne	0	[1]—	[1]—
Newham	[1]—	184	198
Northampton	0	0	1
Nottingham City	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Oxford	[1]—	[1]—	0
Penwith	0	[1]—	0
Portsmouth	9	13	14
Preston	0	[1]—	[1]—
Purbeck	0	1	8
Redbridge	91	122	91
Richmond upon Thames	1	21	18
Richmondshire	1	0	0
Rotherham	0	2	0
Solihull	0	0	[1]—
South Bedfordshire	0	0	[1]—
South Gloucestershire	0	0	7
South Somerset	[1]—	0	0
Southwark	[1]—	7	20
Spelthorne	0	[1]—	[1]—
Stockport	0	11	17
Sunderland	0	0	[1]—
Surrey Heath	3	4	3
Sutton	5	6	3
Tameside	1	5	6
Tamworth	0	[1]—	0
Three Rivers	0	1	0
Torbay	16	16	0
Torridge	0	0	2
Tower Hamlets	177	149	99
Tunbridge Wells	6	9	6
Walsall	0	0	[1]—
Waltham Forest	193	225	249
Warrington	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
West Berkshire	0	[1]—	0
West Lindsey	[1]—	0	0

Homeless households accommodated by local authorities in self-contained hotel annexes during 2002, as at

	30 March	30 June	30 September
West Oxfordshire	1	0	1
West Somerset	0	1	0
West Wiltshire	0	0	4
Westminster	107	90	134
Winchester	0	[1]—	[1]—
Windsor and Maidenhead	1	0	0
Woking	[1]—	0	0
Wokingham	0	2	20
Wolverhampton	0	0	[1]—

[1] Not reported

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which of the top 44 authorities have indicated that they anticipate meeting the commitment that no homeless family with children will live in bed and breakfast accommodation by March 2003, as stated in Issue No 5 of the Bed and Breakfast Unit Newsletter. [89126]

Mrs. Roche: The Government have made a clear commitment that by March 2004 no local authority should place a homeless family with children in Bed and Breakfast accommodation other than in an emergency, and even then for no more than six weeks. In April 44 of the highest using B&B authorities were required to produce bed and breakfast action plans detailing how they would meet the commitment by March 2004. Some authorities set out ambitious plans to meet the commitment a year early in March 2003, 10 currently appear on target to do so:

London borough of Camden, Brighton and Hove city council, London borough of Richmond upon Thames, Colchester borough council, London borough of Waltham Forest, Poole unitary council, City of York council, Royal borough of Kingston,Hastings borough council, London borough of Harrow.

Homelessness Act

Mr. Love: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what evaluation has been undertaken of the implementation by local housing authorities of the Homelessness Act 2002 and associated statutory instruments; and if he will make a statement. [89397]

Mrs. Roche: The Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002 (si 2002/2051), made under the Housing Act 1996, and the main homelessness provisions of the Homelessness Act 2002 came into force on 31 July 2002. The Homelessness Directorate within the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is monitoring implementation of the new provisions, including local housing authorities' progress in carrying out a homelessness review in their district and preparing a homelessness strategy for adoption and publication by 30 July 2003. In addition, local housing authorities have been asked to submit a statement to the directorate indicating how they propose to spend their share of £10 million, allocated by the directorate in 2002–03, to assist with the cost of implementing the Homelessness Priority Need Order. The provisions of the 2002 Act which amend part 6 of the Housing Act 1996 (allocation of housing) will not come into force until 31 January 2003.

National Land Information Service

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what plans he has to make use of the provision for

differential pricing contained in the Electronic Communications Act 2000 to support the work of the National Land Information Service; [88672]

(2) how many local authorities have introduced pricing for the electronic provision of answers to land and property search enquiries; [88656]

(3) what plans he has to provide financial support to the National Land Information Service to encourage take up of its services; [88670]

(4) whether it is his policy to support differential pricing for local authorities for the provision of answers to land and property search enquiries between electronic search and other methods of searches; [88658]

(5) what plans he has for action in the next six months to encourage local authorities to introduce pricing for the electronic provision of answers to land and property search enquiries; [88657]

(6) what assessment he has made of the *(a)* administrative and *(b)* staffing cost to local authorities of responding to land and property search enquiries by (i) electronic means and (ii) other means; [88671]

(7) what steps he has taken in the last six months to encourage local authorities to introduce pricing that encourages take-up of the electronic provision of answers to land and property search enquiries. [88655]

Mr. McNulty: The Government supports the National Land Information Service (NLIS) initiative as a way of delivering property searches electronically within the context of the 2005 target for e-enabling public services and as a part of the seller's pack initiative. Over the last year the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has supported NLIS by contributing to a reception for exemplar authorities and co-ordinating the distribution of a letter to all authorities briefing them on the benefits of NLIS and the National Land and Property Gazetteer (NLPG). In particular, the briefing [paragraph 13] makes the case for lower fees as an incentive for electronic searches. Copies of the letter have been placed in the Library of the House. Officials in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and other government departments have formed a central government stakeholders group to co-ordinate work with NLIS across Government. NLIS is an integral part of our proposals to reform the home buying and selling process. It provides the information needed for conveyancing searches more quickly and with more certainty than paper-based systems. NLIS will help ensure that sellers' packs can be produced quickly and thus reduce the scope for gazumping and other problems to occur.

Fees for searches of the local land charges are prescribed by my right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor. Fees for other land and property searches are set by individual local authorities. These powers are already wide enough to allow different fees to be set for electronic and manual searches, so the question of an order under the Electronic Communications Act does not arise. As with other services they provide, it is the responsibility of local authorities to set income targets and fees for dealing with conveyancers' enquiries, taking account of the cost of the service and the level of charges the market will bear. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister supports reasonable levels of differential pricing where local authorities consider this appropriate in light of these criteria. Completely electronic based services are likely to be cheaper and the briefing quotes the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) and NLIS calculation that fees for searches received could be set at least 18 per cent. lower than for other searches (even without counting savings from electronic payment).

There has been no assessment of administrative and staffing costs of the search methods as it is for councils to set the level of charges. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is encouraging Information House's efforts to market NLIS and the cost savings from e-enabling is clearly an attractive part of the business case for adoption. NLIS reports that over 70 authorities have introduced differential pricing for land and property searches.

It is not the intention of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to offer financial support to either Information House or individual councils to accelerate take up of NLIS. It has always been framed as a self-funding proposition for both Information House and participation councils. However, councils may, if they wish, use part of the 200,000 capital grant made available by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Implementing Electronic Government monies) for e-Government to support local implementation of NLIS.

Over the next month and beyond, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will work with other government departments and NLIS in the context of the Central Government Stakeholders group to consider ways of encouraging the take up and success of NLIS. Officials are currently working with the IDeA and Information House to discuss the provision of funding to support the NLPG project and the development of Local Land and Property Gazetteers (LLPGs) in local authorities. The implementation of LLPGs in local authorities and NPLG will assist take up of NLIS. Officials in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Lord Chancellors Department are working together to examine a proposal from the Local Government Association for differential prescribed fees for searches of the local land charges register.

Refrigerators (Recycling)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the local authorities who have made representations to his Department for additional resources to deal with the recycling of refrigerators; and if he will make a statement. [88820]

Mr. Leslie: The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is the Department with lead interest in this issue and they have received five representations since Special Grant Report No. 109 was approved by Parliament on 16 December 2002, from the following areas:

Cambridgeshire county council;

Devon county council;

Gloucs county council;

Nottinghamshire county council; and

Stoke-on-Trent city council.

Special Grant No. 109 provided £40 million to cover the extra costs to local authorities as a result of the Ozone Depleting Substances Regulations for the period 2002–03. Local authorities previously received an extra £6 million through Revenue Support Grant to cover the period from the introduction of the Regulations on 1 January 2002 through to 31 March 2002. Additional funding for 2003–04 onwards has been provided through Spending Review 2002 within Revenue Support Grant. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is currently consulting on its proposals for the funding of local authorities' revenue expenditure in 2003–04 and will consider carefully all representations received on these proposals.

Section 106

Mr. Love: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment has been undertaken of the operation by local authorities of section 106 planning obligations; and if he will make a statement. [89395]

Mr. McNulty: The consultation document "Reforming Planning Obligations—delivering a fundamental change" issued in December 2001 received over 500 replies. Many of these were from local authorities that provided information on how they use planning obligations.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will publish a further consultation document on planning obligations in the near future.

Social Housing

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to ensure that the increased funding announced in the Spending Review 2002 is used to provide good quality social housing for rent. [88543]

Mr. McNulty: The 2002 Spending Review settlement provided £1.4 billion extra for housing, taking the total housing spend to over £4.5 billion (rising to £5.9 billion when the Major Repair Allowance is taken into account) by 2005–06.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has channelled £365 million from the Spending Review to the Housing Corporation's approved development programme for 2003–04 to provide housing for rent and low cost home ownership. It must, as a minimum, comply with the corporation's scheme development standards.

The remainder of the funding from the Spending Review will be allocated when my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister reports to the House with a comprehensive long term programme of action to tackle a number of housing and planning issues in order to deliver a step change in the Government's policies for building successful, thriving and inclusive communities in all regions. The statement, which will be made shortly, will set out how the additional funding announced in the 2002 spending review will be used and what it will buy over the three years up to 2005–06.

Temporary Accommodation

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what discussions he has had with ministerial colleagues to ensure that information on the placement of families in temporary accommodation is shared among statutory agencies across local authority boundaries, with particular reference to *(a)* housing departments, *(b)* education authorities, *(c)* social services, *(d)* primary care trusts and *(e)* the National Asylum Support Service in order to ensure that such families can gain access to the services to which they are entitled. [88545]

Mrs. Roche: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is jointly funding the Association of Local Government and the Greater London Authority to develop a notification project which will improve systems for London boroughs to make notifications to housing, health, social services and education authorities of families with children placed into and leaving temporary accommodation.

The Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities, issued in July 2002, was published jointly by my right hon. Friends the Deputy Prime Minister and the Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn). The code includes general guidance about joint working between housing authorities, social services and health authorities, and specific guidance on the importance of local authorities ensuring that all babies and young children placed in temporary accommodation have the opportunity to receive health and environmental checks from health visitors and other primary health care professionals.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister also hosts an ad hoc Ministerial Committee on Homelessness, chaired by myself to ensure dialogue between departments, which includes Ministers with portfolios covering housing, education, social services, health and asylum issues.

SCOTLAND

Accreditation

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what her Department is doing to support the Government's policy on accreditation. [88085]

Mrs. Liddell: The United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) is recognised by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry as the sole national body for the accreditation, against international standards, of certification and inspection bodies, testing and calibration laboratories. My Department currently has no schemes requiring accreditation.

Airport Expansion

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions she has had with ministerial colleagues on the expansion of airport capacity in Scotland. [89324]

Mrs. Liddell: I have regular discussions with my ministerial colleagues on a wide range of issues, including matters relating to airport capacity in Scotland. The Government, in its consultation documents on future development of air transport in the United Kingdom, has jointly with the Scottish Executive sought comments from the aviation industry

and all those affected by air travel on issues affecting the future development of air services in Scotland, including airport capacity. This consultation process is still ongoing and will inform the development of the Government's White Paper on aviation policy to be publish next year.

Boundary Commission

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on her plans to implement the latest review by the Boundary Commission for Scotland. [88594]

Mrs. Liddell: The Boundary Commission is required to submit its final report before December 2006. It is a matter for the Commission when, within that timescale, it does so. I am required by the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 to lay the report before Parliament, together with the draft of an Order in Council giving it effect, with or without modifications, as soon as may be thereafter.

Christmas Expenses

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many departmental Christmas cards she and her Ministers intend to send in 2002; how much these cards will cost *(a)* to buy, *(b)* to post and *(c)* in staff time to sign, address and place in envelopes; and if she will place in the Library a sample copy of the official Christmas card she has sent this year. [88107]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* Scotland Office Ministers sent around 420 Christmas cards. Other cards were issued by the Department. The total cost of purchasing Christmas cards was £830 and the expenditure was incurred in accordance with the principles on financial procedures and propriety set out in Government Accounting. Details of postage costs and staff time involved in issuing the cards is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. I have arranged for a copy of the Scotland Office Christmas card to be placed in the Library.

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much will be spent on *(a)* entertaining, *(b)* Christmas decorations and *(c)* other festive activities this Christmas season by her Department and Government agencies answerable to her Department; and of this sum how much will be spent in Ministers' (i) private offices and (ii) official residences. [88131]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* My Department spent £1,520 on Christmas decorations for the public entrances to its office buildings. The expenditure was incurred in accordance with the principles on financial procedures and propriety set out in Government Accounting.

No money has been spent on entertaining or other festive activities in the Department or Ministers' private offices. I do not have an official residence.

Green Ministers

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which Minister in her Department is the nominated Green Minister; how often she has attended meetings of the Green Ministers; and which official has responsibility for the DEFRA rural proofing check-list in her Department. [88454]

Mrs. Liddell: My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Scotland Office represents the Scotland Office on the ministerial committee ENV(G).

Policy responsibility for the rural proofing check-list in the Scotland Office rests with the Parliamentary and Constitutional Division.

Tax/Government Spending

Mr. Joyce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will calculate *(a)* the tax revenue from Scotland since 1980 and *(b)* the total government spending in Scotland since 1980; and if she also will calculate these figures omitting tax revenues from the continental shelf. [88219]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* A table setting out estimates of aggregate expenditure and revenues for Scotland is provided in the table. As noted in the footnote to the table, there are different sources for different parts of the series and therefore some potential for variation in the estimating approaches used.

Estimated Aggregate Expenditure and Revenues, Scotland 1980–81 to 1999–2000

£ billion

Financial year	Expenditure[1]	Revenues (excluding North Sea revenues)[1]	UK North Sea revenues[2]
1980–81	11.0	8.5	3.7
1981–82	12.3	10.0	6.5
1982–83	13.3	10.6	7.8
1983–84	14.2	11.4	8.8
1984–85	15.1	12.0	12.0
1985–86	15.8	13.1	11.3
1986–87	16.6	13.7	4.8
1987–88	18.7	14.9	4.6
1988–89	19.4	16.3	3.2
1989–90	21.6	17.6	2.4
1990–91	22.3	18.7	2.3
1991–92	24.2	19.5	1.0
1992–93	27.0	19.4	1.3
1993–94	28.6	20.2	1.2
1994–95	29.9	22.1	1.6
1995–96	31.3	23.9	2.3
1996–97	31.5	25.0	3.3
1997–98	32.2	26.8	3.3
1998–99	33.1	28.4	2.5
1999–2000	33.8	29.8	2.5

[1] *Sources:* 1978–79 to 1987–88—unpublished data used to compile parliamentary answer, 21 March 1997, *Official Report*, column 969;
1987–88 to 1991–92—unpublished data produced in September 1993 by the Scottish Office, using the methodology used for the publication "Government Expenditure & Review In Scotland" (GERS) and updating the first GERS, 1992;
1991–92 to 1995–96—GERS 1995–96 (Scottish Office 1997);
1995–96 to 1999–2000—GERS 1999–2000 (Scottish Executive 2001).

[2] Petroleum revenue tax, oil royalties and North Sea Corporation Tax before ACT set-off.

Source:
Inland Revenue Statistics

NORTHERN IRELAND

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what training is provided within the health and social services system in Northern Ireland in relation to attention deficit hyperactivity for workers with personal contact with sufferers to help inform their practice. [88260]

Mr. Browne: Psychiatrists are educated about Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) during their general professional training as part of child and adolescent mental health subjects. Child and adolescent psychiatrists, who undergo higher professional training prior to becoming consultants focus on relevant areas such as ADHD in more depth. Postgraduate training, as part of continual professional development, also ensures increased awareness and keeps professionals abreast of developments in this area.

Nurses and social workers can also specialise in child and adolescent psychiatry and in 2001 17 nurses and each year six social workers have received this training.

Ballycastle to Campbeltown Ferry

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the progress towards restoring the Ballycastle to Campbeltown ferry. [88935]

Mr. Pearson: The Scottish Executive has the lead role in relation to the tendering exercise to restore the Ballycastle to Campbeltown ferry service. Northern Ireland officials are working closely with their Scottish colleagues and final tender documentation will be issued shortly. This holds open the prospect of the service resuming in time for the summer 2003 season.

Broadband Coverage

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much public finance has been allocated to support extending broadband coverage in Northern Ireland. [89110]

Mr. Pearson: In September 2001 the Northern Ireland Executive approved £18.04 million to be allocated to telecommunications development over the following three years. In addition Northern Ireland secured £1.46 million as its share of the £30 million UK Broadband Fund.

In November 2002, under the EU's Interreg III Programme, approximately £4 million (7 million euros) was allocated to stimulate investment in efficient communications and e-commerce infrastructure in Northern Ireland and the border counties of ROI. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment is liasing with the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (DCMNR) in Dublin to develop a Call in line with the aims of Interreg III.

Childminders

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which health trusts in Northern Ireland permit children to be looked after by childminders who are related to them; and how many examples there are in each trust. [88060]

Mr. Browne: Health and social services trusts do not collect the information requested as a matter of routine enquiry. The information therefore would not be readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Eastern Health Board

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will take measures to achieve greater equality of funding for the NHS trusts in the Eastern Health Board. [88914]

Mr. Browne: The resources available to the DHSSPS are distributed to each of the four HSS Boards on the basis of a regional capitation formula, which takes various factors into account, such as the population profile and additional need. It is the responsibility of each board to allocate resources equitably to its population. Boards are encouraged to use the capitation formula to inform spending decisions for their sub-board populations.

The Eastern Health and Social Services Board is currently reviewing the equitable distribution of resources to its sub-board population. The board has been working on a strategy to address the equitable allocation of resources to all trusts in its area and, following public consultation, implementation of the resultant strategy should commence from April 2003.

Grammar Schools

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the future of grammar schools in Northern Ireland. [88796]

Jane Kennedy: I would refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir Teddy Taylor) on 27 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 302.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what further action he intends to take to reduce hospital waiting lists; and if he will make a statement. [88802]

Mr. Browne: A wide range of measures is being taken to tackle hospital waiting lists. These include the expansion of existing bed capacity, the development of protected elective facilities, the provision of additional in-patient procedures, the development of community provision as an alternative to hospital treatment, the validation of waiting lists and improved management of waiting lists.

I believe that these measures will have an impact. For example, half of HSS Trusts were able to report a fall in numbers waiting at 30 September 2002. It is also important to note that, despite the large numbers of people waiting for hospital treatment, almost three-quarters of inpatients treated between July and September 2002 waited for less than three months and 95 per cent. waited less than a year for their treatment.

Land Banks

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the locations of land banks held for housing development by *(a)* the Housing Executive and *(b)* housing associations are; and what estimate he has made of the number of new homes which will be built on those land banks over the next five years. [89467]

Mr. Browne: The Housing Executive owns land mainly as an inheritance from former housing authorities and through acquisition to satisfy identified need. Most of its land is in estates and would comprise a mixture of firstly, land on which the houses, or other essential buildings, have been built and secondly, amenity or open space land. The Housing Executive is currently identifying sites in its ownership that could be suitable for development, without giving rise to a serious loss of amenities or space.

The Housing Executive's land transfer programme for development by housing associations would allow for the following units to be built:

Housing Executive's land transfer programme for development by housing associations

	Units	*Schemes*
2002–03	342	26
2003–04	413	28
2004–05	446	31
2005–06	310	20

Note:
Figures for 2006–07 are not yet available.

Additional land required to meet the Department's new build targets is acquired on an ongoing basis.

Housing Associations do not maintain a land bank. When a housing need is identified in a particular location, land is purchased on a one-off basis to meet that need. The land purchase is, therefore, specific to a particular project. In general, the land is used right away.

The identification of individual locations of land held for both could be done only at disproportionate cost.

Nursing and Personal Care

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the provision of free nursing care and personal care in Northern Ireland. [88937]

Mr. Browne: Since 7 October 2002, up to £100 a week is payable on behalf of residents who would otherwise have to pay all of the nursing home fees themselves for their nursing care in a nursing home. This payment is dependent on an assessment of nursing needs.

The Northern Ireland Executive commissioned work on free personal care and a report was forwarded to the First Minister and Deputy First Minister on 8 August 2002. Following discussion at the Executive on 12 August, Ministers asked for further work to be undertaken. That work has not yet been completed. It is not possible at this stage to give any indication about the timing or subsequent handling of the report, since this is a matter which should be determined by the Executive.

Primary and Post-primary School Budgets

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he plans to allocate additional monies to primary and post-primary schools' central budgets. [88794]

Jane Kennedy: The Department of Education plans to allocate an additional £22.2 million to schools over and above their delegated budgets. An announcement regarding how these resources are to be divided among schools will be made in the new year.

Public Transport (Free Fares)

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the cost of providing free fares on public transport in Northern Ireland has been in each of the last three years. [87332]

Angela Smith: Costs incurred by the Department for Regional Development in respect of the provision of free fares on public transport in Northern Ireland under the Concessionary Fares Scheme in each of the last three years are as follows:

	£
1999–2000	719,343
2000–01	807,084
2001–02	3,600,528

Costs incurred by the Department of Education in respect of the provision of free travel for school children on public transport are:

	£
1999–2000	21,923,075
2000–01	20,708,035
2001–02	22,464,968

Schools (Investment)

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much funding has been made available under the NI Programme for Building Sustainable Prosperity, Measure 4, Investing in Early Learning, to *(a)* controlled, *(b)* maintained and *(c)* grant-maintained integrated schools; and if he will make a statement. [86869]

Jane Kennedy: A total of 11.34 million Euros (of which 8 million Euros is the EU contribution) is available to the Department of Education under Measure 3.4 of the European Union's Building Sustainable Prosperity Programme, for securing the building of controlled, maintained, integrated and Irish-medium pre-school education facilities in local communities. The Measure will allow the Department to reclaim capital expenditure on a programme of nursery units, either built or to be built. The programme must, however, go through the application and selection procedure required by the EU. This procedure has not yet been concluded, and at this stage it is not possible to attribute any costs to Measure 3.4.

However, between 1 January 2000 and November this year, a total of £5,103,000 million has been spent on building units for which the Department expects to reclaim the EU contribution. £2,660,000 million of this has been spent in the controlled sector, £2,134,000 million in the maintained, £239,000 in the integrated and £70,000 in the Irish Medium.

Step-up Job Scheme

Mr Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to provide pilots of the step-up job scheme. [88846]

Jane Kennedy: The report of the askforce on employability and long term unemployment, which I launched on 16 December, contains a proposal to pilot an intermediate labour market based on the step-up pilots in GB. Consideration is presently being given to the arrangements for the introduction of this pilot.

Trainee Mathematics Teachers

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to award golden hellos to trainee mathematics teachers. [88786]

Jane Kennedy: There are no plans to introduce financial incentives in Northern Ireland to attract mathematics graduates, or graduates in any other subjects, into the teaching profession.

Wind Farm Developments

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what *(a)* public grants, *(b)* loans and *(c)* subsidies are available to support wind farm developments. [89401]

Mr. Pearson: The Department of Trade and Industry manage a £79 million UK-wide capital grant fund to assist the deployment of offshore wind farms. There are however, no grants, loans or subsidies available to support the further development of onshore wind farms in Northern Ireland.

TREASURY

Climate Change Levy

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect of his policy of exempting the biodegradable elements of waste feed from the climate change levy upon the economic size of incinerators. [88583]

John Healey: The exemption from climate change levy (CCL) for electricity generated from new forms of renewable sources covers a range of renewable sources, including biodegradable waste. No assessment has been made of the effect of the exemption on the economic size of incinerators. However, the scope and rates of all taxes, including CCL, are reviewed annually as part of the Budget process.

Government Procurement

Norman Lamb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on progress towards delivering savings in Government procurement through the office of Government Commerce. [89270]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 7 January 2003]:* The total value for money gains in Government procurement reported by central civil Government bodies for the years 2000–01 and 2001–02 is £815 million.

Landfill Levy

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of anticipated receipts from the landfill levy will be allocated to *(a)* continuing funding for environmental schemes and *(b)* funding to encourage sustainable waste management in (i) 2003–04, (ii) 2004–05 and (iii) 2005–06. [88584]

John Healey: No decision has yet been made on the precise figures that will apply. However, in 2003–04, landfill operators will be able to divert approximately 6 per cent. of their total tax liability to the funding of local environmental schemes. About a further 14 per cent. will be used to fund the uptake of more sustainable waste management practices. Estimates for future years will depend on the figures applied in 2003–04. The figures for 2005–06 will also depend on decisions the Government take on how the revenue from the proposed tax increase of £3 per tonne is recycled.

Public Services Productivity

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place the minutes of the Public Services Productivity Panel for calendar years 2000 to 2002 in the Library. [87211]

Mr. Boateng: It has been the practice of successive administrations not to release the minutes of meetings concerned with the development of policy. Exemption 2 (internal discussion and advice) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information applies.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 13 January 2003

WORK AND PENSIONS

Poverty

17. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to announce a new definition of poverty. [89716]

Malcolm Wicks: Poverty is a complex multi-dimensional problem. The fourth "Opportunity for all" report (Cm 5598) sets out our strategy for tackling poverty and social exclusion and presents the latest information on the indicators used to monitor progress against our strategy. Specifically on child poverty, last April we launched "Measuring child poverty: a consultation document". We will be in a position to publish preliminary conclusions from the consultation by this spring.

Redundancies

19. **Andy Burnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to help people affected by large scale redundancies to find new work. [89718]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: In April 2002 we launched the Rapid Response Service to offer a coherent, tailored response to redundancies and help those people affected make the transition into sustainable new jobs.

By December 2002 in the North West region, the Rapid Response Service had provided support to 25 companies and made its services available to over 5,000 people facing redundancy.

Pension Schemes

20. **John Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what action he is taking to encourage companies to retain existing final salary pension schemes and to make them available to new employees. [89719]

Mr. McCartney: We published the Green Paper "Simplicity, security and choice: working and saving for retirement" (Cm 5677) on 17 December 2002. It provides a framework to help individuals save more in partnership with employers by providing a regulatory framework that supports employers in providing and contributing to good quality pension schemes. The Government's strategy is based on three linked proposals: major simplification of private pensions regulation and tax rules to ease burdens on employers and promote private provision; greater protection for scheme members to increase confidence and help to ensure that people get the pensions they expect; helping employers to provide better information for employees to help employees to understand the value of their pension scheme and to facilitate informed choice. The Green Paper makes clear that different types of scheme suit employees with different characteristics and that overall no particular scheme type is invariably better than the others. Defined contribution schemes tend to be better for employees who move jobs more frequently. The focus, therefore, should be on building on employer commitment and emphasising the advantages to both employer and employee of workplace pension provision. The Green Paper proposals to radically simplify the regulatory regime for pensions could, in total, save employers £150-£200 million a year in administration.

Unemployment

21. **Mr. Baron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the number of people of working age who are neither working nor registered as seeking work or as benefit claimants. [89720]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: About four million people of working age are not working or claiming unemployment related benefit but are claiming another out of work benefit.

In addition other working age people, for example those who are financially independent, students and people looking after the family home, are not active in the labour market and are not claiming an out of work benefit.

Second Pensions

22. **Hugh Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what action the Government are taking to persuade people of working age to contribute to second pensions. [89721]

Mr. McCartney: We believe that if people have the right information and clear choices they will plan for their retirement sensibly. Currently, informed choice is frustrated by complexity.

The Green Paper offers a simple framework to help people understand their options and to give individuals clear information tailored to their own circumstances so they can see how the choices they face relate back to their own retirement prospects. A new pensions advice line and an improved web-based retirement planner will be set up. This builds on the improvements already in train with the new Pension Service which is now rolling out nationally. York pension centre opened on 28 October 2002 and is establishing itself along contact centre lines. Proposals in the Green Paper include significantly extended coverage of combined state and occupational pension forecasts which early research shows have the potential to encourage many people to save more.

State Pensions

23. **Mr. Goodman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement about the Green Paper on Pensions, with special reference to plans for state pensions. [89722]

Mr. McCartney: The Green Paper, "Simplicity, security and choice, working and saving for retirement" (Cm 5677), set out our proposals to simplify

occupational and private pensions saving and make flexible retirement easier, following our earlier reforms to state provision and to financial services. Our proposals will enable people to make informed choices about their retirement provision, building on the foundation of state pension support. As the Green Paper explained, we have already taken action to reform the system of state support for pensioners, focussing in particular on tackling pensioner poverty. Specifically, we introduced the Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) which is currently worth £98.15 a week for single pensioners and £149.80 for couples. Around 2.1 million people in the UK are benefiting from the MIG now.

From October this year the MIG is being subsumed by the more generous Pension Credit which will reward pensioners with savings, second pensions or earnings, yielding incomes up to £139 a week for single pensioners and nearly £204 a week for couples. In addition we brought in the State Second Pension from April 2002 to boost the pension rights of low and moderate earners and bring in groups of non-workers for the first time. Around 4.5 million low earners will build up an additional State Pension worth at least twice what SERPS would have provided. Two million carers and two million disabled people also build up pension rights for the first time. Also, from this April the basic State Pension will be worth £77.45 a week for single pensioners which is a 7 per cent. real terms increase since 1997. And in future years we are committed to increasing the basic State Pension by at least 2.5 per cent., even if the Retail Price Index (RPI) is below this.

Other measures we introduced include free TV licences for those aged over 75, which benefits four million households and Winter Fuel payments now worth £200 each year for eligible households. Around 11 million people benefited from Winter Fuel payments for winter 2001–02. We considered that this state support for pensioners we have put in place provides the right foundation for retirement. We were not persuaded by calls to increase State Pension age for a number of reasons, including that such a change would have a disproportionate effect on the poorest pensioners. We are currently consulting on the proposals in the Green Paper.

Incapacity Benefit

24. **Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what targets his Department has for reducing the number of incapacity benefit claimants. [89723]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We have no targets for getting people who claim incapacity benefit into work. Our Green Paper, "Pathways to Work", sets out our strategy for enabling people on incapacity benefit to move into work, and so become and remain independent.

Child Poverty (London)

25. **Mr. Dismore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on progress in reducing child poverty in London. [89724]

Malcolm Wicks: The Government's commitment to tackling poverty and social exclusion throughout the United Kingdom is well known. In particular, we have made a clear pledge to abolish child poverty in a generation and to halve it by 2010. We will end the scourge of child poverty in London and in the rest of the UK.

In the fourth "Opportunity for All" report (CM 5598), we describe the action we have taken to tackle poverty and social exclusion. Progress is monitored against a wide range of indicators.

Benefit Fraud

Ms Stuart: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what security procedures he has put in place to prevent fraudulent claims for family credit, with special reference to the use of maiden names. [88229]

Dawn Primarolo: I have been asked to reply.

All applications for WFTC go through a stringent verification process to ensure payment is made to the correct applicant. Use of a maiden name will not circumvent these checks on the applicant's identity.

Benefit Inquiry Line

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the operation of the Benefit Inquiry Line. [R] [87914]

Maria Eagle: The Benefit Enquiry Line is a confidential telephone advice and information service for people with disabilities, their carers and representatives. It offers general advice and information about all social security benefits and how to claim them. It can offer advice and assistance with completing many disability-related claim forms and provides a leaflet and claim form distribution service. It will also sign-post people to other services where appropriate. The Benefit Enquiry Line answers approximately 23,000 calls per week.

The Benefit Enquiry Line aims to meet the National DWP Call Centre Target of answering 90 per cent. of calls within 30 seconds. Currently the Enquiry Line answers approximately 55 per cent. of calls within this target.

The Disability and Carers Service is reviewing the role of the Benefit Enquiry Line in the context of the changes being made by Jobcentre Plus and The Pension Service to provide a more complete service to their customers. The review is on-going and no decision has been taken by Ministers on any outcome.

Bereavement Allowance

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many *(a)* claimants there were and *(b)* what amount was claimed in respect of Bereavement Allowance in each month since its introduction; and how many persons were eligible to claim the allowance but did not receive it; [88467]

(2) how many and what amount of bereavement payments were made in each month since their introduction; and how many persons were eligible to claim such payments but did not receive them. [88468]

Malcolm Wicks: The available information is published in the Work and Pensions Statistics 2002, a copy of which is in the Library.

DLA Call Centre

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the operation of the disability living allowance call centre. [87913]

Maria Eagle: The disability living allowance and attendance allowance helpline provides advice and information on claims to these benefits and takes details of changes of circumstances, as well as explaining decisions, to customers or their authorised representatives. It answers approximately 80,000 calls per week.

The helpline aims to meet the National DWP Call Centre target of answering 90 per cent. of calls within 30 seconds. It is currently only answering 25 per cent. in 30 seconds. An extensive programme of call analysis, recruitment and training is being undertaken in order to improve performance.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what impact on prospective tenants his Department expects to see from the pilot schemes for reforming housing benefit. [89702]

Malcolm Wicks: The standard local housing allowance means that, for the first time, tenants will know in advance what support they will receive, allowing them to make their own choices about the quality and price of their accommodation.

I am pleased that Blackpool borough council, which includes my hon. Friend's constituency, has accepted our invitation to become one of the pathfinders for the new allowance, which marks a radical step forward in the simplification of housing benefit.

Minimum Income Guarantee

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of how many people will qualify for the minimum income guarantee; and if he will make a statement. [89717]

Mr. McCartney: As at August 2002 there were 1.76 million pensioners receiving the minimum income guarantee (MIG) which means that they need not live on less than £98.15 a week, £102.10 from April. This is on top of our £200 a year winter fuel payments, free TV licences for the over-75s, worth £104 a year, and above inflation increases to the basic state pension.

From October all existing minimum income guarantee recipients will be automatically transferred to pension credit, which will for the first time reward—not penalise—savings, ensuring those who have worked hard to save modest amounts will gain from having done so.

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners have benefited from the minimum income guarantee in *(a)* Newcastle upon Tyne and *(b)* Gateshead; and what was the average uplift. [89528]

Mr. McCartney: As at August 2002, 12,800 pensioners in Newcastle upon Tyne received on average £43.63 Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) per week and 8,400 pensioners in Gateshead received an average weekly MIG of £41.92.

Source:

Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry, August 2002.

CABINET OFFICE

Capita Group

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will list the contracts that have been awarded to the Capita Group by the Department. [89963]

Mr. Alexander: Current Cabinet Office contracts with parts of the Capita Group are as follows:

Capita Group	*Contract*
Capita Business Services	Fast Stream Recruitment Support
Capita Business Services	Provision of Civil Service and Judicial Pensioner Payroll and Associated Services
Capita RAS	Recruitment of four Assistant Parliamentary Counsel

Civil Servants

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many civil servants there were in each year since 1997. [90464]

Mr. Alexander: The number of permanent, full-time equivalent staff in April of each year is given in the following table:

Year	*Number*
1997	475,660
1998	463,270
1999	459,600
2000	475,420
2001	482,690
2002	490,220

These figures, together with further information on Civil Service staffing levels, are published twice yearly by Press Notice. Copies are available from the Library of the House.

Congestion Charge

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office who will pay the London congestion charge for ministerial cars. [90167]

Mr. Alexander: The responsibility for the provision of ministerial cars and drivers has been delegated under the terms of the framework document to the Government Car Despatch Agency. I have asked its chief executive Mr. Nick Matheson to write to the hon. Member. Copies of his letter will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Energy White Paper

Sue Doughty: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what meetings his officials have had with representatives of the energy efficiency industry during the preparation of the Energy White Paper. [88538]

Mr. Wilson: I have been asked to reply.

As part of the preparation of the Energy White Paper my officials have held a number of meetings and expert workshops with representatives of the energy efficiency industry. Industry representatives attended opening workshops in London, Glasgow and Newport, and a final integrative conference in London covering a range of energy issues. They also attended workshops devoted exclusively to energy efficiency issues. Details are posted on the DTI website at: http://www.dti.gov.uk/energy/developep/reports.shtml.

The White Paper has also been an important theme in recent meetings between officials and industry bodies, for example the British Energy Efficiency Federation.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Abattoirs

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the effect of delays in her Department in payments to beef farmers in the South West who have prime organic cattle condemned as a result of the unavailability of abattoirs to slaughter under the Beef Assurance Scheme; and if she will make a statement. [89683]

Alun Michael: I assume that the hon. Member is referring to payments for cattle that are slaughtered voluntarily under the Over Thirty Month Scheme (OTMS). The Scheme is open to cattle that are prevented from entering the food chain because of the Over Thirty Month rule, but which are otherwise fit for human consumption.

During the life of the scheme up to the 2002–03 year the published timeliness target in respect of OTMS has been to make 98 per cent. of compensation payments to collection centres within 21 days of receipt of all correctly completed documentation establishing the claim.

The target has been changed to making 85 per cent. of compensation payments within 28 days and is consistent with the new targets for all non Integrated Administration and Control Schemes (IACS) payments. The RPA's 2002–03 Business Plan includes its new performance targets. There is no change to the requirement for collection centres to pass on compensation payments to producers within 14 days of receipt.

The new timeliness target reflects the RPA's budget allocation for 2002–03. RPA has been given more headroom in its targets to allow it to respond flexibly to the situation and to deploy its resources by means of a risk based approach which seeks to maintain vital scheme controls.

To help offset the impact of the tighter budget allocation RPA has introduced an initiative to import data electronically from collection centres. Most abattoirs are already submitting kill data electronically and work has started on introducing mechanisms by which data can be submitted electronically from both liveweight markets and casualty centres. This initiative will greatly reduce the manual inputting of data currently undertaken when claim paperwork reaches Reading and will, depending upon take-up, realise staff savings which will to some extent reduce the full impact of the budget cuts.

RPA will continue to make payments as quickly as possible within its resource allocation. In the 2002–03 year to date 98 per cent. of payments have been made within 28 days.

Regarding the unavailability of abattoirs to slaughter under the Beef Assurance Scheme, all licensed abattoirs are permitted to slaughter Beef Assurance Scheme over thirty month cattle, provided they are willing to facilitate their testing for BSE. On receipt of a negative test result, the carcase must be sent to a licensed cutting plant that is separately licensed to remove the vertebral column and dorsal root ganglia before the meat is released for human consumption. All licensed cutting plants are free to apply to the Food Standards Agency for an additional licence to remove vertebral column. It is a simple process, no fee is charged, and all have been encouraged to apply. None have done so in the south west peninsular.

Agricultural Protectionism

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations her Department has made to the European Union regarding reducing agricultural protectionism; and what research she has commissioned into the effects this may have on the United Kingdom economy. [86206]

Mr. Morley: We are committed to phasing out agricultural protectionism in the European Union. We seize every opportunity to make this clear to other member states, especially in the context of the current World Trade Organisation negotiations and the continuing discussions in the Agriculture Council on the mid-term review of the CAP. A recent estimate prepared for the Commission suggests that a 50 per cent. global cut in protectionism in agriculture could generate a welfare gain of up to $27 billion. The benefit for the EU as a whole was estimated at $17 billion.

CAP Reform

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress has been made towards reforming the Common Agricultural Policy; what factors she estimates will influence further moves to reform; and if she will make a statement. [88865]

Mr. Morley: The Agriculture Council has completed its reading of the Commission's outline proposals which were tabled on 10 July. The Commission will now reflect on the discussions in Council and produce the detailed

legal texts which will be necessary to translate their proposals into changes to the CAP regulations. We expect these to be put to the Council in late January.

I expect further reform to be influenced by a wide range of factors including the need to improve the sustainability of European Agriculture and to take account of its impact on international trade and development particularly with a view to a successful conclusion to the WTO round negotiations. I also expect the negotiations to take account of the setting of a ceiling for Category 1A expenditure for the period from 2007 to 2013 at the Brussels Summit.

Correspondence

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what reason she has not replied to the letter from the honourable Member for Yeovil, dated 23 October 2002, on the Rural Payments Agency; and if she will make a statement. [90795]

Alun Michael: I wrote to the hon. Member on 9 January explaining the actions to be taken as a result of a careful review of the issues he raised in his letter.

Environment Agency

Mr Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the forecast budget is for the Environment Agency in the south west for 2003–04. [88300]

Mr. Meacher: The Environment Agency has set a budget for its south west region of £62.3 million for 2003/04.

Environmental Impacts

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to her answer of 20 November 2002, *Official Report*, columns 158–59W, if she will make a statement on the new integrated policy appraisal tools to ensure that environmental impacts are considered alongside social and economic impacts. [89249]

Mr. Meacher: DEFRA's commitment to use integrated policy appraisal (IPA) was set out in the Department's Sustainable Development Strategy, "Foundations for our Future", published in June 2002. It is currently being piloted within DEFRA in a number of selected policy areas, and will be applied more widely in the coming year. The IPA provides a framework or template within which the economic, social and environmental impacts of policy options and their distributional effects in relation to different groups of people can be assessed. It allows decision-makers to:

consider all the effects that a policy may have and identify which are potentially significant;

highlight areas requiring more detailed or specialist guidance/ further appraisal; and

following any such guidance or appraisal, assemble evidence systematically to provide a summary of the impacts of a policy and the likely scale of the impacts.

It is intended to contribute to the Government's goal of better policy making and to the achievement of sustainable development. The results of the pilot exercise in DEFRA, together with those being carried out in other Departments, will be shared across Government.

Fisheries

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when her Department received the Opinion of the Legal Service, Council of the European Union No.13585/02, Limite, JUR424 PECHE164, dated 29 October; and when this was passed to the *(a)* Scottish Fishermen's Federation and *(b)* National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations. [88199]

Mr. Morley: This document had been received in the Department on 1 November. I am not aware that it has been passed to either of the organisations referred to.

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many UK vessels are involved in scallop fishing; how many people work in scallop fishing in the UK; how many people are employed in the scallop processing industry in the UK; and what estimate she has made of the value of the scallop fishery industry to the UK economy. [89451]

Mr. Morley: Details from Fisheries Departments systems show that 471 UK vessels caught scallops in 2001. The landings of scallops by these vessels in 2001 were valued at £29.9 million, compared with the total value of landings by UK vessels of £574.4 million. With regards to the information requested on levels of employment, estimates of employment are not made at the level of detail required in order for answers to be provided.

Flower Imports

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what was the total *(a)* volume and *(b)* value of flowers imported into the UK from Kenya for each year since 1997; what discussions her Department has had relating to the involvement of UK companies in the import or production of flowers produced in Kenya using chemicals banned in the EU; and if she will make a statement; [88281]

(2) What controls are placed on the import of flowers into the UK in relation to the use of *(a)* pesticides and *(b)* environmentally unsustainable practices; and if she will make a statement. [88282]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 8 January 2003]*: The total volume and value of imports of fresh cut flowers into the UK from Kenya since 1997 is set out in the following table:

Year	*Total tonnes*	*Total £000*
1997	5,014	13,430
1998	4,835	13,950
1999	6,634	19,427
2000	8,095	22,817
2001	9,088	28,073
2002[1]	7,893	25,093

[1] January to September

Source:
HM Customs and Excise

DEFRA has had no discussion so the use of chemicals in the production of flowers in Kenya.

There are no controls on the import of flowers into the UK in relation to the use of pesticides or environmentally unsustainable practices, other than EU common quality standards which require that marketed cut flowers must be free of pesticide residues that affect the visual quality of the product.

Imported produce is subject to checks for maximum residue levels, but these levels apply to consumable products and not to flowers.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much is outstanding in respect of payments for valuation fees during the foot and mouth outbreak in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the UK. [88602]

Mr. Morley: The amount outstanding in respect of payments for valuation fees during the foot and mouth outbreak in *(a)* Scotland is none and in *(b)* the UK is £9,970.

There is a dispute between some valuers in Scotland and England over the basis of reimbursement. The claims in dispute are *(a)* Scotland £1,270,000 and *(b)* the UK £2,075,001. The UK figure is the total for Scotland and England. There are no outstanding payments or disputes in respect of valuation fees in Wales or Northern Ireland.

Hunting

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether the hunts active across the Vale of York in part in upland areas will be allowed to continue under the proposed Bill. [89010]

Alun Michael: The proposal in the Hunting Bill is to establish a system for making case-by-case decisions on whether hunting activities may take place, to ensure that unnecessary suffering is prevented. An applicant would have to show that both the tests of utility and cruelty are met in the case of the particular hunting proposal. It will be for the registrar to be satisfied, on the basis of an objective assessment of the evidence—which would cover any local factors—provided by both the applicant and the animal welfare body, that the proposed hunting satisfied the two tests, namely, that it would be for one of the purposes set out in clause 8(1) and that the purpose cannot reasonably be achieved by a method that would cause less suffering.

Late Payments

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what targets exist for the Rural Payments Agency in respect of the deadlines within which payments must be made; and what *(a)* numbers and *(b)* amounts of payments have (i) been within the target and (ii) failed to meet it in the last 24 months. [88881]

Alun Michael: The Rural Payments Agency had two targets relating to the payment of valid claims within deadlines:

1. To process and pay at least 96.14 per cent. of valid IACS claims by value within the EU deadline; and

2. To process and pay 98 per cent. of valid non-IACS claims by volume within Ministerial deadlines and all claims within set EU deadlines or in their absence 60 days. For 2002 this percentage has been reduced to 85 per cent.

Target 1	
Value of 2001 scheme year payments made within target (£)	1,056,435,921
Made outside target (£)	146,908,512
Number of 2001 scheme year claims made within target	223,401
Number outside target	96,128

For the 2002 scheme year, no IACS targets have been missed so far.

The payment window for SAPS opened on 16 October 2002 and closes on 31 March 2003. As at 16 December, a total of 26,843 (99.2 per cent.) of Premium and National Envelope top-up payments have been made, of which 97 per cent. were issued in the first few days of the opening of the payment window. In addition, 8,327 producers (98.3 per cent. of those qualifying for the Less Favoured Area Supplement) have now received the supplementary payment amounting to £13.6 million.

The payment window for AAPS opened on the 16 November 2002. As at 15 December, of the 41,345 AAPS claims received for the main scheme payments (excluding rejected and withdrawn), 37,597 (90.93 per cent.) had been authorised and 36,746 claims (88.88 per cent.) had been paid, with a value of £757,549,518.00 (85.69 per cent. of the estimated total to be paid). The target date is set at 31 January 2003.Progress is being made on Bovine Payments but the deadline is 30 June 2003.

Target 2	
Value-of 2001–02 payments made within ministerial target (£)	375,411,587
made inside 60-day target (£)	415,478,423
Value of 2002–03 payments made within ministerial target (£)	300,944,770
made inside 60-day target (£)	302,184,748
Number of 2001–02 claims made within ministerial target	774,860 (85.23 per cent.)[1]
number inside 60-day target	909,051 (99.99 per cent.)
Number of 2002–03 claims made within ministerial target	641,563 (99.42 per cent.)
number inside 60-day target	645,252 (99.99 per cent.)

[1] The targets were missed because of prioritisation of resources to FMD related schemes including Livestock Welfare Disposal Scheme.

Licensing

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether her Department knew that drinks and entertainment organisations were clients of MCM Research Ltd. when it was commissioned by her Department to advise on proposed changes in the arrangements for alcohol and entertainment licensing. [89540]

Alun Michael: The research MCM is carrying out on behalf of Defra is to assist with the provision of best practice guidance for addressing potential noise from pubs and clubs. It is not to comment on proposed changes in the arrangements for alcohol and entertainment licensing. The intention is to support local authorities and the licensing trade both when working under the current licensing rules and in implementing changes under the arrangements currently proposed within the Licensing Bill.

All applicants to the competitive tender for this research project were asked to give details of their relevant experience in this area. A number of drinks and entertainment organisations have been clients of MCM Research Ltd. as a result of its specialisation in the application of social science to alcohol-related problems. MCM Research Ltd. was appointed partly as a result of their knowledge and experience of the licensed trade.

This research will be made publicly available and is expected to be published in spring 2003.

Modulation Receipts

Mr. David Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish an analysis of how modulation receipts for *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03, (i) have been and (ii) are planned to be spent, showing the main categories of expenditure and the amounts of money spent on each such category. [88277]

Margaret Beckett: Payments in England from modulation receipts are as follows.

Scheme	*2001–02* £m	*2002–03 (April to November 2002)* £m	*2002/03 (forecast total)* £m
Countryside stewardship	3.4	2.2	8.6
Environmentally sensitive areas	1.3	3.5	7.6
Organic farming	3.8	4.4	5.7
Energy crops	0.1	0.03	0.1

Modulation receipts are used to fund new agri-environment agreements entered into since 1 January 2001; for every pound contributed through modulation, the Government provide a pound of additional finance through match funding so that double the figure raised goes back into farming. Expenditure funded from modulation will rise significantly from next year as existing agri-environment agreements come up for renewal at the end of their first ten year period.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total sum was of modulation receipts, in financial years *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03 to date; what the expected sum is of such receipts for the full financial year 2002–03; and if she will make a statement. [88278]

Margaret Beckett: Modulation was introduced in 2001 at 2.5 per cent. following wide consultation. The current rate of modulation is 3 per cent. and, under existing plans, this will rise progressively to 4.5 per cent. by 2005.

Under the present system the Government match pound for pound the finance available through modulation so twice as much money goes back into farming. Modulation receipts and the Government's match-funding will increase funding for rural development under the England Rural Development Programme (ERDP) by around £600 million over the seven years from 2000 to 2006.

The total sums of modulation receipts in England are:

£ million

2001–02	*2002–03*[1]	*2002–03*[2]
27.3	30.0	40.6

[1] April to November 2002
[2] Forecast total

The Rural Development Regulation (Reg. 1257/99) enables member states to modulate CAP direct subsidy payments by up to 20 per cent. and to use the sums collected to co-finance new agri-environment agreements entered into since 1 January 2001. Sums collected in one year may be carried over to be used at any time in the following three years.

Following the recommendations of the Curry Commission on the Future of Farming and Food the Government have also announced that an additional £75 million of domestic funding will be made available to introduce an entry-level agri-environment scheme, subject to successful pilots. EU co-financing will be made available either through an increase in modulation or as a result of wider changes to EU rural development funding.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the cost was of administering modulation in 2001–02; what the expected administrative cost is for 2003–04; if she will express those sums as a percentage of actual and expected modulation receipts; and if she will make a statement. [88279]

Margaret Beckett: The system for administering all CAP payments in England is fully automated. There are no significant additional administrative costs incurred in either collecting modulation receipts or in making payments using those receipts.

The funds raised by modulation may be spent only on a limited range of rural development measures (in England, only new agri-environment agreements). Modulation receipts may not be used to cover the administrative costs of running the England Rural Development Programme.

Nappies

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether her Department has undertaken a life cycle analysis to compare the environmental impact of re-usable nappies and disposable nappies. [88709]

Mr. Meacher: The Environment Agency is currently carrying out a life cycle analysis comparing the environmental impact of both types of nappies.

It is expected that the work will be completed in the spring of this year.

National Park Authorities

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the grant for *(a)* 2002–03 and *(b)* 2003–04 to each national park authority is; and what the percentage grant uplift to each park authority is. [90442]

Alun Michael: The information requested is provided in the following table. The differences in the percentage increase reflect a number of different pressures on individual National Park Authorities and on effort to achieve a fair distribution of the available resources:

Authority	*2002–03*	*2003–04*	*Cash rise (Percentage)*
Broads	2,801,437	2,996,877	7.0
Dartmoor	3,721,705	3,977,323	6.9
Exmoor	3,059,765	3,318,950	8.5
Lakes	5,460,856	5,907,102	8.2
Northumberland	2,419,922	2,682,555	10.9
North York Moors	4,224,936	4,477,842	6.0
Peak District	6,721,617	7,161,060	6.5
Yorkshire Dales	[1]4,583,616	[1]5,037,283	9.9
Total	32,993,854	35,559,000	7.8

[1] Includes £0.5 million for new accommodation. This was announced in a press notice on 28 November 2002.

National Parks

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects to receive European Commission state aids approval for National Park farm schemes; and if she will make a statement. [88428]

Margaret Beckett: Further information was sent to the European Commission to assist their assessment of the National Park farm schemes' compatibility with state aid legislation in June 2002. The National Park farm schemes are being considered by the commission within regulatory requirements, and we will continue to work with the commission to gain approval for this scheme.

Pesticides

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the Government's pesticides voluntary initiative. [86593]

Mr. Morley: The Government are committed to minimising the adverse environmental impact of pesticide use, consistent with adequate crop protection. A voluntary agreement on measures to reduce the environmental damage caused by pesticides was entered into by the industry and other stakeholders in April 2001. Provided the voluntary initiative is fully implemented, it should reduce the environmental impacts of pesticides and the Government remain committed to this approach. However, the Government are carrying out further work and analysis on a possible tax or other economic instrument, should the voluntary initiative fail to deliver its objectives within a reasonable timescale.

Public-private partnerships

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many departmental minutes issued by her Department were outstanding on 30 November 2002 that referred to public-private partnerships, as included in Table B14 of the Consolidated Fund and National Loans Fund Accounts; and what their value was. [89422]

Alun Michael: Defra had no minutes outstanding at 30 November 2002 that referred to public-private partnerships. The Department has two contracts for delivery of flood defences on public-private partnership terms: as these are operating within the contractual terms, they do not require the issue of a departmental minute.

Rabies

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will place in the Library a copy of the Government's contingency plan for dealing with an outbreak of rabies in the United Kingdom; and what plans she has to review the contingency plan. [89012]

Margaret Beckett: The existing Rabies Contingency Plan is being updated to take account of lessons learned from our experience with foot and mouth disease. We intend to issue, in the spring of this year, a revised draft of the Plan, for consultation by stakeholders.

Rural Land Register

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the projected cost is of completing the rural land register. [90396]

Alun Michael: The projected cost of completing the rural land register is in the order of £5.5 million.

Rural Payments Agency

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many calls have been received by the Rural Payments Agency fraudline telephone number in each quarter since it was launched. [90401]

Alun Michael: The Rural Payments Agency Fraudline has received on average 205 calls each quarter from 16 October 2001 to 31 December 2002.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what has been the operating cost of the Rural Payments Agency fraudline since its launch. [90402]

Alun Michael: The operating costs of the Rural Payments Agency Fraudline from 16 October 2001 to 31 December 2002 was £1,035.29

Slaughter Premium

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many claims for slaughter premium were refused for the reason that they were received more than six months after sale or slaughter of the animal in each year since the scheme began. [90394]

Alun Michael: The following figures are provided for 2000 Under Thirty Months, 2001 Adult and Veal and 2002 Adult and Veal. The figures refer to animals for which claims were late and so that the applicant was not entitled to a payment.

	Number
UTM	
2000	1,575
Adult	
2001	7,816
2002	6,428
Veal	
2001	22
2002	24

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the Government's policy is on the payment of slaughter premium in respect of stock slaughtered under *(a)* the foot and mouth cull and *(b)* the Livestock Welfare Disposal scheme; and if she will make a statement. [89014]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 7 January 2003]*: FMD culled cattle did not meet the criteria for receipt of the Slaughter Premium subsidy. Eligibility for the subsidy for animals taken under the Livestock Welfare Disposal Scheme is a matter still under consideration.

Third-party Legal Action (Environmental Grounds)

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make it her policy to allow third parties to take court action against projects on environmental grounds; and if she will make a statement. [86413]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 12 December 2002]*: The existing standing provisions for judicial review allow the courts to determine whether or not a specific party should be heard. They have demonstrated that they are willing to give standing to non-governmental organisations and members of the public in appropriate environmental cases.

In order to gain a fuller insight into NGOs views, DEFRA is funding a research project by Capacity Global entitled "Access to Courts: Barriers and Opportunities for Environmental Justice". This will look at the experiences of NGOs and individuals. Results are expected to be available in spring 2003.

Translation Costs

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what has been the cost incurred by her Department in providing translation of *(a)* forms and *(b)* publications for (i) Welsh and (ii) Gaelic speakers in the last 12 months. [90398]

Alun Michael: (i) The central Translation Section of Defra has spent the following amounts on translations of forms and publications into Welsh.

Financial year	*Forms (£)*	*Publications (£)*	*Total (£)*
2001–2002	486	4,715	5,2001
2002–2003 (to 31.12.02)	8,719	11,198	19,917

(ii) The Translation Section has not provided any translations into Gaelic.

Warm Front Grants

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what the take-up of Warm Front Grants has been from families receiving Disability Living Allowance; [88017]

(2) what the take-up of Warm Front Grants have been from families with a child under 16 receiving Disability Living Allowance. [88020]

Mr. Morley: To qualify for a grant under the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme, now marketed as the Warm Front Team, the householder or their spouse must be in receipt of a qualifying income or disability related benefit. Children under 16 in receipt of such benefits do not qualify for assistance through the scheme. Householders in receipt of the Disability Living Allowance are currently entitled to assistance up to the value of £1,500.

Between June 2000 and September 2002, 99,175 households received assistance where the only qualifying benefit was Disability Living Allowance.

Water Framework Directive

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to revise the 1999 regulatory impact assessment of the water framework directive. [88435]

Margaret Beckett: A revised partial regulatory impact assessment (RIA) will be included in a third consultation paper which is due to be published later this year. A RIA was published with the first consultation paper on the water framework directive in March 2001. Chapter 4 of the second consultation paper published in November 2002 provided information about carrying forward the RIA. This work is now underway.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Diego Garcia (Anti-personnel Landmines)

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what jurisdiction the United Kingdom has in respect of the anti-personnel landmines being stored by the United States on Diego Garcia. [88984]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I am assured that there are no stocks of anti-personnel landmines stored on Diego Garcia by the US or any other country.

EU Budget (Information Campaigns)

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to

his statement of 16 December 2002, Official Report, column 547, on the European Council (Copenhagen), what rules govern the distribution and expenditure of EU budget funds in information campaigns. [89370]

Dawn Primarolo: I have been asked to reply.

Funds are available from the EC Budget to provide general information on the implications of enlargement for candidate states. The Commission, assisted by a management committee of Member States' representatives, is responsible for distributing these funds under the EC Regulations giving assistance to candidate countries. Disbursement of EC Budget funds by the Commission is also subject to the rules and principles laid down in the Financial Regulation applicable to the general budget of the European Communities, and to external audit by the European Court of Auditors.

GDP Growth Estimates

Mr Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will identify the source of the GDP growth estimates given in his statement of 16 December, *Official Report*, columns 537–51, on the Copenhagen summit and enlargement of the EU. [89246]

Mr. MacShane: The estimate of nearly £2 billion as the benefit to UK GDP from enlargement is taken from a study by Baldwin R E, J F Francois & Fortes R (1997) "The costs and benefits of eastern enlargement: the impact on the EU and central Europe", Economic Policy, no 24, April 1997. The study estimates have been updated to 1999 GDP figures and prices. The estimate of a 1.5 percentage point boost to the GDP of the acceding countries is taken from a study by the European Commission (June 2001) 'Economic Impact of Enlargement' available at http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/economy_finance/publications/enlargementpapers_en.htm.

Boundaries Commission (Bermuda)

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to introduce an Order in Council to progress the work of the Boundaries Commission in Bermuda and to introduce an electoral system which conforms to the objective of one person, one vote; each vote of equal value; and if he will make a statement. [87758]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Given the degree of consensus which has emerged on this matter, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary is minded to recommend to Her Majesty in Council, in January 2003, an Order in Council to amend the Constitution of Bermuda to give legal effect to the Commission's recommendations to change the boundaries and the current 20 dual seat constituencies to 36 single seat constituencies. My noble friend, Baroness Amos, sent the text of the draft Order in Council to the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition in Bermuda on 25 November and to the Chairman of the FAC and interested peers on 29 November.

Constitutional Treaty of European Union

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his policy on the content of the draft Constitutional Treaty of European Union prepared by Professor Alan Dashwood. [89584]

Mr. MacShane: The Government commissioned Professor Alan Dashwood, a constitutional expert, and his team at Cambridge to draft a constitutional text. Professor Dashwood retained editorial control throughout. We support many of his ideas, such as clearer dividing lines between EU and member state roles. The Prime Minister's speech CA clear course for Europe' of 28 November 2002, which can be accessed on the website www.number-10.gov.uk, sets out the Government's position.

Convention on the Future of Europe

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Government's aspirations for the Convention on the Future of Europe. [89583]

Mr. MacShane: The Government believe the Convention on the Future of Europe is an important opportunity to consider how to make the European Union more effective and efficient. We want a Union that is better organised, more accessible, and better able to deliver real and practical benefits to citizens.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his policy on the principle of loyal co-operation proposed for inclusion in the conclusions of the Convention on the Future of Europe. [89585]

Mr. MacShane: The draft Constitutional Treaty of the Praesidium of the Convention on the Future of Europe makes provision for a phrase setting out 'the obligation of loyal co-operation of Member States vis-a-vis the Union'. The principle exists in the present Treaties (Article 10 of the Treaty on European Community and Article 11(2) the Treaty on European Union). The Government support this principle.

Dame Shirley Porter

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the attendance by Dame Shirley Porter at a function held by the British Embassy in Israel; and what instructions have been given, and on what date, by his Department in respect of contact with, and the provision of hospitality to, Dame Shirley Porter. [90344]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Dame Shirley Porter accompanied her husband, Sir Leslie Porter, the Chancellor of Tel Aviv University, to a dinner at the British Embassy in honour of the Weizmann Institute Foundation on 10 November 2002. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has not issued instructions about contact with Dame Shirley Porter.

Goa (Terrorist Attack)

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment his

Department has made of the warning issued by the Israeli Government concerning a possible terrorist attack on Goa in the New Year; what intelligence reports his Department have received concerning the threat posed by terrorism to British citizens in Goa during 2002; what changes his Department has made to travel advice on Goa in 2002; what steps his Department plans to take to warn British citizens about reports of terrorists targeting Goa; and if he will make a statement. [88319]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 7 January 2003]:* We have received no specific threat to British or other foreign interests in Goa in recent months. The FCO travel advice for India, including Goa, was last changed on 13 December to indicate that India is one of a number of countries where there is an increased risk from global terrorism. The British Government are in close touch with other governments, including the Israeli Government, about terrorist threats. Our travel advice for those planning to visit India, including Goa, highlights the global risk of terrorism, including in areas visited by tourists.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Area Cost Adjustment

Mr. Luff: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister why Worcestershire local authorities are not eligible for area cost adjustment. [90387]

Mr. Leslie: The area cost adjustment is based on evidence about average wages in each area of the country, adjusted so that like for like comparisons are made. Areas with a relative wage above a particular threshold are those that receive the area cost adjustment. Wages in the Herefordshire and Worcestershire area are below this threshold. A full methodology guide to the area cost adjustment is available on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's website, and a copy has been placed in the Library of the House.

Best Value

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he will publish the Best Value Code of Practice. [89539]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government have consulted on a code of practice and new statutory guidance which will ensure that all local authority service contracting takes proper account of the need for a high quality work force in order to deliver high quality services. We have considered the responses and intend to publish the code and guidance very shortly.

Environmental Protective and Cultural Services

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister in respect of each local authority, how much money was distributed and is planned to be distributed through the environmental protective and cultural services standard spending assessment for each financial year from 1997–98 to 2003–04; what the total sum distributed via EPCS SSA was for each year; and if he will make a statement. [90657]

Mr. Raynsford: A table showing the EPCS SSA for the financial years 1997–98 to 2002–03 and the provisional 2003–04 EPCS FSS by authority has been placed in the Library of the House.

The EPCS SSAs provided are not suitable for comparison purposes between years. Some of the major differences between years are as follows:

The last tranche of local government reorganisation occurred on 1 April 1998; this created a further 19 unitary authorities;

In 1997–98 the "Other Interest Receipts" SSA was included in the EPCS SSA; from 1998–99 onwards the "Other Interest Receipts" SSA was included in the Capital Financing SSA;

The Greater London Authority came into being in 2000. Prior to this the policing in the capital was provided by the Metropolitan Police Service, while the fire service was provided by the London Fire and Civil Defence Authority;

The Metropolitan Police Authority was subject to boundary changes in 2000. Before this certain areas of Essex, Surrey and Hertfordshire were policed by the Metropolitan Police Service;

The Metropolitan Police Service provided Magistrates Courts and Probationary Services as well as School Crossing Patrols, for the period 1997–98 to 1999–2000;

It is proposed that the GLA will cease to receive money for its EPCS services in 2003–04; instead these will be funded via the GLA General Grant.

In 2003–04 SSAs were abolished and replaced with Formula Spending Shares (FSSs). The control totals for FSSs are much larger than those for SSAs as they have been increased to around the level of spending by all authorities in England for these services.

The SSA and FSS amounts are not cash. Instead they are used in the distribution of formula grant to local authorities. SSAs/FSSs are not spending targets, authorities are free to set their own budgets subject to local spending priorities.

Fire Service (Radio Network)

Mr. Chope: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what estimate he has made of the cost to *(a)* the Government and *(b)* contractors of the aborted regional fire service replacement radio budget; [90436]

(2) how many fire authorities made claims for compensation for the cost of abortive work undertaken in implementing the regional procurement strategy for a new radio system; what the total value of the claims was; and how much has been paid to each authority; [90439]

(3) if he will make it the policy of the Government to reimburse Dorset Fire Authority for costs and expenses incurred in its commitment to the South West Radio Project prior to the project being curtailed by the Government. [90437]

Mr. Raynsford: No figures are available relating to the cost to Government or private sector companies of the fire service regional radio procurement strategy.

44 fire authorities have written to the Office giving preliminary notification of their intention to claim for costs related to the adoption of the national radio strategy. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister does not expect to receive claims until March 2003.

Framework guidance on making claims is to be issued by officials shortly. All claims will be considered on merit within the given guidelines. A copy of the Fire Service Circular will be placed in the Library of the House in due course.

Flood Protection

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the impact the introduction of the new local government grant distribution formula will have on local authority budgets for flood defence and coastal protection. [89642]

Mr. Raynsford: The provisional settlement included a small change in the formula used to provide resources through FSS (formerly SSA) for flood defence and coastal protection. Actual budgeting and expenditure remain matters for the authorities themselves.

Green Goddesses

Bob Russell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many Green Goddess fire appliances there are; what is the age of the *(a)* oldest and *(b)* newest; and what plans he has to replace them. [90363]

Mr. Raynsford: There are currently 1,027 Green Goddess appliances, including 116 for Scotland. They were all acquired in the mid-1950s. The Government have no current plans to replace the Green Goddesses but a substantial number of more modern appliances have been deployed for use by the military during the current dispute and we will be reviewing their effectiveness.

Housing (Private Rented Sector)

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to *(a)* increase supply and *(b)* improve standards in the private rented sector, and to enable it to play a bigger role in meeting housing need. [88549]

Mr. McNulty: The Government actively encourage a private rented sector that provides a decent standard of accommodation throughout. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will regulate where needed and the Housing Bill, to be published in draft shortly, will provide for the compulsory licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation and the selective licensing of landlords in areas of low demand. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is consulting on tenancy deposits and is encouraging voluntary measures such as local accreditation schemes as well as streamlining Housing Benefit to improve delivery and to give tenants greater choice. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister continues to consider the scope for measures that could make long-term investment in private rented housing a more attractive proposition.

Islington Community Groups

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what information he has collated on Government expenditure in the last 12 months on Islington community groups based in buildings the Borough Council is proposing to sell; and if he will make a statement. [89382]

Mr. McNulty: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what consultation there has been with the Government Office for London by Islington Council on the proposed sale of buildings used by community organisations; and if he will make a statement. [89385]

Mr. McNulty: There has been no consultation with the Government Office on the proposed sale of buildings used by community organisations.

Local Government (Performance Assessment)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the Audit Commission's comprehensive performance assessment of single tier and county councils; and what assessment he has made of the reasons underlying the proportion of unitary authorities rated as excellent. [90694]

Mr. Raynsford: The assessments were a matter for the Audit Commission. The methodology was widely consulted on with local government, the Local Government Association and other stakeholders. The judgments made for individual authorities drew a great deal of information from varied sources to form an overall view of authorities' services and their capacity to improve. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister considers the assessments provide a robust basis for our programme of improvement.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has made no assessment of the reasons for differences in average scores in different types of authority. The advice of the Audit Commission is that there is no strong evidence of systematic differences between classes of authority and the key message is that it is possible for authorities of all types and with widely varying circumstances to be excellent.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Chope: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will place in the Library the information used by his Department in deciding upon area cost adjustments in the provisional funding settlement for local Government in 2003–04. [90438]

Mr. Leslie: A full methodology guide to the area cost adjustment is available on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's website, and a copy has been placed in the Library of the House. The guide explains how data from the New Earnings Survey is used to calculate the adjustment, and which areas of the country receive it.

Local Government Finance

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his estimate is for each shire and metropolitan county and for the GLA of spending per head from all local government sources in the last year for which figures are available. [90009]

Mr. Raynsford: The budgeted spending per head for each shire county area, metropolitan county area and the GLA in the year 2002–03 is in the following table:

Revenue expenditure per head for each shire county area, metropolitan county area and the GLA area for 2002–03

Former county area[1]	*Revenue expenditure (£ per head)*
Avon	1,211
Bedfordshire	1,257
Berkshire	1,020
Buckinghamshire	998
Cambridgeshire	1,089
Cheshire	1,171
Cleveland	1,479
Cornwall	1,049
Cumbria	1,241
Derbyshire	1,183
Devon	1,237
Dorset	1,089
Durham	1,278
East Sussex	1,376
Essex	1,182
Gloucestershire	1,130
Hampshire	1,153
Hereford and Worcester	953
Hertfordshire	1,184
Humberside	1,313
Isle of Wight	1,152
Kent	1,259
Lancashire	1,278
Leicestershire	1,172
Lincolnshire	1,132
Norfolk	1,144
Northamptonshire	1,132
Northumberland	1,149
North Yorkshire	1,123
Nottinghamshire	1,243
Oxfordshire	1,003
Shropshire	1,012
Somerset	990
Staffordshire	1,131
Suffolk	1,124
Surrey	1,073
Warwickshire	1,119
West Sussex	986
Wiltshire	1,085
Greater London	1,797
Greater Manchester	1,458
Merseyside	1,613
South Yorkshire	1,370
Tyne and Wear	1,510
West Midlands	1,476
West Yorkshire	1,319

[1] Shire county areas are based on pre-reorganisation boundaries (1995–96 to 1998–99) and include shire districts, unitary authorities, police and fire authorities. Metropolitan areas include metropolitan districts, police, fire, transport and waste authorities. The Greater London area includes London boroughs, City of London, GLA, waste authorities and the Greater London Magistrates Courts Authority.

Source:

2002–03 GFRA budget estimates and the mid- 2001 population estimates from the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his latest estimate is of spending per head from all local government sources for each region in England in the last year for which figures are available. [90037]

Mr. Raynsford: The budgeted spending per head for each region in England in the year 2002–03 is in the following table.

Revenue expenditure per head in English regions for 2002–03

Government office	*Revenue expenditure (£ per head)*
East Midlands	1,181
East of England	1,165
London	1,797
North East	1,405
North West	1,394
South East	1,164
South West	1,136
West Midlands	1,292
Yorkshire and the Number	1,301

Source:

2002–03 GFRA budget estimates and the mid-2001 population estimates from the Office for National Statistics (ONS)

Population and Electorate (Size)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what his latest estimate is of *(a)* the population and *(b)* the electorate of each metropolitan district in England and each London borough; [90012]

(2) what his latest estimate is of *(a)* the population and *(b)* the electorate of each region in England; [90011]

(3) what his latest estimate is of *(a)* the population and *(b)* the electorate for each shire and metropolitan county and the GLA area in England. [90010]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter to George Howarth from John Pullinger, dated 13 January 2003:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your question concerning the latest estimate of *(a)* the population and *(b)* the electorate for each shire and metropolitan county of the GLA area in England. I am also including responses to your two related questions requesting the population and the electorate for each metropolitan district in England and each London borough, and for each region in England. I am replying in the National Statisticians' absence. (90010, 90012, 90011).

Attached are three tables which relate specifically to your three requests. These show the total population and the 18 + population estimated for mid-2001, and the 18 + population registered to vote as at 1 December 2001.

Even though figures are shown in the tables for comparable age-ranges, it is still not easy to make direct comparisons between the population and the electorate data. For one thing, there is a difference in timing: the mid-year estimates relate to 30 June 2001 whereas electorate data are as at 1 December 2001. In addition, there are differences in population coverage. The mid-year estimates include foreign citizens resident here who are not eligible to vote and people who choose not to register. On the other hand, there are a number of reasons why the electorate data may be higher than the mid-year estimates. Students are entitled to register both at their home and their term-time addresses, and second homeowners may also register in two places. Citizens who are not resident due to working abroad may be registered as overseas voters. In addition, electoral registers may be inflated if it is some years before non-respondents to the annual electoral canvass are deleted from electoral registers.

Table 1: 2001 population and electorate data for metropolitan and shire counties of England

Thousands

	Persons all ages[1]	*Persons 18+*[1]	*Electorate 18+*[2]
Metropolitan counties	18,009.8	13,829.8	13,345.6
Greater London	7,188.0	5,568.3	5,169.9
Greater Manchester	2,482.8	1,890.6	1,903.1
Merseyside	1,361.7	1,042.1	1,041.1
South Yorkshire	1,266.5	981.0	953.9
Tyne and Wear	1,076.3	839.9	823.0
West Midlands	2,554.4	1,923.9	1,907.6
West Yorkshire	2,080.2	1,584.0	1,547.1
Shire counties	22,990.7	17,904.4	17,692.8
Bedfordshire	382.1	291.4	288.4
Buckinghamshire	479.1	366.7	359.7
Cambridgeshire	553.6	433.1	423.3
Cheshire	674.2	524.8	520.9
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	502.1	397.0	389.5
Cumbria	487.8	383.9	382.6
Derbyshire	734.9	572.6	575.5
Devon	705.6	561.4	554.3
Dorset	391.5	312.2	311.7
Durham	493.7	387.1	386.2
East Sussex	493.1	388.6	381.4
Essex	1,312.7	1,018.7	1,012.4
Gloucestershire	565.0	439.9	434.8
Hampshire	1,240.8	960.1	951.6
Hertfordshire	1,034.9	794.9	777.6
Kent	1,331.1	1,025.2	1,006.8
Lancashire	1,135.8	873.7	868.9
Leicestershire	610.3	476.1	470.7
Lincolnshire	647.6	507.5	501.4
Norfolk	797.9	634.8	625.2
Northamptonshire	630.4	480.7	477.7
Northumberland	307.4	241.5	241.8
North Yorkshire	570.1	445.5	439.3
Nottinghamshire	748.8	582.8	580.6
Oxfordshire	605.9	472.9	460.0
Shropshire	283.3	221.6	220.5
Somerset	498.7	388.5	388.0
Staffordshire	807.1	627.5	627.5
Suffolk	669.4	520.3	512.3
Surrey	1,059.5	828.6	804.1
Warwickshire	506.2	395.4	388.8
West Sussex	754.3	592.3	579.2
Wiltshire	433.5	334.4	328.6
Worcestershire	542.2	423.1	421.5

[1] Figures from the 2001 mid-year population estimates
[2] Figures from the Register of Electors as at 1 December 2001
Note:
Figures may not add exactly due to rounding.
Source:
Population Estimates Unit, ONS

Table 2: 2001 population and electorate data for districts in metropolitan counties and London boroughs

Thousands

	Persons all ages[1]	*Persons 18+*[1]	*Electors 18+*[2]
Greater Manchester (metropolitan county)	2,482.8	1,890.6	1,903.1
Bolton	261.3	197.5	203.9
Bury	180.7	137.0	138.6
Manchester	392.9	300.5	312.5
Oldham	217.5	161.3	158.4
Rochdale	205.2	152.6	152.3
Salford	215.9	166.2	159.5
Stockport	284.6	219.6	218.4
Tameside	213.1	161.9	162.7
Trafford	210.2	162.0	163.7
Wigan	301.5	232.0	233.1
Merseyside (metropolitan county)	1,361.7	1,042.1	1,041.1
Knowsley	150.5	111.3	108.8
Liverpool	439.2	338.5	337.1
St. Helens	176.8	135.6	134.9
Sefton	282.9	218.0	213.6
Wirral	312.2	238.7	246.6
South Yorkshire (metropolitan county)	1,266.5	981.0	953.9
Barnsley	218.1	168.3	170.1
Doncaster	286.9	219.4	215.1
Rotherham	248.4	189.7	192.6
Sheffield	513.1	403.6	376.1
Tyne and Wear (metropolitan county)	1,076.3	839.9	823.0
Gateshead	191.2	149.4	150.2
Newcastle upon Tyne	259.6	205.0	198.3
North Tyneside	192.0	150.5	141.7
South Tyneside	152.8	117.8	115.6
Sunderland	280.8	217.2	217.2
West Midlands (metropolitan county)	2,554.4	1,923.9	1,907.6
Birmingham	976.4	719.6	714.3
Coventry	300.7	229.2	221.8
Dudley	305.1	236.8	236.5
Sandwell	282.8	213.7	213.0
Solihull	199.6	152.4	152.5
Walsall	253.3	191.5	188.2
Wolverhampton	236.4	180.7	181.3
West Yorkshire (metropolitan county)	2,080.2	1,584.0	1,547.1
Bradford	467.9	344.9	332.7
Calderdale	192.4	146.4	145.8
Kirklees	388.9	294.6	287.6
Leeds	715.5	555.4	533.0
Wakefield	315.4	242.7	248.1

Table 2: 2001 population and electorate data for districts in metropolitan counties and London boroughs

Thousands

	Persons all ages[1]	*Persons 18+*[1]	*Electors 18+*[2]
London Boroughs			
Greater London	7,188.0	5,568.3	5,169.9
City of London	7.2	6.5	5.7
Barking and Dagenham	164.3	121.5	115.4
Barnet	315.3	243.7	230.7
Bexley	218.8	167.4	167.5
Brent	263.8	204.8	179.5
Bromley	296.2	230.5	225.8
Camden	198.4	161.4	136.9
Croydon	331.5	250.1	239.9
Ealing	301.6	234.4	212.9
Enfield	274.3	209.4	198.8
Greenwich	215.2	163.1	155.1
Hackney	203.4	150.6	130.0
Hammersmith and Fulham	165.5	135.2	114.0
Haringey	216.8	167.0	148.4
Harrow	208.0	160.5	157.5
Havering	224.7	174.6	176.2
Hillingdon	243.1	185.7	179.7
Hounslow	212.7	163.4	158.3
Islington	176.1	140.2	128.7
Kensington and Chelsea	159.1	132.0	98.9
Kingston upon Thames	147.6	116.5	100.1
Lambeth	266.8	210.2	194.1
Lewisham	249.5	191.0	179.8
Merton	188.3	147.7	133.3
Newham	244.3	172.7	155.4
Redbridge	239.3	182.0	178.4
Richmond upon Thames	172.8	137.1	129.0
Southwark	245.4	190.5	170.6
Sutton	180.2	138.1	131.2
Tower Hamlets	196.6	146.4	138.2
Waltham Forest	218.6	166.3	159.7
Wandsworth	260.8	214.0	209.1
Westminster	181.7	154.2	131.2

[1] Figures from the 2001 mid-year population estimates.
[2] Figures from the Register of Electors as at 1 December 2001.
Note:
Figures may not add due to rounding.
Source:
Population Estimates Unit, ONS.

Table 3: 2001 population and electorate data for Government office regions of England

Thousands

	Persons all ages[1]	Persons 18+[1]	Electors 18+[2]
North East	2,516.5	1,954.5	1,937.1
North West	6,731.5	5,161.6	5,167.3
Yorkshire and the Humber	4,967.2	3,824.8	3,752.1
East Midlands	4,175.1	3,233.2	3,185.5
West Midlands	5,267.1	4,033.2	3,995.5
East	5,394.9	4,179.6	4,118.7
London	7,188.0	5,568.3	5,169.9
South East	8,006.9	6,124.9	6,081.2
South West	4,934.2	3,875.9	3,824.7

[1] Figures from the 2001 mid-year population estimates.
[2] Figures from the Register of Electors as at 1 December 2001.
Source:
Population Estimates Unit, ONS.

Private-Public Partnerships

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many departmental minutes issued by his Department were outstanding on 30 November that referred to public private partnerships as included in Table B14 of the Consolidated Fund and National Loans Fund Accounts; and what their value was. [89424]

Mr. Leslie: The office of the Deputy Prime Minister had no departmental minutes referring to public private partnerships in Table B14 of the Consolidated Fund and National Loans Fund Accounts.

Room Areas

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when the regulations prescribing the manner in which the floor area of a room is to be ascertained under section 326 (4) of the Housing Act 1985 were laid before Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [89526]

Mr. McNulty: Regulations governing the measurement of rooms were made in 1937 under that provision of the Housing Act 1935 which preceded section 326(4) of the Housing Act 1985. These regulations were revoked in 1990, and no alternative methods of measurement were specified.

Room Definitions

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what definition of the terms *(a)* living room, *(b)* sitting room and *(c)* lounge exists in legislation. [89549]

Mr. McNulty: As regards Part X of the Housing Act 1985, which specifies the overcrowding standards, the term "living room" is used without definition to describe a room, other than a bedroom, that may be regarded as sleeping accommodation, subject to normal practice in the locality, for the purposes of determining whether a dwelling is overcrowded. The other terms mentioned by my hon. Friend are not used in Part X.

Room Spaces

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if kitchens and bathrooms with a floor space greater than 50 square feet are counted as rooms available to sleep in. [89525]

Mr. McNulty: Under Part X of the Housing Act 1985, a room with a floor space of 50 square feet or more is considered to be available as sleeping accommodation if it is of a type normally used in the locality as a bedroom or as a living room.

Smoke Alarms

Dr. Cable: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment the Government has made of the costs and benefits of making the fitting of smoke alarms a statutory requirement for *(a)* domestic and *(b)* other property owners. [89132]

Mr. Leslie: The possibility of introducing a mandatory requirement on all households to install smoke alarms was considered by the Community Fire Safety Task Force whose 1997 report, "Safe as Houses", outlined a strategy on reducing fire deaths. The Government accepted their finding that, although such a proposal does have attractions, the enforcement difficulties were likely to be excessive. Instead, it advocated a far greater level of publicity and education to build upon the significant improvement on ownership levels which have already been achieved.

The fire safety aspects of the Building Regulations in Approved Document B were amended in 1992, to include provision for mains wired, interconnected smoke alarms to be provided in all new dwellings, resulting in new homes being provided with smoke alarms since 1992. This provision was extended in 2000 when, following a regulatory impact assessment, it was considered to be good regulation for smoke alarms to also be provided where a loft conversion is undertaken in an existing dwelling. This move, together with our wider publicity and educational efforts, has helped to raise smoke alarm ownership levels in all households to 82 per cent.

Premises that require a fire certificate under the Fire Precautions Act 1971 and premises that are subject to the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997 can be required to have fire detection equipment where this is reasonable and necessary in relation to the risks to persons who use the premises. This was reflected when the Building Regulations and Approved Document B were further amended in 2000 to require new and materially altered premises to be fitted with appropriate provisions for the early warning of fire.

The Government have also recently consulted on proposals to reform general fire safety law by means of a Regulatory Reform Order. These proposals would extend the risk based requirements of the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations to most places, other than private dwellings, and would include provision of fire detection equipment where this is reasonable and necessary. The proposals will be subject to a full Regulatory Impact Assessment and this is currently being prepared.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what estimate the Government made of the number of homes *(a)* equipped and *(b)* not equipped with a working smoke alarm. [89135]

Mr. Raynsford: Findings from the "2000 British Crime Survey" suggest that 77 per cent. of households in England and Wales were equipped with at least one smoke alarm. 23 per cent. of households were not equipped with a smoke alarm.

Due to the nature of the question asked in the British Crime Survey, it is not possible to ascertain what proportion of households were equipped with a working alarm. However, evidence from the National Community Fire Safety Centre's annual Fire Safety Attitude and Behaviour Monitor suggests that in approximately 9 per cent. of households containing fitted smoke alarms at least one alarm has either been disconnected or has had the battery removed.

Social Services Expenditure

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether the formula for funding social services expenditure of local authorities reflects a 20 per cent. higher cost of elderly residential provision in those areas to be subject to the higher differential rate of payments under the Delayed Discharge (Compensation) Bill. [89607]

Mr. Raynsford: The grant distribution formulae for social services have to be generally applicable across England. As such they are based primarily on broad indicators of population, deprivation and the area cost adjustment. Possible payments under the Delayed Discharge Bill would be calculated on a different basis. My right hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) has announced that there will be an additional £100 million provided to local government for each full year of the reimbursement scheme.

WALES

Bilingual Service

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what his estimate is of the annual cost of his Department's bilingual service; and how many people used this service in the latest year for which information is available. [89953]

Peter Hain: My Department is committed to treating the Welsh and English languages on a basis of equality. It is not possible separately to identify the day-to-day running costs which arise from this.

Most of our translation needs are met by the National Assembly's Translation Unit under the terms of a service level agreement. However, in 2001–02, £4,400 was spent on translation by outside contractors.

No records are kept of the number of people who use Welsh in their dealings with us.

Demographics

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what his latest estimates are of *(a)* the population and *(b)* the electorate in Wales. [90007]

Peter Hain: The figures requested are contained in the Digest of Welsh Statistics 2002, which is available on the National Assembly for Wales website (www.wales.gov.uk).

(a) 2,903,200 (2001 mid-year estimate based on 2001 census).

(b) Parliamentary electorate, 2,238,200.

National Assembly and local government electorate, 2,245,400.

TRANSPORT

Airport Capacity (South-East)

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list the community organisations, residents' associations and environmental groups which he, members of his ministerial team and officials have met with regard to the consultation on airport capacity in the South East up to 30 November; [88492]

(2) if he will list the organisations from the aviation industry which he and any member of his ministerial team and his officials have met with regard to the consultation on airport capacity in the South East up to 30 November. [88491]

Mr. Jamieson: Since the launch of The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom (South East) consultation, Ministers and officials have held a large number of meetings with a wide range of individuals and organisations. This has included representatives of environmental organisations, local authorities, business groups and the aviation industry.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport announced to Parliament on 28 November that the consultation on airports capacity will be extended until we have consulted on proposals in respect of Gatwick. We will set out our plans for the remaining stage of the consultation process when we publish the further consultation paper early in 2003.

Alternative Fuels

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent discussions he has had with representatives of the road haulage industry and vehicle manufacturers regarding *(a)* the use of alternative fuels and *(b)* the development and use of lean, clean and low noise engines. [90323]

Mr. Jamieson: Ministers meet regularly with representatives of the road haulage, motor and oil industries to discuss the development of clean fuels and technologies, both individually and through a number of high level committees. The Road Haulage Forum, for example, discusses progress in modernising the industry, including through the introduction of clean vehicle technologies. The Low Carbon Vehicle Partnership, which will be launched on 16 January 2003, will allow Ministers to work closely with all stakeholders to encourage the development and use of clean, low carbon vehicles and fuels.

Central Railways

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the SRA report on central railways to be published; and who will be responsible for publication. [89690]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 11 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 351W, to the hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir John Stanley).

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the Strategic Rail Authority report on Central Railway; and if he will make a statement. [89691]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 11 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 351W, to the hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir John Stanley).

Diesel Technology

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what incentives the Government have put in place to encourage *(a)* vehicle manufacturers and road haulage companies to cut emissions on existing diesel technology and *(b)* the wider use of alternative based vehicles. [90322]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government have introduced a number of incentives to encourage the wider use of cleaner vehicles and fuels, and has published the "Powering Future Vehicles Strategy", which provides a framework for future fiscal and other incentives.

All new vehicles have to meet minimum European emission standards that are set to become progressively tougher over time. This will ensure that all vehicles—including heavy diesel vehicles—become less polluting over time. In addition, my Department sponsors the CleanUp programme that provides grants towards the cost of fitting trucks—and other vehicles—with

pollution reducing technologies such as particulate traps. In many cases, trucks fitting such devices can also benefit from lower Vehicle Excise Duty.

More generally, the Government are encouraging the wider use of cleaner fuels and vehicles through:

favourable fuel duty rates for cleaner fuels, including LPG, natural gas and biofuels;

company car tax and vehicle excise duty regimes based on CO_2 emissions, with discounts for alternatively fuelled vehicles; and

grants through Transport Energy programmes towards the additional cost of purchasing cleaner vehicles such as electric, hybrid and gas vehicles.

Dismantled Railway Lines

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many feasibility studies the SRA commissioned in 2002 into the possible re-opening of dismantled railway lines; and if he will make a statement. [88957]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) does not commission feasibility studies into the re-opening of dismantled railway lines. Parties who intend to make bids for Rail Passenger Partnership (RPP) funding however, often carry out feasibility studies and three such bids have been received during 2002. Therefore, no specific studies into dismantled railway lines have been commissioned by the SRA in 2002.

Driving Licences

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many requests were received in the past 12 months to replace *(a)* photocard and *(b)* counterpart driving licences. [90024]

Mr. Jamieson: The photocard and the paper counterpart together constitute the complete driving licence. DVLA expects to process some 680,000 applications for duplicate driving licences (i.e. where the licence has been lost, stolen or defaced) by the end of the current financial year. Figures are not available for which part of the licence has been lost but DVLA believes that most cases involve loss of the paper counterpart.

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will provide a breakdown of the average costs incurred, per application, by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency for providing *(a)* replacement photographic driving licences and *(b)* replacement counterpart driving licences in 2001–02. [90025]

Mr. Jamieson: The average cost of replacement licences of all types, per application, in 2001–02 is estimated to be around £5.60. DVLA does not maintain a breakdown of transaction costs into the categories requested.

Freight

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what Government assistance has been given to UK freight transport since 1997. [90318]

Mr. Jamieson: Government policy is to promote an efficient, safe, and sustainable UK freight industry across all modes; rail, road, air, sea and inland waterway. Since 1997 the Government have implemented a variety of fiscal and non-fiscal measures to support this policy.

Detailed information in relation to all freight transport modes across the United Kingdom could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Investment

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what additional investment in travel by sea there is in his spending plans for 2003–04. [89566]

Mr. Jamieson: None. The Department does not subsidise travel by sea.

London Underground (PPP)

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how much money has been spent by his Department on *(a)* consultants' fees and *(b)* lawyers' fees for the London Underground PPP; [88978]

(2) what has been the cost to his Department, and its predecessor Departments, of preparing the PPP for London Underground. [88977]

Mr. Jamieson: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State explained when giving evidence to the Transport Select Committee on 18 December 2002, the estimated cost to London Transport and to the Department of preparing for the PPP, including the costs being repaid to all bidders, is likely to total around £500 million.

The PPP amounts to an unprecedented modernisation of the entire underground network over the next 30-years. The level of bid development costs reflects this and also the lengthy duration of the bidding process, which commenced in October 1999. Nonetheless, the level of bid costs represents only an extremely small proportion of the value of investment that will be delivered over the life of the contracts.

It is normal practice for eligible bid costs to be recoverable under PFI contracts. In this instance, the amounts to be recovered have been verified through an independent review to ensure that the costs have been reasonably and properly occurred and were appropriate for a transaction of this nature.

The Department has sought to keep its costs to a minimum by making joint use of London Transport's advisers, expenditure on which is regularly reported to Parliament, mostly recently on 25 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 63W. As this made clear, London Transport's expenditure on external consultants, including legal advice, from 20 March 1998 (the date of the Government's announcement) to 30 September 2002, for work on the PPP and restructuring of London Underground, was £96.3 million. As a result of the delayed implementation of the PPP, London Transport currently estimate that the final amount should be between £103-£105 million, an increase of between £5–£7 million over its December 2001 forecast. Around £1.6 million of this increase arises from the Mayor's second unsuccessful legal challenge in July 2002. The court granted that these costs should be fully recovered from Transport for London.

The Department has separately spent around £1.5 million on independent external advice where this has been appropriate.

Manchester Airport

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many aircraft transport movements there have been at Manchester Airport in each month since December 2001. [90732]

Mr. Jamieson: The information is as follows:

Air transport movements at Manchester airport

	Number
2001	
December	11,750
2002	
January	12,804
February	11,993
March	13,260
April	13,504
May	15,791
June	16,022
July	17,070
August	17,469
September	17,123
October	16,338
November	13,495

Public Private Partnerships

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many departmental minutes issued by his Department were outstanding on 30 November, that referred to public private partnerships as included in Table B14 of the Consolidated Fund and National Loans Fund Accounts; and what their value was. [89421]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department for Transport had no departmental minutes outstanding on 30 November referring to public private partnerships as included in Table B14 of the Consolidated Fund and National Loans Fund Accounts.

Railway Investment

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the proposals received by the Strategic Rail Authority for investment in signalling, track improvement and platform lengthening in the areas served by *(a)* South-West Trains and *(b)* Island Line; and which are included in forthcoming investment programmes. [89567]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority announced a new approach to the South West Trains franchise on 6 November 2002. This involves a one-year extension to February 2004 and agreement of key principles with Stagecoach Holdings plc for a new franchise extending beyond then to 2007. The extension ensures the introduction of new trains and extra services but does not include infrastructure enhancements, which the Authority will develop separately. On 12 November 2002, the Authority announced that it had reached agreement with Stagecoach for the continued operation of the existing level of services on the Island Line until 2007. The Authority's Strategic Plan, the second edition of which is to be published shortly, will list investment priorities for the short and medium terms, as well as long-term goals for the network.

Shoreham Harbour

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with Shoreham Port Authority about levying charges on fishing cargoes landed at Shoreham Harbour; what the standard levy rate is for fish cargoes landed at trust ports; and which trust ports levy cargo dues on fish landed at their wharfs in addition to charges levied against the vessels themselves. [90026]

Mr. Jamieson: Fish landing dues are set by the harbour authority and are not a matter in which the Department has any locus. Therefore we hold no information about the level of dues set by individual authorities and have had no discussions with the Shoreham Port Authority regarding this matter.

Statutory Instruments

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many Statutory Instruments subject to negative procedure made by his Department *(a)* came into force and *(b)* were considered by a delegated legislation committee in each of the last three sessions. [88030]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department for Transport was formed on 29 May 2002. Since then 22 statutory instruments subject to the negative resolution procedure for which that Department is responsible have come into force. In the same period five statutory instruments for which the Department is responsible have been the subject of a debate in standing committee on delegated legislation.

Vehicles (Pedestrians)

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to require the fronts of vehicles to be more pedestrian-friendly. [90248]

Mr. Jamieson: We supported a proposal by the European Commission in 2001 for a negotiated agreement with the motor industry to design car fronts to reduce the injury to pedestrians in the event of an impact, beginning with new models in 2005. We are now awaiting a further proposal early this year from the Commission to provide a legislative framework for this agreement.

DEFENCE

Servicemen (Pension Rights)

Joyce Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what his Department's estimate is of the cost of extending service pension rights to the second spouses of deceased servicemen who completed their period of service prior to 1976; [88954]

(2) how many representations he has received concerning his Department's policy of refusing to transfer pension rights to the second spouses of servicemen who completed their periods of service prior to 1976; [88953]

(3) what assumptions concerning survival rates of spouses are made by his Department when estimating the cost of financing the transfer of pension rights to spouses after the death of a serviceman. [88955]

Dr. Moonie: Post-retirement widow and widower pensions (PRWP) were introduced as a requirement of the Social Security Pensions Act 1975. Provision was made in the Armed Forces Pension Scheme (AFPS) for the payment of pensions to widow(er)s of service pensioners who married (or remarried) after retirement, but this change benefited only the widows of those giving service on or after 6 April 1978, and the widowers of those giving service on or after 6 April 1989. Only service on or after those dates was taken into account when calculating the level of pension. Against this background, it would cost in the order of £50 million to extend PRWP's to all current and deferred AFPS pensioners. This would be a one-off cost.

It has been the long-standing policy of successive Governments that discretionary changes to improve the benefits from public service pensions schemes should be implemented from a current date for future service only. There is no distinction between servicemen and public sector employees with regard to the fact that the PRWP only applies to those with service on or after 6 April 1978, or 6 April 1989. To extend the post-retirement marriage concession to survivors of members of all public service occupational schemes would cost between £300 million and £500 million.

There is no requirement for the Ministry of Defence to hold data on the number of representations it has received on this issue and the information could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The assessment of the costs of making the 1978 and 1989 changes retrospective was a broad actuarial estimate, carried out by the Government Actuary's Department. The assumptions used in making this assessment were derived from general UK population mortality statistics, supplemented by mortality experience analysis within the AFPS and other pension schemes. Detailed calculations have not been carried out due to the lack of readily available data. Full calculations could be carried out only at disproportionate cost.

Aircraft Carriers (Deployment)

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the development of RN/RAF co-operation in joint deployments on UK aircraft carriers. [89887]

Mr. Ingram: The three United Kingdom Invincible class aircraft carriers are capable of supporting and operating a range of RN and RAF aircraft, both fixed wing and rotary wing. In addition, RAF Chinook helicopters, based on either HMS Ocean or any of the Invincible class aircraft carriers in the LPH role, have been provided by the Joint Helicopter Command to provide essential heavy-lift capability to amphibious operations.

The concepts of operations covering the employment of these aircraft from sea are firmly established and have been proven during both exercises and real operations. Already long-standing, the strong co-operation and resolute interoperability between the RN and the RAF continues to develop as defence strategies evolve.

Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment Report

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Public Record Office a copy of the report produced in 1961 by the chemical and biological defence establishment entitled, "The change of size-spectrum of zinc cadmium sulphide particles with increasing distance of travel" (Porton Note 218). [89463]

Dr. Moonie: A copy of Porton Note No. 218, entitled "The change of size spectrum of zinc cadmium sulphide particles with increasing distance of travel", has already been placed in the Public Record Office and can be found at WO 189/2388.

Colchester Garrison

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many weapons have been reported as missing from the Colchester Garrison in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. [90352]

Dr. Moonie: In the last ten years a total of two complete weapons and part of another weapon have been reported missing or stolen from Colchester Garrison. In 1999 the Birkhampstead Cadet Force reported an SA80 Assault weapon missing. In 2001 part of a bolt for an SA80 Assault Rifle and a deactivated Lee Enfield rifle were reported missing.

Departmental Properties (Scotland)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which of his Department's properties in Scotland are awaiting disposal; and if he will make a statement. [86389]

Dr. Moonie: There are currently 26 separate Ministry of Defence properties awaiting disposal as at 7 January 2003:

Defence Estates (Scotland): Properties awaiting disposal/ under offer

Garelochhead, Station road

Bower, Comms site (site 1)

Helensburgh Ardencaple dev sites (4)

RAF Machrihanish

Perth, St. Leonards Bank (3 and 7)

Edinburgh, TA Centre Dalmeny street

Edinburgh, TA Centre Chesser crescent

Coatbridge, TA Centre Quarry street

Falkirk TA Centre Bog road

Campbeltown, TA Centre

Buchan Claymore Estate (26)-phase 1

Helensburgh Churchill Estate (4)

Ayr-Belmont Avenue/Chalmers road (3)

Irvine, 31–66 Dundonald crescent
Helensburgh (seven blocks) Smuggler's Way
Forres MQs-Pilmuir Estate
Forres—76, 78, 80 Pilmuir (3)
Buchan-Invernettie (3) Monument close-phase 1
Glasgow, Kentigern House car park
Thurso, 40 Ormlie crescent
Aberdeen, 4 and 6 Ashwood circle
Glasgow, 133 and 135 Carmunnock road
Giffnock, 27, 29 Wellfield avenue and 27 Clifton road
Ardencaple-Office West King street
Inverness, dev site-Raigmore avenue
Leuchars-Earlshall land

Development Sites

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many times since 1997 his Department has used confidentiality as a reason for not revealing details in connection with selling sites for development; what they were, and with which companies; and if he will make a statement. [90129]

Dr. Moonie: There have been cases in the past when, on grounds of commercial confidentiality, the Ministry of Defence has withheld information relating to the disposal sale price. Since 1999 it has been departmental policy to require all purchasers of surplus MOD land and property to be told, in writing, that the final sale price will be made known to any party who, in the future, requests that information. However, bidders/purchasers may still refuse consent to the sale price being made public on the grounds of commercial confidentiality.

Specific details of the cases for which such information has been withheld are not held centrally and can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

HMS Ark Royal

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the capability of HMS Ark Royal to perform the functions of a Commando carrier. [89880]

Mr. Ingram: Maritime forces are inherently flexible and although not her primary role the Carrier Vertical Strike (CVS) can be operated successfully as a Landing Platform Helicopter (LPH). HMS Illustrious demonstrated this when, during operations in Afghanistan, she reconfigured from her role as CVS to that of LPH while at sea on deployment in the Gulf. Her primary role while configured as an LPH was to support joint and combined war fighting operations and to provide a platform for the rapid deployment of elements of Landing Forces by helicopter. HMS Ark Royal is fully capable of performing this task.

HMS Nottingham

Mr. Wood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much the transportation of HMS Nottingham is expected to cost; and when the board of inquiry report into the incident which caused the damage is to be published. [89558]

Mr. Ingram: The cost of transporting HMS Nottingham from Australia to the United Kingdom on a Heavy Lift Ship is expected to be about £3 million.

There are no plans to publish the Board of Inquiry (BOI) report into the incident in which HMS Nottingham was damaged. A BOI is an internal fact-finding investigation into the circumstances surrounding a particular incident, undertaken by the Services for internal use. Boards are convened to discover whether there were any procedural or other Service-related irregularities, or difficulties which could be identified and overcome. The main purpose is to establish the facts concerning an incident as quickly as possible and to make recommendations aimed at preventing a recurrence. The principle of confidentiality applied to BOI proceedings is designed to encourage witnesses to provide forthright evidence.

HMS Sheffield

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what formal complaints he has received since April 2002 concerning the handling of the sailors' evidence on the loss of HMS Sheffield in May 1982; and if he will make a statement. [90127]

Dr. Moonie: A total of eight letters were received during April and May 2002 from MPs relaying concerns raised by their constituents relating to the conduct of the Board of Inquiry into the loss of HMS Sheffield during the Falklands Campaign. As I stated at that time, I am satisfied that the Board of Inquiry was conducted in a professional and proper manner and that no useful purpose would be served by reopening the inquiry.

Honours

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects an outcome to the meeting of the sub-committee of the Committee on the Grant of Honours Decorations and Medals, chaired by General Lord Guthrie of Craigiebank on 22 November, regarding the case for a general service medal for Suez veterans. [90118]

Dr. Moonie: The report submitted by the sub-committee chaired by Lord Guthrie to the HD Committee will be considered by them before making a recommendation to Her Majesty the Queen. HD Committee's conclusions will be published in due course.

Iraq

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what British *(a)* special forces and *(b)* other military personnel (i) are and (ii) were in 2002 (A) involved in operations and (B) present on the ground within the borders of Iraq. [89854]

Mr. Hoon: It is the longstanding policy of successive governments never to comment on the activities of special forces. I am therefore withholding the information requested in accordance with Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Regarding conventional forces, there are and have been no military forces deployed on ground operations within Iraqi borders either currently or at any time in 2002. There are, however, 11 United Kingdom military personnel currently deployed with the United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission (UNIKOM)), the headquarters of which is situated just inside Iraq's borders, within the UN Demilitarised Zone.

JSF Aircraft

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment his Department has made of the progress of the JSF development programme and the likely date of availability of JSF aircraft for the future aircraft carriers. [89888]

Mr. Ingram: The Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) programme has been moving forward successfully since the development contract was awarded to Lockheed Martin in October 2001. United Kingdom companies have already secured significant roles in JSF as a result of their outstanding technology and ability to deliver value for money.

It is planned that deliveries of the UK's JSF aircraft will begin in late 2009, in preparation for their entry into service in the CVF in 2012.

Land Transference

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the value was of the land transferred to QinetiQ at *(a)* Farnborough, *(b)* Fort Halstead, *(c)* Chertsey, *(d)* Funtington and *(e)* Malvern; what assessment he has made of the potential for housing and other developments on these sites; and what clawback arrangements there are in the event of substantial increases in value for the properties transferred. [87714]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 17 December 2002]:* In line with normal business practice, QinetiQ and its predecessor the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) frequently reviewed its estate in order to ensure that it was making efficient use of its property portfolio. Because a number of sites have already been scheduled for disposal, the value of the individual sites is commercially sensitive, and therefore specific details of the information requested are being withheld in accordance with Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information which relates to commercial confidences.

The majority of properties were transferred to QinetiQ on the basis of their value as part of the on-going business and in most cases the value of the property as part of the business was higher than would be achieved through a sale of the land on the open market. These values were assessed by external valuers immediately before the properties were transferred to QinetiQ at vesting. The total value of the land and buildings transferred from the Ministry of Defence to QinetiQ in use in the continuing business was £342 million. Due to the specialist nature of QinetiQ's business the valuation is based on depreciated replacement cost, and this amount was £114 million greater than the open market value. This amount does not include surplus properties held for disposal which on transfer to QinetiQ in July 2001 had an open market value of £98 million, that was subsequently reduced by impairment of £20 million, as stated in the company's annual report 2002.

The sale provisions contain clawback arrangements to ensure that the taxpayer receives a suitable share of any unanticipated or excess profits arising from land disposals.

MOD Contracts

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will ensure MOD contracts have at least 50 per cent. UK build content. [88573]

Mr. Ingram: It is the Government's policy to provide the armed forces with the equipment which they require at the best value for money for the taxpayer. Contracts are negotiated on an individual basis and there is no policy requirement for a particular percentage of work to be undertaken in the United Kingdom. However, as stated in our new defence industrial policy published on 14 October 2002, the benefit to the UK economy from Ministry of Defence contracts is taken into account when selecting contractors. A copy of the Government's defence industrial policy is in the Library of the House.

Nuclear Weapons

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his policy is on the use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states. [89853]

Mr. Ingram: Britain has repeatedly made it clear that we will not use nuclear weapons against a non-nuclear weapon state not in violation of its nuclear non-proliferation obligations, unless it attacks us, our allies or a state to which we have a security commitment, in association or alliance with a nuclear weapon state.

We would contemplate the use of nuclear weapons only in extreme circumstances of self-defence. We would not use our weapons, whether conventional or nuclear, contrary to international law.

The Government continue to believe that there is no benefit to be gained from speculation about hypothetical scenarios involving the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons.

Overseas Forces (Decoding Cards)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will establish a decoding card for those serving in the Armed Forces overseas with a digital box so that they can receive BFBS radio and television; and what evaluation has been made as to the merits of providing these services. [89606]

Dr. Moonie: Use of a decoding card in conjunction with a suitable set-top box would not in itself enable reception of British Forces Broadcasting Service (BFBS) television and radio services as it is necessary to have an appropriately sized and correctly aligned satellite receiver dish in addition. The size and alignment of these dishes would not be the same as for those used by other broadcasters in the United Kingdom, e.g. BSkyB.

Until recently all BFBS transmissions utilised low power satellites requiring large receiver dishes (of up to 4 metres diameter) not suitable for Direct-to-Home (DTK) down linking. This has meant that local transmission and reception has been via conventional terrestrial broadcasts requiring approval by the host nation and allocation of suitable frequencies.

However, since December 2001 BFBS has used satellite capacity on Eutelsat W3 which enables radio and television broadcasts to be received on dishes no larger than 1.2 metres. As a result, it will become possible to dispense with local terrestrial transmission systems and move to DTH. Plans to do this in Germany are being finalised as part of the requirement to switch to digital broadcasting in that country and it is probable that other locations will follow in due course, dependent upon affordability.

To protect programme rights holders, BFBS is introducing fully encrypted television services throughout the area covered by the Eutelsat W3. To date the Balkans and the Middle East are fully encrypted and proposals are being prepared to extend this to all other locations. The encryption service is delivered either via set top boxes (to single televisions) or via secure cable installations (again via decoders). Access at each set or cable head-end is controlled by digital cards.

The BFBS radio channels can also be received via the set top boxes but in order to provide a MI service e.g. in workshops, cars etc., radio is normally delivered via local terrestrial transmitters in the overseas Commands and operational theatres.

Overseas Service

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the places where British troops are serving abroad and whether they can *(a)* receive radio and *(b)* obtain newspapers; and if he will make a statement. [89605]

Dr. Moonie: Information on the location of British forces serving abroad can be found in Tri-Service Publication (TSP) 6, "Global Location of Service Personnel", a copy of which is held in the House of Commons Library. This is published quarterly, the latest edition is as at 1 October 2002.

Availability of British Forces Broadcasting Service (BFBS) radio and/or television broadcasts depends upon a number of factors including host nation acceptance (including the provision of suitable broadcast frequencies where necessary), practicality and affordability; and is currently available in the following locations:

Location	*TV*	*Radio*
North West Europe		
Belgium	No	Yes
Germany	Yes	Yes
Netherlands	No	Yes
Rest of World Garrisons/Units		
Ascension Island	Yes	Yes
Belize	Yes	Yes
Brunei	No	Yes
Canada (BATUS)	Yes[1]	Yes
Canada (Goose Bay)	Yes	No
Cyprus	Yes	Yes
Falkland Islands	Yes	Yes
Gibraltar	Yes	Yes
Italy (Naples)	Yes	No
Deployed Operational Theatres		
Afghanistan	Yes	Yes
Bosnia/Kosovo	Yes	Yes
Greece (Sindos Camp)	Yes	No
Kuwait	Yes	Yes
Oman (Thumrait)	Yes	Yes
Saudi Arabia	Yes	Yes
Turkey	Yes	Yes
HM Ships	[1,2]Yes	[2]No

[1] Recorded VHS tapes
[2] Some larger ships are able to receive live satellite TV/Radio, others can receive when in port. Trials are being conducted on the practicality of providing BFBS to other HM ships via the "SCOT" broadcast system.

Newspapers are supplied to HM Forces under a contract with Higgs International Ltd. to the following overseas countries/locations.

Country	*Location*
Abu Dhabi	—
Afghanistan	Kabul
Belize	—
Bosnia	Various
Brunei	—
Canada	Suffield; Wainwright; Ottawa; Goose Bay
Croatia	—
Cyprus	Akrotiri; Dhekelia and Ayios Nikolaos
Falkland Islands	—
Germany	Various
Italy	Naples and Valencia
Kenya	—
Kosovo	—
Kuwait	—
Macedonia	—
Nepal	—
Norway	Stavanger and Reitan
Saudi Arabia	Riyadh
Sierra Leone	—
Turkey	Incirlik
USA	Norfolk, Virginia

Most personnel serving abroad, be they in permanent garrisons, training unit or liaison/exchange posts etc. will receive a Local Overseas Allowance (LOA) which is a compensatory, non-taxable allowance encompassing a wide range of factors including the ability to access English language radio, television and newspapers.

Personnel deployed away from their normal place of duty on operation or exercise, in excess of two months, are provided with an Operational Welfare Package (OWP). The key elements of the OWP include 20 minutes of publicly funded telephone calls per week, internet access, mail, newspapers, books and where practical the provision of BFBS television and radio.

Pension Benefits

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the educative

measures his Department has taken to ensure *(a)* serving armed services personnel and *(b)* veterans are informed of the pension benefits veterans are entitled to. [89470]

Dr. Moonie: All Service personnel receive basic information about the benefits offered by the Armed Forces Pension Scheme (AFPS) when they join the armed forces and further information, notably a statement of benefits accrued, when they leave. We also provide advice on the AFPS and the financial aspects of resettlement through briefings by specially mandated independent financial advisers. These presentations are not restricted to Service leavers; they are available to any member of the armed forces at any stage in his or her career. They are normally delivered at Regional Resettlement Centres, nine of which are in the United Kingdom, while the other is in Germany. Pensioners also receive an annual newsletter from Paymaster, the contractor responsible for paying their pensions, updating them on any changes that might affect them.

The basic information material on the scheme had become out-dated and was not simply written. We have therefore been revising it and, in late autumn 2002, we issued to all serving members of the armed forces a pack containing a straightforward, easy-to-read new guide to the current AFPS and a short, pocket-sized summary which also gives the current pension code rates, details of additional booklets in the series and useful contacts. The general guide was tested with key ex-Service organisations and with representative Service personnel, and is now available on the MOD web and the internet. It will be issued to all new recruits when they commence their initial training. The pocket-sized brief will be updated and reissued annually, again on an individual basis, to incorporate each year's new pension code rates.

Five supplementary booklets covering specialised pension topics were published at the same time; these are available to serving military personnel on request and can also be found on the internet and MOD intranet. Copies of the pack and the five booklets will shortly be placed in the Library of the House. A further three booklets are currently being written to complete the series; these are due to be published in late spring this year and will also be available electronically. This series of booklets has been publicised to ex-Service organisations, notably the Forces Pensions Society. However, they may not be relevant to all veterans, given the changes to pension benefits over time, and do not replace the information that will have been communicated to ex-Service personnel during their time in service and at the point when they left the armed forces.

In addition to this general information on the Services' occupational pension schemes and the benefits they offer, specific information exercises are undertaken where changes take place affecting the entitlement of Service or ex-Service personnel. Examples of this include information on changes with respect to transfer rights between pension schemes, and on the introduction of Stakeholder pensions and pension-sharing on divorce.

The War Pension Scheme is administered separately and, in addition to the AFPS, provides Service personnel with compensation for injury or illness attributable to service. We inform serving armed forces personnel of the provisions of the War Pension Scheme through their leaving-packs and, since the transfer of the Veterans Agency (VA) to the Ministry of Defence, the War Pensioners Welfare Service (WPWS) have attended resettlement events to give advice. In order to raise veterans' awareness of the War Pensions Scheme, we issue a range of information leaflets and posters to a variety of outlets such as post offices, regimental museums and GP surgeries. The VA works closely with ex-Service organisations and the War Pension Committees. In addition, the VA website contains comprehensive information and the WPWS holds advice days and surgeries using a mobile advice unit to reach more remote areas.

RAF Welford

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what long-term plans he has for the future use of RAF Welford. [89443]

Mr. Ingram: RAF Welford will continue to be made available for the use of the United States Visiting Force. There are no plans to change the current mission of the base, which is that of a munition storage site.

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps have been taken to assess the risks from accidents involving vehicles carrying munitions to and from RAF Welford and other military bases. [89447]

Mr. Ingram: All road movements are carried out in accordance with Ministry of Defence policy, which complies fully with national and international regulations. Formal assessments have been carried out by the MOD Explosives Storage and Transportation Committee on all types of munitions carried by road.

Recruitment Initiatives

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on recruitment initiatives for *(a)* the Royal Navy and *(b)* the Royal Marines. [89872]

Dr. Moonie: The Directorate of Naval Recruiting continually utilises various advertising mediums for promoting careers in the Naval Service, and has an on-going programme of recruiting initiatives. Current initiatives include: the London Ethnic Minorities Recruiting Strategy, which commenced in June 2002—a dedicated campaign based on ethnic minority recruiting success in previous years; a campaign to improve submarine recruiting by offering acquaint visits to submarine facilities, and the production of a dedicated submarine recruiting video; and a proposal to use an external response handling agency to deal with the handling of potential recruiting inquiries to improve efficiency and effectiveness. In addition, visits to ships and establishments by potential recruits are encouraged and exhibition trailers participate regularly in local and regional events.

RN Presentation Team

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the structure, role and programme of the RN Presentation Team. [89871]

Dr. Moonie: The role of the Royal Navy Presentation Team (RNPT) is to improve the public image, understanding and perception of the Royal Navy through the organisation and delivery of presentations to a wide cross-section of audiences around the United Kingdom.

The team of nine personnel are all serving members of the RN or Royal Marines, led by Captain RNPT. They typically serve with the team for about two years. Four members comprise the road team, which delivers the presentations. Others are responsible for generating and directing the presentation events, while the remainder provide administrative support.

The RNPT operates an annual programme of presentations commencing each September and ending in the following June. Between September 2002 and June 2003, the team aims to give over 90 presentations across the United Kingdom, including universities, and groups from industry and commerce. Presentations to school students aged 18 and under are given by a separate students presentation team.

Scientific Advisory Council Reports

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when his Department will deposit documents relating to the reports and papers of the Scientific Advisory Council in 1970 and 1971 into the WO 195 classmark at the Public Record Office; and for what reason these documents are not already deposited in accordance with the 30-year rule of the Public Records Act 1967. [89464]

Dr. Moonie: The Scientific Advisory Council was abolished on 1 April 1969 and was replaced by the Defence Scientific Advisory Council (DSAC). There are therefore, no papers held for the Scientific Advisory Council for the years 1970 and 1971. Papers relating to DSAC covering the years 1970 and 1971 have been deposited in the Public Record Office under class DEFE 10, which covers major Committees.

Spending Review

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list for his Department *(a)* those Comprehensive Spending Review 1998 targets that were outstanding at the time of the statement on the Comprehensive Spending Review 2002, *(b)* progress on such targets since then and *(c)* the expected date when targets not yet achieved will be met. [87692]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 17 December 2002]:* The Ministry of Defence published details of achievements against current PSA targets with its Expenditure Plans (Cm 5412) in July 2002 and details of progress against all outstanding PSA targets in its Performance Report 2001–02 (Cm 5661) in November 2002.

War Pensions

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many veterans from *(a)* the Second World War and *(b)* conflicts since 1945 are claiming (i) a war disablement pension, (ii) an armed forces pension and (iii) a war pension. [89471]

Dr. Moonie: The information requested is not available in the format required and it could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Entitlement to War Pension and Armed Forces Pension is not dependant upon service during a war/conflict.

As at 30 June 2002, there were 214,265 war pensions in payment in respect of veterans who have served since 1939, and there are currently 270,000 armed forces pensions in payment.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his Department's policy is in regard to back-dating a claimant's war pension entitlements; and how many claims his Department received in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2002 from (i) veterans of the Second World War and (ii) veterans of conflicts since 1945. [89472]

Dr. Moonie: The policy for commencing dates of war disablement pension (for ex-service personnel) is incorporated into Schedule 3 to the Naval, Military and Air Forces etc. (Disablement and Death) Service Pensions Order 1983 (Statutory Instrument 1983 No. 883).

The normal rules are that a pension is commenced from the date of claim or application for review.

Statistics on claims to back-dating of war pensions are not kept by the Veterans Agency.

TREASURY

Working Families Tax Credit

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many families in *(a)* Newcastle upon Tyne and *(b)* Gateshead are receiving working families tax credit; and what the average value of the credit is. [89527]

Dawn Primarolo: The number of families with children receiving Working Families' or Disabled Person's Tax Credit in each local authority, and the average weekly values, appear in "Working Families' and Disabled Person's Tax Credit Statistics. Geographical analyses". This is available on the Inland Revenue web site, at www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats/wftc/wfdptc_geog.htm.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many recipient families live in a household receiving Working Families' Tax Credit but not housing benefit. [89693]

Dawn Primarolo: It is estimated that a little over one million families in Great Britain were in receipt of Working Families' Tax Credit (WFTC) but not Housing Benefit (HB) at May 2001, the latest date for which such an estimate is currently available. This estimate is based on WFTC administrative data and an analysis of Department of Work and Pension's 1 per cent. sample of HB recipients; the latter is subject to sampling uncertainty.

Accounting Officers

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on which occasions since May he has been informed of a Minister issuing a direction to an accounting officer as set out in paragraphs 12–15 of the Treasury document, The Responsibilities of an Accounting Officer; on which grounds the note of dissent was issued; and if he will make a statement. [88314]

Mr. Boateng: The circumstances in which an Accounting Officer should seek a direction from a Minister are set out in paragraphs 14–17 of the Treasury document The responsibilities of an Accounting Officer. The Treasury has not been informed of any directions issued by Ministers to Accounting Officers under this guidance, since the reply given by my predecessor (Andrew Smith) to the hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon) on 8 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 253W and my own further reply to the hon. Member (Mr. Bacon) on 10 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 1037W.

British Supplies

Paul Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent calculation he has made of the cost to public funds if *(a)* the Army, *(b)* the Education Service and *(c)* the NHS were required to purchase all supplies from exclusively British sources. [90254]

Mr. Boateng: To purchase supplies from exclusively British sources could restrict the Government's procurement policy that all procurement decisions are taken on grounds of value for money and be contrary to international obligations. No such calculations have therefore been made.

Christmas Expenses

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many departmental Christmas cards he and his Ministers sent in 2002; how much these cards will cost *(a)* to buy *(b)* to post and *(c)* in staff time to sign, address and place in envelopes; and if he will place in the Library a sample copy of the official Christmas card he has sent this year. [88102]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* A total of 2,440 departmental Christmas cards were purchased for Treasury Ministers at a total cost of £1,912.18. All expenditure incurred in the purchase and despatch of official Christmas cards is made in accordance with the departmental guidance on financial procedures and propriety, based on the principles set out in Government Accounting. The Treasury Christmas card was produced by Card Aid which donates all profit to charity. A sample copy of the card will be placed in the Library of the House.

Contingent Liabilities

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total Government expenditure on contingent liabilities which came to fruition was in each year since 1992. [89387]

Mr. Boateng: The information is not held centrally. When a contingent liability becomes an actual liability, the resulting expenditure is scored in both departmental accounts and national accounts.

Correspondence

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the hon. Member for Christchurch will receive a response to his letter of 6 November to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury concerning correspondence from Mr. Hawksworth. [90720]

Ruth Kelly: I wrote to the hon. Gentleman on 10 January saying that I hope to provide a full response soon and noting the reason for delay.

Departmental Expenditure (Newsprint)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total expenditure of his Department was on newspapers, magazines and periodicals in 2002. [90543]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 228W.

Departmental Research

Adam Price: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list programmes of research being conducted by members of the countries and regions team within his Department. [89852]

Mr. Boateng: The devolved countries and regions team does not have its own internal research programme. The Treasury more generally is involved in some external research on regional issues, partly funded by the evidence based policy fund.

Diversity

Norman Lamb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the programme of activities aimed at raising awareness of diversity in his Department, as set out on page 38 of the HM Treasury Departmental Report 2002; and how much the programme cost. [89261]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 7 January 2003]:* The Treasury initiated a programme to raise awareness of diversity among all staff in 2001. A number of events and seminars have been held. Diversity has also been incorporated into our management training courses, including induction, appraisal, recruitment and selection. Since January 2001, the Department has spent £96,000, partially funded through the Modernising Government Fund, on raising diversity awareness among Treasury staff.

Diversity Objectives

Norman Lamb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the diversity objectives set by members of the Senior Civil Service within his Department, as set out on page 38 of the HM Treasury Departmental Report 2002; to what extent these objectives have been met; and what measures have been put in place to monitor progress towards these objectives. [89262]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 7 January 2003]:* The Treasury is committed to improving the diversity of its staff and has diversity targets to improve the representations of women, people from a minority ethnic background people with disabilities at all management levels. To help the Department to make further progress in this area, members of the Senior Civil Service have been asked to set themselves a diversity objective. These are monitored through the Department's internal performance management system. Progress against our diversity objectives will be published in the Treasury's 2003 Departmental Report.

Euro

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the five tests will begin being conducted on UK entry to the euro; and who will conduct the five tests. [89386]

Ruth Kelly: The Government have said that they will complete an assessment of the five economic tests within two years of the start of this Parliament. The assessment will be a Government assessment and the work will be undertaken by the Treasury.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the proportion of small and medium sized companies that have made preparations for UK membership of the Euro; and if he will make a statement. [90171]

Ruth Kelly: The Government has made no estimate of the proportion of small and medium sized companies that have made preparations for UK membership of the euro.

Finance Regulation and Industry Section

Norman Lamb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make a statement on the *(a)* activities and *(b)* purpose of the Finance Regulation and Industry Section of HM Treasury. [89264]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 7 January 2003]:* The purpose of the Finance Regulation and Industry Directorate is to lead the Treasury's work in:

(i) increasing the productivity of the economy;

(ii) securing a competitive, efficient and well regulated financial sector;

(iii) ensuring financial sector stability.

The Directorate's teams pursue a wide range of activities that contribute to these three key areas.

(i) the enterprise and growth agenda—a programme of reforms aimed at the key drivers of productivity in the economy;

(ii) the framework for competition and economic regulation of private sector monopolies;

(iii) Public private partnerships and the private finance initiative;

(iv) The UK and EU legislative framework for regulation in the financial sector, including the completion of the EU single capital market;

(v) national and international systems for fighting financial crime, especially money laundering and terrorist financing; and

(vi) reforms to increase efficiency, competitiveness and fairness in the financial sector and to reduce financial exclusion.

Financial Advice Network

Ms Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on progress since 6 November 2002 on a strategy for a national financial advice network and the extent to which *(a)* credit unions and *(b)* friendly societies can play a part in the process of providing advice to the financially excluded from. [89460]

Ruth Kelly: It is important that everyone should have access to appropriate financial education, information and generic advice to understand his or her options, as well as having access to regulated product specific advice where appropriate.

We have noted the proposals for a new network to provide financial education, information and generic advice, with interest. Many organisations are already involved in the provision of those forms of help.

I welcome the work the Financial Services Authority (the FSA) is undertaking to look at the feasibility of a new tool to help deliver consistent, high quality, interactive generic help for those who need it. We also welcome the work the FSA will be doing to develop a more general strategy for consumer education, information and advice. We understand they plan to consult on this in the summer of 2003.

All financial services firms can support the provision of advice to the financially excluded.

Government Accounts

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) for what reason government accounts have switched from gross domestic product of regions and nations of the UK to gross value added of regions and nations of the UK; [89388]

(2) what elements of UK GDP are classed as 'extra regio' and what proportion of the total of 'extra regio' GDP each comprises for the current financial year; [89390]

(3) whether a revised set of regional gross value added statistics for the period of 1989 to 1999 will be published. [89428]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter to John Pullinger from Alex Salmond, dated 13 January 2003:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent questions on estimates of regional gross value added (GVA). I am replying in his absence. (89428, 89388, 89390).

Current estimates of Regional GVA were published in February 2001 for the period 1989 to 1999. A revised series was published on 21 November 2002, but was withdrawn on 10 December 2002, when errors were identified by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and issues raised as to the quality of the underlying data. The ONS plans to publish estimates for regional, sub-regional and local area GVA in the spring of 2003. This will follow an investigation and detailed analysis of the compilation systems and component data to ensure their quality.

Under the European System of Accounts 95 (ESA95) the economic estimates that are defined as Gross Value Added (GVA) at basic prices are broadly equivalent to what has been historically known as GDP at factor cost. ONS has effected the change from

GDP at factor cost to GVA at basic prices as part of implementation of ESA95, along with all other EU countries. GVA at basic prices includes the effects of taxes less subsidies on production, but excludes taxes and subsidies on products, which are included in GDP at market prices under ESA95.

The GVA for extra-regio comprises that part of compensation of employees and of gross trading surplus which cannot be assigned to any particular region. This mainly relateds to (1) the extraction of oil and gas and (2) public administration and defence (armed forces overseas and embassies). 1998 is the latest year for which industry estimates showing this breakdown are available.

For that year the total estimate for extra-regio was just under £12 billion, of which 92 per cent. related to the extraction of oil and gas and 8 per cent. to public administration and defence.

Government Documents

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what documents comparable to Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland are published for regions of the UK. [89427]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Pullinger to Alex Salmond dated 13 January 2003:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your parliamentary question on what documents comparable to Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland (GERS) are published for regions of the UK. I am replying in his absence.

GERS is unique, and there are no directly comparable publications for the English regions, or for Wales and Northern Ireland. Comparable information on Wales used to be published by the Welsh Office, but this was last published in 1996 and related to the financial year 1993/94.

There is, however, information published by the office for National Statistics (ONS) and other Government departments on Government expenditure and revenue within the regions of the UK that can provide a partial comparison on some aspects of the data for Scotland presented in GERS, as described below.

HM Treasury published a comprehensive account of regional (NJTS1) Government expenditure in its annual publication Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses (HM Treasury (2002)) or PESA. The estimates show identifiable Government expenditure by function of government for Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the nine Government Office Regions of England. The PESA estimates do not cover Government revenue.

On 31 October 2002, the ONS published experimental sub-national estimates of Government accounts for the calendar year 1998. The estimates show by region (NUTS1) where General Government output is produced, which regions and sub-regions have contributed to Government revenue and which regions and sub-regions have received Government expenditure. The ONS work, however, is not intended to give a complete picture of Government finances and certain aspects of revenue and expenditure are excluded from the analyses and hence the estimates are not directly comparable with GERS.

Finally, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has commissioned a project to identify the flow of Public expenditure (UK and European) into the English regions (NUTS1) and the allocative mechanisms that underpin those flows. The project has close links with the PESA estimates and with the ONS Government accounts work, but is not looking at Government revenue. The project is expected to be completed by the middle of 2003.

Landfill Levy

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the calculations his Department has made concerning the value of the tax arising from the landfill levy that would have been forgone in 2002–03 if all the available tax credits had been claimed by landfill operators. [88582]

John Healey: Based on the predicted quantity of taxable waste going to landfill, the total tax liability of landfill operators in 2002–03 is estimated to be £675 million. Landfill operators can divert up to a maximum of 20 per cent. of this amount to the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme. Therefore, if all available tax credits are claimed in 2002–03, then approximately £135 million of potential landfill tax revenue will be foregone.

Minimum Wage

Pete Wishart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the impact of increasing the minimum wage *(a)* in line with average earnings, *(b)* to £4.17 per hour, *(c)* to £4.87 per hour, *(d)* to £5.00 per hour and *(e)* to £5.30 per hour, on the cost of salaries of departmental employees (i) in total and (ii) for each nation of the United Kingdom in the next financial year. [90596]

Ruth Kelly: Increasing the minimum wage by *(a)*, *(b)*, *(c)*, *(d)*, *(e)* will have no impact on the cost of salaries for HM Treasury.

New Export System

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what representations he has received from trade associations and other business interests regarding the New Export System; [89130]

(2) what the target time period is for Customs and Excise to clear applications under the New Export System. [89129]

John Healey: Customs and Excise's New Export System (NES) went live at all Maritime and Inland locations (including Inland Clearance Depots) throughout the UK on 27 October 2002. NES is an electronic- based system, which enables exporters and agents to send their export declarations to Customs electronically. It replaces the current paper-based system, facilitates legitimate trade and helps combat VAT and Excise fraud.

NES provides a number of tailored models and procedures to meet the needs of different trade sectors. It allows Customs to target their controls more effectively, minimise disruption to legitimate trade and reduce the time it takes to process an export declaration.

In order to utilise NES simplified procedures exporters must apply to Customs for specific authorisation. This involves completion of a form, possibly a visit from a Customs Officer and, depending on the electronic transmission route chosen, registering to use the Government Gateway. Each application is considered on its merits; there is no specific time frame for completion of individual applications. Customs make every effort to complete their part of the procedure as swiftly as possible. Exporters who need to obtain a digital certificate from the Office of the e-Envoy (to enable Government Gateway access) may wait approximately 7 days for delivery of access data.

The Paymaster General received one representation on NES from the British International Freight Association (BIFA) on 20 December 2001, to which the Financial Secretary replied on 24 January 2002. A series of Questions relating to the use and provision of digital certificates was laid and answered in October 2002.

Office of National Statistics

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the budget of the Office of National Statistics was in each year from 1992. [89389]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Karen Dunnell to Mr. Alex Salmond, dated 13 January 2003:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question on what the budget of the Office for National Statistics was in each year from 1992. I am replying in his absence. (89389)

The requested information is shown in the attached table.

Office for National Statistics Spending[1]

£ million

Financial year	*Expenditure*[2]
1992–93	97
1993–94	90
1994–95	93
1995–96	103
1996–97	110
1997–98	95
1998–99	102
1999–2000	110
2000–01	156
2001–02	212
2002–03[3]	163

[1] The Office for National Statistics was created as a Government Department and an Executive Agency on 1 April 1996 by merging the Central Statistical Office (CSO) and the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS). The figures for 1992–93 to 1995–96 reflect the combined outturn for CSO and OPCS.

[2] Expenditure figures from 1998–99 are presented on a resource basis. Figures for earlier years are in cash terms. Figures from 1998–99 onwards include additional provision for planning, fieldwork and initial processing of the 2001 Census of Population in England and Wales.

[3] Planned expenditure.

Pensions

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people have informed his Department that they wish to *(a)* contract out of the state pension and *(b)* contract back in to the state additional pension in each three month period in the last three years for which figures are available. [87995]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* The information is only available for those individuals with Appropriate Personal Pensions (APP) and Stakeholder Pensions (SHP) for complete tax years. The table shows the number of APP and SHP applications and cancellations for complete tax years.

Number of appropriate personal pension and stakeholder pension applications and cancellations received

	Number of applications[1]	*Number of cancellations*[1]
1999–2000	116,600	77,600
2000–01	143,300	20,000
2001–02	207,000	53,000

[1] Rounded to the nearest hundred

Scorecard Approach

Norman Lamb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will make a statement on the scorecard approach based on departmental information used by his Department to measure Spending Review 2000 PSA Target 4, as described on page 26 of the HM Treasury Departmental Report 2002; [89266]

(2) if he will make a statement on the scorecard approach based on departmental information used by his Department to measure improvements to the quality and cost-effectiveness of public services, as set out on page 58 of the HM Treasury Departmental Report 2002. [89269]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answers 7 January 2003]*: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor) on 21 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 586W.

SDA Target E1.2

Norman Lamb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the action his Department has adopted to meet Spending Review 2000 SDA Target E1.2, as described on page 32 of the HM Treasury Departmental Report 2002. [89267]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 7 January 2003]*: The Treasury continues to make progress towards meeting its diversity targets. The Department has an action plan focused on achieving these targets and other diversity aspirations. Progress against our diversity targets will be published in the Treasury's 2003 Departmental Report.

Tobacco Products (Revenue)

Paul Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total revenue from the sale of tobacco products was in each of the last five years. [90273]

John Healey: Total revenue from excise duty and estimated VAT receipts from tobacco for each of the last five years are below:

	£million
1997–98	10,106
1998–99	9,977
1999–2000	7,489
2000–01	9,413
2001–02	9,514

Unemployment (City of Chester)

Ms Christine Russell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people were unemployed in the City of Chester in *(a)* May 1997 and *(b)* December 2002. [90282]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Pullinger to Ms Christine Russell, dated 13 January 2003:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question regarding the number of people who were unemployed in the City of Chester in *(a)* May 1997 and *(b)* December 2002. I am replying in his absence. (90282)

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) compiles statistics of unemployment from surveys following the international standard International Labour Organisation definition. However the survey sample size is too small to provide estimates for the City of Chester. ONS also compiles claimant count statistics which represent claimants of the Jobseeker's Allowance working age benefit.

The claimant count in the City of Chester parliamentary constituency, not seasonally adjusted, stood at 2,062 in May 1997 and at 879 in November 2002. Figures for December 2002 will be released on 15th January 2003.

Waste Recycling

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the allocation of landfill tax credits was to waste recycling projects run by *(a)* local councils, *(b)* non-profit making charitable organisations and *(c)* industry in financial years (i) 2001–02 and (ii) 2002–03. [90452]

John Healey: Figures are not available in the form requested. In 2001, contributions of £34 million were made under the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme to projects that encourage sustainable waste management, the development of products from waste or markets for recycled products through research, education or information dissemination. The figure for 2002 is estimated to be £37million. All projects are run by environmental bodies registered with ENTRUST, the scheme's regulator. All such bodies are not-for-profit, but not all are charities. They may not be controlled by landfill operators or local authorities, but very often work in partnership with them.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Commonwealth Games

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her criteria are for assessing the success of the Commonwealth Games in Manchester; and if she will make a statement. [89581]

Mr. Caborn: The Public Sector Funders and Manchester 2002 defined the following shared objectives in relation to the Games:

To position the UK as a Centre of International Sport, and to demonstrate the UK's ability to host a major international sporting event. To view the games as one means of strengthening sports participation at all levels

To strengthen the economic and social capacity of the City/Region, recognising the importance of capturing maximum benefits to justify the significant capital investment in facilities

To advance policies for greater social inclusion, promotion of diversity, access to sport and volunteering

To showcase Britain internationally and to raise the profile of the Commonwealth

An assessment of how well these objectives were achieved was included in an independent 'lessons learned' report, jointly commissioned by my Department, Manchester City Council and Sport England in June 2002.

The full published report can be viewed on the DCMS website at *www.culture.gov.uk*

Community Radio Station Licences

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport pursuant to her answer of 11 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 39W, on community radio station licences, what organisations are involved in the pilot study of access radio stations, and at what cost; and whether non-returnable deposits are required for individuals applying for licences for community radio. [89436]

Dr. Howells: The access radio pilot schemes licensed by the Radio Authority are:

Angel Radio
Awaz FM
Bradford Community Broadcasting
Cross Rhythms City Radio
Desi Radio
Radio Faza
Forest of Dean Community Radio
GTFM
Manchester Community Radio Group (Radio Regen)
New Style Radio
Northern Visions Radio
Resonance FM
Shine FM
Sound Radio
Takeover Radio

The costs incurred are a matter for the organisations involved.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 25 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 39W, explaining that no charge (whether through a deposit or a licence fee) is made for licensing the current access radio pilot experiment.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how she is encouraging *(a)* individuals and *(b)* organisations to apply for licences for community radio stations. [89435]

Dr. Howells: It is up to individuals or organisations to apply direct to the Radio Authority for radio licences.

Community Sports Initiatives

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to improve access to community sports facilities for volunteer organisations and the local community; and if she will make a statement. [89998]

Mr. Caborn: The new opportunities for PE and sport programme is committing £581.25 million in England to support projects designed to bring about a step-change in the provision of sports facilities for young people and their community generally. The programme will ensure that new and modernised facilities for school and

community use promote social inclusion through access to and use of sports and outdoor adventure facilities by all groups in society.

Green Ministers

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport pursuant to her answer, ref 88451, on Green Ministers, how often the Green Ministers Committee has met since the Baroness Blackstone was appointed. [89766]

Dr. Howells: The Green Ministers Committee has met four times.

Olympic Games

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) if she will make a statement on her policy on applying HM Treasury's Green Book assumptions, and the appropriate assumptions for inflation, when calculating the cost of staging the 2012 Olympic Games; [89582]

(2) what measurable financial return on public investment she seeks in assessing the viability of bidding for the 2012 Olympic Games. [89580]

Mr. Caborn: The Government use the guidance and procedures issued by the Treasury in their Green Book, (Appraisal and evaluation in Central Government 1997), in assessing the value of bidding for and staging the 2012 Olympic Games. This analysis complements an estimate of the cash flow for future public expenditure planning, which allows for inflation, which we are also undertaking.

Sports Clubs-Schools Partnerships

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to encourage and support partnerships between sports clubs and schools; and if she will make a statement. [90001]

Mr. Caborn: We are encouraging clubs to forge strong links with schools and to build quality opportunities for young people that are safe, effective and child friendly through the PE, School Sport and Club Links project. Investment in child protection and club development (£10 million from 2004–05) and from the £60 million Community Club Facilities Fund will be used to encourage and support school-club links and junior provision.

Sports Coaching

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what plans she has to compile a directory of the coaches that will be available to schools and community groups; and if she will make a statement; [89996]

(2) what plans she has to introduce career structures for coaching of sport; and if she will make a statement. [89997]

Mr. Caborn: We are investing £28 million from 2003–04 to implement recommendations of the Coaching Task Force for: a five-level national coaching certificate; ring-fenced resources to enable a step change in national governing bodies' coach education systems; a network of community-coach employment agencies to provide the local infrastructure to recruit, employ and deploy professional coaches in their area; a network of 45 coaching development officers deployed locally to assist in the strategic planning, implementation and management of coach development; and a major Come into Coaching recruitment drive to attract more people to enter coaching. These proposals will tackle the shortage of coaches, both professional and voluntary, and recognise coaching as a profession, with accredited qualifications and a career development structure.

Sports Facilities

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to *(a)* conduct a mapping exercise of local sports facilities, and *(b)* identify their usage and user profile; and if she will make a statement. [89995]

Mr. Caborn: We are in the process of planning a database that will include all significant sports facilities across England. It is intended that the databases will complement the Sport England Facilities Planning model and enable responsible organisations to make better informed decisions in planning the provision of sports facilities in the future.

Sports Fields

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when the new guidance for local authorities for assessment of sports fields will be published. [89684]

Mr. Caborn: New planning guidance (PPG17) and the accompanying notes for local authorities was published last year. The revised Playing Pitch Strategy, which up-dates the specific guidance on sports fields will be finalised by Sport England in the near future.

NORTHERN IRELAND

A-levels (Pupil Expenditure)

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the average amount spent on each pupil studying two A levels was in each of the last five years at *(a)* a further education college and *(b)* a school. [88800]

Jane Kennedy: The information requested is not available in the form requested.

(a) Full-time students attending Further Education Colleges do not generally undertake a programme of study comprising two A levels only.

(b) No account is taken of the number of examinations an individual pupil is studying when deciding on the level of funding a school receives.

Beef Exports

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will take steps to ensure full resumption of beef exports from Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [88913]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Resumption of beef exports from Northern Ireland have been possible from 30 September 2002 following changes in the rules of the date based export scheme, as a result of intensive lobbying of the EU Commission by the UK Government heavily supported by the devolved administrations. The changes mean that animals destined for the domestic market may be slaughtered in the same plant, provided they are time dedicated.

Efforts are being made by Government to ensure that there is a sufficient supply of eligible animals for this scheme by encouraging farmers to fully comply with EU Regulations on cattle identification and movements.

Officials are also in discussion with Northern Ireland meat processors to facilitate exports through the DBES. Four NI plants have declared an interest. However none have as yet provided sufficient detail of their ability to meet the scheme conditions to justify approval. Until the registration process is completed, exports cannot commence. New markets have to be found, but at present market conditions do not favour exports and, moreover, the GB market provides the best return. There is optimism however that limited exports to premium outlets will commence later in the year.

Bills (Late Payment)

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on Government policy with regard to the late payment of bills by large firms to other firms smaller than themselves. [88845]

Mr. Pearson: Government policy on this issue is the responsibility of the Department of Trade and Industry.

Current legislation extends to Northern Ireland. The United Kingdom was one of the first countries in the EU to implement late payment legislation to help promote a culture of prompt payment. There has been a statutory right for interest for late payment for Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) owed money by large firms or the public sector since 1 November 1998, when the Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1998 came into force. Since 1 November 2000 SMEs have been able to charge each other statutory interest, as well as large businesses and the public sector, for the late payment of commercial debt.

Amended late payment legislation came into force on 7 August 2002. The legislation fulfils the UK's obligations under European Directive 2000/35/EC on combating late payment in commercial transactions.

Bone Marrow Database

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action he has taken to extend the National Bone Marrow database to Northern Ireland. [88801]

Mr. Browne: The provision of tissue matched bone marrow is managed throughout the UK through the British Bone Marrow Donor Registry. The Blood Transfusion Service here, in conjunction with the local Tissue Typing Laboratory, is already a significant contributor to this Registry. There are approximately 7,000 local donors, of which around 50 have actually donated bone marrow.

The Anthony Nolan Trust and the International Bone Marrow Register also hold bone marrow registers, and there is co-operation between all registers.

Departmental Underspends

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the extent of underspend in the Northern Ireland Departments; and what action has been taken to deal with this. [88844]

Mr. Pearson: In his statement to the NI Assembly on 1 July 2002, the then Minister of Finance and Personnel set out details of the underspend for 2001–02, and his plans to address the issue in future years. The spending plans for 2003–04 to 2005–06, announced on 11 December 2002, build on the approach established at that time—full details are set out in Section 2 of the Budget Document ("Building on Progress: Budget 2003–06").

Information on the extent of any underspend for 2002–03 will be available in late June 2003.

Donaghadee Harbour

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the ownership of Donaghadee Harbour. [90453]

Angela Smith: Under' the Donaghadee Harbour Act 1820, ownership of the Harbour is vested in the Donaghadee Harbour Commissioners. The Board of Commissioners currently consists of officials of the Department for Regional Development, together with a representative from the Department of Finance and Personnel. As the Department for Regional Development bears the cost of harbour maintenance and upkeep, consideration is currently being given to bringing forward legislation transferring ownership of the harbour to the Department.

Drivers (Drugs)

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what measures are being taken to tackle the problem of drivers driving while under the influence of drugs. [88867]

Angela Smith: The Department for the Environment for Northern Ireland, consistent with its policy of pursuing research-based solutions to identified problems, is monitoring ongoing research into drugs and driving in GB, and based on the findings of that research will consider if and when action in Northern Ireland is appropriate.

In the meantime, the DOE, to create a more effective regime to control drugs and driving, intends to seek NIO agreement to the introduction of legislative powers to enable the police to undertake tests of co-ordination and, when suitable equipment is available, to require suspected drivers to provide samples for screening.

The PSNI view is that drugs and driving is an emerging threat to road safety. Work is ongoing by the police to identify an appropriate roadside screening device for drugs, similar to the roadside screening device for alcohol, and to procure and introduce the equipment at the earliest possible time.

Employment

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many jobs were *(a)* created and *(b)* lost in Northern Ireland in 2002. [90163]

Mr. Pearson: An exact figure for the number of jobs created and lost in the period requested is not available. However, the most recent data from the Quarterly Employment Survey (QES) provides an estimate of the net change in employee jobs between September 2001 and September 2002. QES figures show that the net change in the employee job level in Northern Ireland during that period was +6,850 (+1.1 per cent.).

Over the year to 31 December 2002, there were 4,354 redundancies in Northern Ireland confirmed to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

Government Expenditure Reports

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what comparable documents to Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland are published for Northern Ireland. [89434]

Mr. Pearson: There is no direct Northern Ireland equivalent to the Scottish publication "Government Expenditure and Revenue". However, historical financial information is available from a number of sources.

At an aggregated level, the Public Income and Expenditure Account provides a breakdown of the main sources of income, details of borrowing from the National Loans Fund and issues made to finance supply services.

More detailed information on Northern Ireland spending by programme is available in the HMT document "Public Expenditure Statistical Analysis", which provides details of identifiable and non-identifiable spending in each of the UK regions.

Higher Education

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on participation in higher education by students with parental homes in Northern Ireland, broken down by socio-economic class in each year since 1990. [88329]

Jane Kennedy: The data, obtained from the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), do not include all institutions in Northern Ireland. As a consequence, approximately 20 per cent. of NI-domiciled students are not captured.

The information for NI-domiciled accepted applicants to degree courses in the UK since 1993 is detailed in the table. Prior to the creation of UCAS in 1993, information on this basis was not available.

Social class	*I* *Professional*	*II* *Intermediate*	*III* *Skilled: non-manual*	*IIIM* *Skilled: manual*	*IV* *Partly skilled*	*V* *Unskilled*	*Not known*	*Total*
1993–94								
Number	773	3,005	1,097	1,497	541	231	365	7,509
Percentage	11	42	15	21	8	3		
1994–95								
Number	834	3,181	1,179	1,622	590	210	417	8,033
Percentage	11	42	15	21	8	3		
1995–96								
Number	873	3,262	1,218	1,712	599	251	546	8,461
Percentage	11	41	15	22	8	3		
1996–97								
Number	848	3,322	1,310	1,742	584	200	521	8,527
Percentage	11	41	16	22	7	2		
1997–98								
Number	940	3,751	1,533	1,844	692	241	845	9,846
Percentage	10	42	17	20	8	3		
1998–99								
Number	861	3,798	1,440	1,871	677	217	842	9,706
Percentage	10	43	16	21	8	2		
1999–2000								
Number	926	3,755	1,480	1,856	722	234	903	9,876
Percentage	10	42	16	21	8	3		

Social class	I Professional	II Intermediate	III Skilled: non-manual	IIIM Skilled: manual	IV Partly skilled	V Unskilled	Not known	Total
2000–01								
Number	964	3,871	1,676	1,939	725	242	955	10.372
Percentage	10.2	41.1	17.8	20.6	7.7	2.6		
2001–02								
Number	1,034	4,108	1,709	2,099	734	253	1,171	11,108
Percentage	10.4	41.3	17.2	21.1	7.4	2.5		

While the overall number of NI-domiciled students has increased, the percentage of students from each socio-economic group has remained relatively constant. Over 30 per cent. of NI-domiciled students come from social class groups III, IV and V.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what measures he proposes to take to reduce hospital waiting lists in Northern Ireland. [88916]

Mr. Browne: A wide range of measures is being taken to tackle hospital waiting lists. These include the expansion of existing bed capacity, the development of protected elective facilities, the provision of additional in-patient procedures, the development of community provision as an alternative to hospital treatment and the validation and improved management of waiting lists. To support this action, £5.5 million has been allocated in the current year and the additional £17.4 million provided for acute services in next year's budget will also help to improve access to hospital services.

Housing Maintenance

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he will take to ensure sustained investment in housing in Northern Ireland *(a)* to tackle disrepair and *(b)* to reduce unfitness in the residential sector. [89602]

Mr. Browne: I fully recognise the need for sustained investment in housing in Northern Ireland. I will continue to argue the strongest case possible for the resources necessary to tackle disrepair and reduce unfitness.

Gross funding for housing has increased from £621 million in 2001–02 to £655 million in the current financial year, contributing to the maintenance and improvement of housing conditions, both in the public and private sectors. Included in the overall housing resources is some £43 million per annum allocated for grants to tackle unfitness in the private sector.

Industrial Rates Relief

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make it his policy not to remove industrial rates relief before electricity prices in Northern Ireland are more in line with those in the rest of the United Kingdom. [88920]

Mr. Pearson: Arising out of the current Review of Rating Policy and as outlined in the recently published consultation report I have made a decision in principle to abolish industrial derating. What I am still considering is how best to achieve this without causing harm to business.

There are two ways I intend to approach this. Firstly, by phasing out derating gradually and secondly by providing a hardship scheme to minimise adverse impacts on vulnerable firms or sectors.

I do not think it would be right to use the tax base as a means of compensating for higher energy costs. Some sectors are affected much more than others and tariffs vary and are changing. We are looking at this whole area and it is my wish that the cost differential is brought down, well before the existing contracts expire.

The intention is to publish a policy paper early in the new year on this issue which will set out clearly a limited number of options for implementing change.

Maternity Hospital (Belfast)

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when a decision will be made on the location of the new maternity hospital for Belfast. [82024]

Mr. Browne: I expect to be in a position to take a decision soon, after I have had an opportunity to consider the outcome of the current consultation process covering the trusts' proposals.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the purpose is of the planned visits by the hon. Member for Basildon (Angela Smith) to Scotland and Wales. [89441]

Angela Smith: The Secretary of State has asked me to respond to your question.

On 4 December 2002, I announced the requirement for massive investment in Northern Ireland's water and sewerage services and the need to find a long-term and reliable funding source to meet this investment need. In December 2002, I undertook a study visit of the water industry in Scotland and in Wales, to learn more about how water and sewerage services are financed and delivered elsewhere in the United Kingdom. Water and sewerage services are delivered by a public corporation in Scotland, whereas these services are the responsibility of a not for profit trust in Wales. These services are funded by water charges in both regions.

On 11 December 2002, my colleague Ian Pearson MP announced our intention to introduce self-financing arrangements for water and sewerage services in Northern Ireland. This will mean that in the future Northern Ireland households will have to make a direct

contribution for the water and sewerage services they receive. I want to ensure that these services are delivered as effectively and efficiently as possible, so that the charges paid by Northern Ireland consumers offer value for money. Consequently, I wish to reflect on the best features of the financial and structural arrangements adopted by the water industry in Scotland and Wales when developing proposals for the introduction of self-financing arrangements for water and sewerage services in Northern Ireland.

I am committed to full and inclusive consultation on all proposals for the reform of water and sewerage services in Northern Ireland.

Navan Centre

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to assist with the re-opening of the Navan Centre in Armagh. [88804]

Angela Smith: My officials have been exploring a range of options that might lead to the re-opening of the Navan Centre. In particular, they remain in close contact with both the current trustees and the representatives of a consortium that is interested in taking over the Centre. A business plan has been tabled, and this is at the centre of discussion.

A number of difficult issues remain to be resolved, but we remain committed to working with these interested parties to see if it is possible to have the Navan Centre reopened.

New Schools (Funding)

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what criteria he takes into account when distributing capital funding for the development of new schools in Northern Ireland. [88917]

Jane Kennedy: The criteria for the allocation of capital funding for the development of new schools in Northern Ireland are based on educational need, prioritised as follows:

the need to address substantial unmet demand for school places;

replacement of sub-standard accommodation which is essential to effect rationalisation; and

replacement of schools that suffer significantly from several serious accommodation inadequacies.

An economic appraisal has to be completed for each school and an appropriate stage of planning needs to have been undertaken. Where relevant, a scheme must have an approved Development Proposal.

Official Forms

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make the body of official forms issued by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development more comprehensible to farmers. [88870]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Officials from the Department will be meeting with farming union representatives this month to discuss documentation and procedures relating to cattle identification and subsidy claims. The Department is also working towards simplifying application forms used for the programme for building sustainable prosperity and the PEACE II programme. In addition it is currently piloting on-line claims for sheep annual premium, with a view to making this facility more widely available and making subsidy applications more convenient and user-friendly

Forms produced by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development are broadly consistent with those used in other agriculture departments throughout the UK. One of the Department's main aims is to ensure that farmers are only being asked to provide information which is essential to meet statutory or other obligations and to facilitate processing. Forms normally contain contact details for anyone requiring assistance and are reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that they are as user friendly as possible.

Post-primary Education

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will place in the Library the data underlying the Review of Post Primary Education Household Survey. [88797]

Jane Kennedy: Data on the Review of Post-Primary Education Household Survey are set out in the Report on the Responses to Consultation. Additional analyses of responses by gender, age, type of school attended and level of social deprivation are available on the Department's website. A copy has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what reasons underlay the number of young people whose views were sought as part of the Review of Post Primary Education; and if he will make a statement. [88799]

Jane Kennedy: Young people constitute the current and future users of the education system and the multi-stranded consultation on the Burns Report provided an opportunity for them all to express their views. These were received through written submissions from young people, pupils at school, youth organisations, children's charities and representative bodies. The Department of Education also commissioned the Northern Ireland Youth Forum to undertake qualitative research into the views of 14–19 year olds through a series of focus groups broadly representative of the population. 200 young people were invited to 10 focus groups across Northern Ireland and 116 participated.

In addition, Save the Children conducted independent research into the views of primary school children.

PPPs

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many departmental minutes issued by his Department were outstanding on 30 November, that referred to public private partnerships as included in Table B14 of the Consolidated Fund and National Loans Fund Accounts; and what their value was. [89419]

Mr. Pearson: The coverage of Table B14, which contains details of departmental contingent liabilities, does not extend to the Northern Ireland Departments. In these cases the relevant information is produced as an appendix to the Public Income and Expenditure (PI&E) Account.

The 2001–02 PI&E Account is due to be published in January 2003 and reflects the position at 31 March 2002. None of the contingent liabilities listed at that date are in relation to public private partnerships, nor have there been any contingent liabilities relating to public private partnerships declared since that date.

Saville Inquiry

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much public funding has been provided up to November to the legal representatives of the families appearing at the Saville Inquiry, broken down by each solicitor or barrister or firm of solicitors involved. [87299]

Mr. Browne: The payments made to the legal representatives appearing at the Bloody Sunday Inquiry on behalf of the families or the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) are set out in the following table. The figures include VAT, where that is paid, and in most cases, expenses as well as fees. The figures represent the position as at 30 November 2002. The Judicial Reviews on Barristers' and Solicitors' fees currently under consideration could affect the level of payments already made in respect of the period of work covered.

	Payments made (£)	*Period covered (from)*	*Period covered (to)*
Senior counsel representing the families[1]			
Lord Gifford	383,120	Oct-98	Jun-02
Arthur Harvey	550,377	Jul-98	Jun-02
Michael Lavery	278,754	Nov-00	Jun-02
B.J. MacDonald[2]	261,187	Sept-98	May-02
P.T. MacDonald[3]	65,800	Apr-98	Jun-99
Michael Mansfield	296,875	Mar-99	Oct-01
Elish McDermott	105,309	Mar-00	Jun-01
Seamus Treacy[4]	307,301	Mar-98	Jun-01
Eoin McGonigal	82,446	Oct-00	Jun-02
Senior Counsel representing NICRA			
Sir Louis Blom-Cooper	227,879	Dec-00	Jun-02
Junior counsel representing the families			
John Coyle	213,931	Sept-99	May-01
Fiona Doherty	142,763	Oct-00	Sept-01
Ciaran Harvey	222,904	Dec-00	June-02
Richard Harvey	216,172	Oct-00	Dec-01
Brian Kennedy	406,939	Jul-99	Jun-02
Philip Magee[5]	83,175	June-98	Sept-00
Kieran Mallon BL	408,606	Mar-99	May-02
Brian McCartney	423,749	Oct-98	Apr-02
Karen Quinlivian BL	135,150	Mar-99	May-02
Patricia Smyth	286,386	Oct-98	Feb-02
Michael Topolski[6]	139,940	Nov-00	Jun-01
Mary McHugh	32,803	Feb-02	Apr-02
Junior counsel representing NICRA			
Paddy O'Hanlon	101,106	Nov-00	Jan-01
Solicitors representing the families[7]			
Barr & Co.	264,405	Feb-99	Jun-02
Brendan Kearney & Co.	606,069	Jul-99	Jun-02
Desmond Doherty & Co.[8]	659,249	Nov-98	Sept-02
MacDermott & McGurk	648,351	Nov-98	Sept-02
Madden & Finucane	5,173,370	Jan-98	Jul-02
McCann & McCann	294,521	Oct-98	Sept-02
McCartney & Casey	652,499	Nov-98	Sept-02
Solicitors representing NICRA			
Francis Keenan	208,739	May-00	Jun-01

[1] In addition the following senior counsel have represented/are representing some of the families but have yet to submit fee claims: Kevin Finnegan, Declan Morgan and Reg Weir.

[2] Left the case (as a junior) in September 2000 and rejoined the case (as a senior) in July 2001.

[3] Left the case June 1999.

[4] Having started as a junior in March 1998, became a senior counsel in September 2000.

[5] Left the case in September 2000.

[6] Left the case in June 2001.

[7] Includes payments made in respect of witness statement-taking work.

[8] Figure does not include fees for June 2002.

School Salaries

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the differential between the salaries of primary school principals and vice-principals. [88789]

Jane Kennedy: The Inquiry into teachers' pay and conditions of service completed its interim report on the salary differentials of principals and vice-principals at the end of November. Both sides of the Teachers' Salaries and Conditions of Service Negotiating Committee (Schools) accepted the report at their meeting on 17 December, and the employers and my Department will now put in place the arrangements necessary for its implementation.

Social Housing

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what additional financial resources will be allocated to the provision of sufficient social housing units to meet housing demand in Northern Ireland. [89600]

Mr. Browne: Funding of £66 million is being allocated in 2003–04 for the provision of social housing units in Northern Ireland. In addition to this some £24 million will be levered in by private finance through housing associations bringing the total budget to £90 million.

The requirement for social housing units to meet housing demand is measured by an independently assessed Net Stock Model. This Net Stock Model is currently being reviewed as recommended in the recent Needs and Effectiveness Evaluation studies into housing in Northern Ireland.

I will consider whatever additional financial resources may be necessary, when the results of the net stock model review have been received (early autumn 2003).

Springvale Campus Project

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the composition is of the group conducting the review of the Springvale campus project; what its terms of reference are; and when the review is expected to be completed. [88787]

Jane Kennedy: The Springvale Board, comprising members from the Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education, the University of Ulster and the West Belfast, Greater Shankill and North Belfast Partnership Boards, has agreed to conduct the Springvale review. The review's remit is to identify that the necessary external funding for the project remains in place, to define with clarity the way forward and to appraise any proposed alternative model with clear targets for completion. The Board has also be and regenerative dimensions of the original concept. It is expected to report by Easter 2003.

The supplementary data have been placed in the Library.

Vocational Training

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what funding the Department of Employment and Learning is making available to vocational training for young adults with learning difficulties; which units are receiving this support; and how much they are receiving. [88922]

Jane Kennedy: Jobskills is the Department's primary vocational training programme, aimed mainly at 16 and 17 year old school leavers, but with provision for young people with a disability, including those with a learning difficulty, to enter the programme up to their 22nd birthday. The programme's Access strand offers bespoke training to entrants with learning difficulties, and provides enhanced duration and funding support and training periods of up to 156 weeks. Access trainees follow training toward approved qualifications up to and including National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Level 1.

The Department provides additional funding to further education colleges for students with learning difficulties through the Additional Support Fund and weightings in the FE Funding Formula. A breakdown of funding between those students on vocational or non-vocational courses is not available.

The Department's Disablement Advisory Service provides funding to organisations to provide vocational and pre-vocational training, as well as other services for people with learning disabilities of all ages. It is not possible to provide an accurate breakdown of how much will be provided towards vocational training specifically for young adults with learning difficulties. The estimated amounts to be paid to organisations providing vocational training, among other services, in the 2002–03 year are:

	£
Datalink	13,000
Triangle	18,000
Mencap	76,000
The Orchardville Society	23,000
Parkanaur College	250,000

Water Charges

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to introduce direct water charges in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [89442]

Angela Smith: The Secretary of State has asked me to respond to your question, as I have responsibility for water and sewerage services.

In his budget announcement on 11 December 2002, my colleague Ian Pearson MP stated our intention that Water Service become a self-financing organisation. In principle, this will involve the introduction of domestic water and sewerage charges for Northern Ireland households. Water Service's non-domestic customers already pay water charges.

I am committed to full and inclusive consultation on our proposals for the reform of water and sewerage services in Northern Ireland.

Wet Weather Payments

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions he has had with DEFRA regarding applications to the EU for wet weather payments; and if he will make a statement. [88912]

Mr. Paul Murphy: DEFRA has been made fully aware of the difficulties experienced by the Northern Ireland agricultural industry as a result of the unprecedented wet weather during a large part of the 2002 growing season. It has indicated that it will facilitate any approach to the EU Commission seeking state aid approval for a possible financial assistance package, assuming that there is sufficient evidence to support such a case and that the necessary resources can be identified from within the Northern Ireland Block.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Flexible Working Hours

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to introduce a right to flexible working hours for employees with families; and if she will make a statement. [89809]

Alan Johnson: From 6 April 2003, parents with children under six, or disabled children under 18, will have the right to ask their employers for flexible working arrangements. Employers will have a statutory duty to consider these requests according to a set procedure. This includes confirming their decision in writing to the employee, and where the request cannot be accommodated, explaining the business reason and why it applies in the circumstances.

Guidance to assist employers and employees to use this right is available on the DTI website and will be expanded later this month: www.dti.gov.uk/er. Individual advice will be provided by the Acas Helpline 08457 47 47 47, and DTI will be running an awareness raising campaign in the national press in the run up to 6 April.

The Government are committed to providing working parents with more choice and support to help them balance work and child care in a way that benefits employers, employees and their children. The new right is part of a package of measures, including improvements to maternity pay and leave, the introduction of two weeks' paid paternity leave, and the introduction of paid adoption leave roughly equivalent to maternity provisions. These are in addition to existing rights to parental leave and time off for dependents.

Accreditation

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her Department is doing to support the Government's policy on accreditation. [88087]

Ms Hewitt: Accreditation, as a means of providing assurance of the competence of certification, inspection, testing and calibration services, is a voluntary activity which none the less makes an important contribution to the competitiveness of UK businesses. In order to ensure that accreditation is authoritative and operates in the public interest, my Department, on behalf of Government as a whole, has established a Memorandum of Understanding with the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) which places a number of duties and obligations on both parties and gives recognition to UKAS as the sole national body for the accreditation, against recognised standards, of certification and inspection bodies, testing and calibration laboratories. My Department is responsible for ensuring that the duties and obligations set down in the MoU are met by both parties. We are also supporting an accreditation awareness campaign, being run by UKAS, aimed at raising the awareness in business and Government of the benefits of using UKAS accredited services.

Animal Welfare

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if she will make a statement on plans to establish a primate breeding facility at the military research centre at Porton Down, indicating *(a)* what the maximum number of monkeys held will be, *(b)* from where the original monkeys will be obtained, *(c)* what species of monkey will be bred there and *(d)* for what purposes these monkeys will be used; [89080]

(2) if she will make a statement on the compatibility of the Government's policy of the Three Rs with the establishment of a primate breeding centre at Porton Down. [89081]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 8 January 2003]:* The monkeys will be used to help scientists continue vital research into serious diseases and conditions including HIV, malaria, stroke, Parkinson's Disease and Alzheimer's Disease. They will not be used for chemical and biological defence testing.

The facility under construction at Porton Down is part of a continuing effort to improve further the care and welfare of laboratory animals across the academic sector. The project, a partnership involving the MRC, The Wellcome Trust, the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge, has been in the planning for almost three years.

The new facility will replace an existing UK academic breeding facility for Rhesus Macaque monkeys. The colony is being relocated because the new facility at Porton Down will offer state of the art accommodation, care, and welfare in a secure setting. The aims of the facility are broadly two-fold:

(i) to establish a centre of excellence and to provide an example of best contemporary practice for the care and welfare of monkeys; and

(ii) to provide a supply of monkeys for justified medical research purposes.

The facility is designed to house about 250 macaques. It is expected that this will be sufficient to supply approximately 100 animals for use in academic medical research each year. This does not represent an increase in the use of such monkeys in the UK university sector.

Primates from the new breeding centre will only be used in scientific procedures licensed by the Home Office under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. This means that the 3Rs (replacement, reduction, and refinement) will be fully applied. Under the 1986

Act no animals can be used in scientific procedures if alternatives are available, and primates can only be used if no other species are suitable and readily obtainable. The number used and the suffering experienced must be minimised.

The establishment of this new facility further promotes policy on the 3Rs in that:

it will operate to the best contemporary practice for the care and welfare of monkeys and disseminate best practice accordingly. The facility will work closely with the MRC's Centre for Best Practice for Animals in Research to develop, promote and disseminate best practice in all aspects of primate care and welfare;

careful planning to predict the numbers of animals required for academic medical research will ensure that potential for "over-breeding" is avoided;

co-operative dialogue between the research funders and the facility will ensure that only scientific projects of the highest quality that can fully justify the use of monkeys will be supplied from the facility.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps the Government is taking to encourage the World Trade Organisation to allow countries to impose restrictions on the import of products that compromise animal welfare. [89082]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 8 January 2003]:* Because trade is a matter of Community competence, the UK has been working with other EU member states to progress this issue for a number of years. Animal welfare issues have been included in the EU's WTO negotiating priorities for some years. At Doha, the EU successfully negotiated the Doha mandate so that the issue of farm animal welfare would be taken into account as part of the current Agreement on Agriculture negotiations, which are due to be concluded by the end of 2004.

It remains extremely difficult to reach agreement on changes to WTO rules to allow countries explicitly to limit imports of goods based only on the way in which a product was made (under which would fall consideration of whether a production method took account of animal welfare standards). Many WTO member states are highly suspicious of the EU's motives and fear that animal welfare production standards will be used as a disguised form of protectionism. This is a concern for developing country governments in particular. This issue is not on the agenda for the current Doha trade round, but the EU continues to discuss this issue in all relevant WTO fora and is working hard to try to build trust and understanding for the EU's position.

The recent Commission Communication (COM(2002) 626 final) on Animal Welfare Legislation of 18 November offers a useful overview of the Commission's approach to improving animal welfare issues internationally, including through the WTO.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans the Government has to introduce a clearer labelling system to enable consumers to tell whether products have been tested on animals. [89083]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 8 January 2003]:* I have no such plans. The Cosmetic Products (Safety) Regulations already contain provisions allowing manufacturers who wish to label their products "not tested on animals" to do so. The recently agreed 7th Amendment to the Cosmetics Directive requires the European Commission to bring forward new guidelines on animal testing labelling to make it easier for manufacturers to make honest claims about animal testing.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of cosmetics sold in the UK were tested on animals, in the last year for which figures are available. [89085]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 8 January 2003]:* This information is not held centrally.

British Energy

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent assessment she has made of the solvency of *(a)* British Energy and *(b)* BNFL. [89089]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 8 January 2003]:* British Energy has submitted a plan to Government for the solvent restructuring of the company. The Department and its financial advisers have assessed the implications and have decided to support it in allowing the company to attempt solvent restructuring.

In respect of BNFL, it is for its Board to assess the Company's solvency. In doing so the company comply with relevant corporate governance and financial accounting requirements. This is independently reviewed by the company's auditors.

BNFL reported a net asset deficit in 2002. However the company has significant cash resources which, coupled with the ongoing proposals relating to the management of the UK's civil nuclear liabilities, means that the company can continue to trade.

BNFL's Directors confirmed that the company remains a going concern in their Corporate Governance Report included in the company's 2002 annual report and accounts.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to protect British energy markets from state-aided competition. [89568]

Mr. Wilson: Complaints about undertakings believed to be in receipt of unauthorised state aid should be directed to the European Commission for investigation.

This Government's policy is to ensure rapid progress is made in developing a single EU energy market to the benefit of UK consumers and business. As is the case with other industries in this country, our policy is to ensure that all companies, regardless of ultimate ownership, are strictly regulated in the interests of the consumer and the environment. All utilities are subject to legal regulatory and environmental obligations and controls.

Christmas Expenses

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much will be spent on *(a)* entertaining, *(b)* Christmas decorations and *(c)* other festive activities this Christmas season by his Department and

government agencies answerable to his Department; and of this sum how much will be spent in ministers' (i) private offices and (ii) official residences. [88122]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* It would not be possible to provide a detailed answer without incurring disproportionate cost, but any such expenditure would be for official purposes only, and would be in accordance with the Department's guidance on financial procedures and propriety, based on the principals set out in Government Accounting.

Convention on the Future of Europe

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her reply of 19 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 902W, which industry and user groups were consulted about the Convention on the Future of Europe; and in what terms. [89371]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 7 January 2003]:* Officials have been in contact with a broad range of copyright and other intellectual property rights interests to draw their attention to the work of the convention, particularly in relation to EU competence for intellectual property rights.

Departmental Running Costs

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what *(a)* percentage and *(b)* amounts of savings on her Department's running costs have been achieved in each year since 1998; and if she will make a statement. [88814]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 7 January 2003]:* Progress towards meeting with the Department's PSA target of annual savings of 2.5 per cent. of its administration costs has been published in its expenditure plans report since 2001.

In 1999–2000 the Department achieved a saving of 2.6 per cent. (£10.6 million) on projected costs of £406.6 million including savings from the introduction of the ELGAR and MANDRIN IT systems, from case handling in ACAS and the ETS and from savings relating to staff costs, postage and stationery and the re-scheduling of international payments.

In 2000–01 the Department achieved a saving of 4.6 per cent. of £19.3 million) on projected costs of £418.8 million including savings from better procurement procedures and from the development of IT systems.

Data for 2001/2002 is currently being collated and the results will be set out in the 2003 expenditure plans report, due to be published in the spring of 2003

Employment Tribunals

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, on how many occasions in each of the last three years an employment tribunal has used its powers under Rule 14 of the Employment Tribunal Rules of Procedure (SI 2001/1171) to make an order for costs against a respondent who has acted vexatiously, abusively, disruptively or otherwise unreasonably in conducting the proceedings; and how many of these orders have been for failure to disclose to an applicant documents as previously directed by the tribunal. [89810]

Alan Johnson: In the previous three financial years, the number of occasions where an employment tribunal has used its powers to make an order for costs against a respondent is recorded in the following table:

Year	*Number of cost awards*
2001–02	169
2000–01	80
1999–2000	61

Source:
Employment Tribunals Service

The database of the Employment Tribunals Service does not distinguish between an award made against the respondent company/individual or their representative, nor does it record the reason for the award of costs being made

Export Credits

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what applications have been received by the Export Credit Guarantees Department relating to *(a)* mining projects and *(b)* logging operations in the last 12 months. [88074]

Ms Hewitt: During 2002 the Export Credits Guarantee Department has received two applications relating to mining projects and none for logging operations.

One of the applications relates to the modernisation and improvement of existing underground coal mining operations in India and the second to a nickel refinery project in the Russian Federation.

ECGD does not disclose more detailed information on applications prior to guarantee issue for reasons of commercial confidentiality.

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which UK companies have received Export Credit Guarantees Department support for *(a)* the development of logging operations and *(b)* mining projects, since 1997; and what the locations of those operations were. [88075]

Ms Hewitt: The information is as follows:

Main UK exporter	*Project type*	*Location*
Cementation Skanska	Coal mine	Iran
NSG Exports Ltd.	Quarry	Saint Kitts and Nevis
Continental FSW Ltd.	Coal mine	Mexico

ECGD also provided Overseas Investment Insurance in respect of three other projects—a copper/gold mine in Argentina, a coal mine in Kazakhstan and a limestone quarry in Jamaica. Details of Investment Insurance support are commercially confidential.

GATS Agreement

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the UK Government's position in the GATS negotiations and the final agreement will be subject to

approval by Parliament; and if she will make a statement on the role of Parliament in the ratification process. [87709]

Ms Hewitt: The GATS negotiations are part of the Doha development agenda of the World Trade Organisation, in which the United Kingdom negotiates through the European Community. The Government will continue to keep Members informed of developments throughout the negotiations. In respect of the GATS, copies of a recent consultation document were deposited in the Libraries of both Houses last October, and we will also deposit there a summary of the responses received.

The Government has and will continue to keep Parliament informed of developments in the negotiations on the Doha development agenda, including on GATS. After the Doha ministerial meeting in November 2001 I made a detailed statement of the results of the meeting and the United Kingdom's position. The Government will ensure that both Houses will have an opportunity to scrutinise the outcome of the Doha development agenda negotiations as they have the results of previous multilateral trade negotiations.

Health and Safety

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether her Department and its agencies have met the commitment arising from action point 13 of the June 2000 strategy Statement on Revitalising Health and Safety to summarise health and safety performance and plans in Annual Reports from the year 2000–01 onwards. [89505]

Ms Hewitt: My Department has published its first annual report on health and safety, which includes information on its performance in 2000–01. Departmental agencies have for some time included health and safety in their annual reports. They are now reviewing those inclusions to ensure their reported performance and plans reflect the requirements of the Revitalising Health and Safety initiative.

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which senior officials within her Department and its agencies take responsibility for health and safety at board or equivalent level; and where their names are publicised. [89506]

Ms Hewitt: My Permanent Secretary has overall responsibility for health and safety for my Department and its Agencies. For my Department this responsibility has been delegated to the Director General Services. Both are members of my Department's Executive Board.

Agency Chief Executives are responsible for health and safety matters in their Agency. In addition, in the Insolvency Service the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources, in the Patent Office the Director of Corporate Services, and in the Employment Tribunals Service the Estates Director are the Directors responsible for health and safety. All are members of Agency Steering Boards.

All names are publicised in the Civil Service Year Book.

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information she has collated on the application to her Department and its agencies of the checklist, circulated by letter by Sir Richard Mottram, referred to under action point 12 of the revitalising health and safety strategy statement; and if he will make a statement. [89507]

Ms Hewitt: My Department has reviewed its governance arrangements for managing health and safety risks based on the checklist circulated by Sir Richard Mottram. This exercise has identified some actions, including revision of the Departmental Health and Safety Policy Statement to reflect the requirements of the Revitalising Health and Safety Strategy Statement.

Departmental agencies have reviewed their arrangements against the ministerial checklist published in the Revitalising Health and Safety Strategy Statement. They will be looking to extend their reviews to take into account the checklist circulated by Sir Richard Mottram.

Industrial Tribunals

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to make *(a)* judgments and *(b)* transcripts of cases being heard by industrial tribunals available through the internet. [88791]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 7 January 2003]:* There are no plans to put employment tribunal (formally industrial tribunal) decisions on the internet.

Mineworkers

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many mineworkers *(a)* are employed in Bassetlaw, *(b)* were employed in Bassetlaw 10 years ago and *(c)* are estimated to be employed in 10 years time. [88966]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 7 January 2003]:* Separate employment figures on a constituency basis are not available, but figures produced by the Coal Authority show that in September 2002, there were 1,785 miners employed in Nottinghamshire as a whole, all of whom worked in deep mines.

In 1992, figures were compiled differently. Figures published by the British Coal Corporation show that in March 1992, there were a total of 11,200 miners employed in Nottinghamshire as a whole, with 9,600 employed in deep mines and 1,600 employed in opencast mines.

DTI does not produce estimates of future employment figures in the coal industry.

Sources:

The Coal Authority

British Coal Corporation Report and Accounts, 1991–92

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many mineworkers *(a)* are employed in England, *(b)* were employed 10 years ago and *(c)* there are estimated to be in 10 years time. [88967]

Mr. Wilson: In September 2002, there were 7,970 mineworkers, including contractors, employed in England, with 6,832 employed in deep mines and 1,138 employed in opencast mines.

Employment figures in 1992 were compiled on a different basis and do not identify England separately. Figures published by the British Coal Corporation show that in March 1992, there were a total of 42,300 mineworkers employed in England and Wales, with 36,500 employed in deep mines and 5,800 employed in opencast mines. The corresponding figures for England and Wales in September 2002 show a total of 8,920 workers, with 7,420 employed in deep mines and 1,500 employed in opencast mines.

DTI does not produce estimates of future employment figures in the coal industry.

Sources:

The Coal Authority

British Coal Corporation Report and Accounts 1991–92

(Figures for Wales in 1992 cannot be separately identified)

Nuclear Energy

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to reduce the United Kingdom's reliance upon nuclear energy. [89483]

Mr. Wilson: The Government are currently carrying out a review of future energy policy with a view to issuing a White Paper shortly. The review includes consideration of the future role of nuclear power.

PACEC Consultancy

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the projects by PACEC Consultancy within her Department since 1998 and their costs; and if she will make a statement. [88810]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 7 January 2003]:* From the centrally-held information available, thee have been two PACEC contract since 1998:

Survey of the impact of a Trade Partners UK service, costing £74K

Report on Business Links in London, costing £11.5K

Policy Development

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the bodies outside her Department that have been involved in her Department's policy development in each year since 1997; and if she will make a statement. [88826]

Ms Hewitt: Central records are not kept but my Department consults very extensively on a wide range of issues affecting business, employees and consumers. In the course of recent reviews of the Department, for example, some 1,500 organisations and individuals provided their views.

Renewable Energy

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the most recent measure is of the percentage of electricity used in the London Headquarters Estate generated by renewable sources; and if she will make a statement. [88821]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 9 January 2003]:* Electricity generated from renewable sources currently constitutes 36 per cent of the total electricity used by the London Headquarters Estate.

Rural Newsagents

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations she has received from rural newsagents on the impact of changes in newspaper carriage costs. [88664]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 7 January 2003]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has received a number of recent representations about the concerns of rural newsagents over newspaper carriage charges.

The Office of Fair Trading (OFT) has recently carried out a review of the 1994 Code of Practice on newspaper distribution. This also addressed the issue of carriage and service charges. On 12 December 2002, the OFT published it provisional recommendations. The main provisional recommendation is that selling-on within exclusive territories should be fully liberalised. The provisional recommendations are now open for public consultation until 14 March 2003.

Services (Electronic Access)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of her Department and its associated agencies' services are accessible electronically; and if she will make a statement. [88812]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 7 January 2003]:* Fifty five per cent. of the planned total of services within my Department and associated agencies were accessible electronically in mid November, when the most recent review was carried out.

The Department remains committed to meeting the Government's target for making its services accessible electronically by 2005.

Severn Estuary (Tidal Power)

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent consideration has been given to harnessing tidal power in the Severn Estuary; and if she will make a statement. [89484]

Mr. Wilson: The Department commissioned a study by the Severn Tidal Power Group which considered the merits of a reappraisal of a Severn Estuary tidal barrage project. This report of that study was recently published and is available on the DTI website at: www.dti.gov.uk/energy/renewables/severn.shtml. The potential of renewable sources of energy, including tidal barrage schemes such as that proposed for the Severn Estuary, will be addressed in the Energy White Paper which will be published shortly.

Small Business Service

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the performance indicators that have been put in place to assess the success of the Small Business Service. [89827]

Nigel Griffiths: I refer the hon .Member to the reply I gave my hon .Friend the Member for Chorley on 22 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 248–49W.

Solar Energy

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans the Government have to increase the use of solar energy by domestic industry; and if she will make a statement. [89482]

Mr. Wilson: Private companies can apply for 40 per cent. grants (50 per cent. in the case of SMEs) to install solar photovoltaic systems under the £20 million first phase of the Major PV Demonstration Programme. With a medium or large scale system they may be able to claim the renewable obligation certificates for electricity they generate if they can reach agreement with their electricity supplier.

VAT on solar water heating professionally installed systems has been reduced to 5 per cent. since April 2000, and private companies can apply for enhanced capital allowances (tax refunds) for installing this technology, among other energy efficiency and energy saving measures.

Spending Review

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list for her Department *(a)* those Comprehensive Spending Review 1998 targets that were outstanding at the time of the statement on the Comprehensive Spending Review 2002, *(b)* progress on such targets since then and *(c)* the expected date when targets not yet achieved will be met. [87701]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 17 December 2002]:* The Department publishes progress against all its outstanding PSA targets in its Expenditure Plans Report and Autumn Performance Report. The Department's Autumn Performance Report will be published shortly and a copy will be placed in the Libraries of the House. The Expenditure Plans Report for 2002–03 to 2003–04 was published in June 2002; the Report for 2003–04 to 2004–05 is due to be published in Spring 2003.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Anti-social Behaviour Orders

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his answer of 11 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 307W, on anti-social behaviour orders, of the 18 persons fined how many fines have been collected; and at what rate. [89343]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* ASBOs, *(b)* parenting orders and *(c)* curfew orders have been issued in the City of Newcastle upon Tyne. [89107]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 9 January 2003]:* *(a)* The table shows the number of notifications received by the Home Office of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) issued within the Northumbria Magistrates Courts Committee (MCCs) area (in which the City of Newcastle upon Tyne is situated) and by local government authority up to 30 June 2002 (latest available).

We are aware that the numbers of ASBOs made nationally have been consistently under-reported in returns made by magistrates courts and are considering how reporting can be improved.

(b) Youth Justice Board figures indicate that 2,712 Parenting Orders were imposed in England and Wales between April 2000 and September 2002. During this period the number imposed in Newcastle upon Tyne was eight.

(c) Figures from the electronic monitoring contractors indicate that 3,037 Curfew Orders with electronic monitoring were imposed on young offenders aged 10 to 15 in the period from the start of the contracts on 28 January 1999 to the end of December 2002. During that period the number imposed in Newcastle upon Tyne was five.

No applications have yet been received to establish a local child curfew scheme under section 14 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. Some local authorities and police forces have considered the possibility but concluded that other measures should be taken to tackle relevant local problems.

Number of ASBOs as notified to the Home Office by magistrates courts committee and local authority area within England and Wales, April 1999-June 2002

MCC/local authority area	*Total issued*
Northumbria MCC	25
Of which	
From 1 April 1999 to 31 May 2000 by pfa	8
From 1 June 2000 to 30 June 2002 by local authority area	17
Gateshead MBC	3
Newcastle upon Tyne, City of	3
North Tyneside Council	8
South Tyneside MBC	2
Sunderland CC	1

Note:
Between 1 April 1999–31 May 2000 data available by police force area (pfa) only.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultation was held with the towns and cities to which asylum seekers will be sent; how many agreed to accept them; and what responsibility *(a)* NASS and *(b)* the accommodation agency has for assessing health and social services provision. [88674]

Beverley Hughes: Prior to becoming operational the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) wrote to regional consortia for each potential cluster area early in 2000 to seek their views on issues such as integration, access to education and healthcare before finalising

the initial cluster list. Any representations against designation were carefully considered by NASS before a final decision was made.

Neither NASS nor our accommodation providers formally assess the impact of dispersal on healthcare and social services. These are matters for the Department of Health (DOH) but it is not intended that dispersal should place an overwhelming burden on provision of services and MASS does liaise with colleagues in the DOH about dispersal.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what review of the experience of *(a)* Clearsprings and *(b)* Landmark (Liverpool) in (i) housing and (ii) accommodation of asylum seekers was conducted before contracts were agreed; [88676]

(2) how many of his contractors for making provision for asylum seekers are *(a)* run, *(b)*, owned and *(c)* managed by former asylum seekers. [88675]

Beverley Hughes: The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) is part of the Home Office and all its procurement exercises are undertaken in accordance with standard Government procurement rules. As part of the procurement process checks were made on the capability and suitability of potential suppliers and these checks would have included a review of their experience of housing and accommodation but not necessarily limited to asylum seekers. Former asylum seekers who have been given refugee status or allowed to remain on another basis are able to work and engage in business. Their former status as an asylum seeker would not have been taken into account in deciding whether the company was reputable.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to allow new asylum seekers to be able to work and so enable them to pay for their own support. [89534]

Beverley Hughes: There are no plans to re-introduce an employment concession for asylum seekers. The concession was established when widespread delays were occurring in the asylum system. By the time the concession was abolished in July last year it had become largely irrelevant and only applicable to a minority of applicants. The vast majority—around 80 per cent.— of asylum seekers currently receive an initial decision within six months of their application being submitted and could not therefore benefit from the terms of the concession.

We also believe that allowing new asylum applicants to work could act as a pull factor. We are determined to maintain a robust asylum process which helps those fleeing persecution and not those who wish to come to the UK to work. Those who wish to come here for the purpose of employment have a range of schemes open to them and we continue to open up more routes to allow people to come here and work legally in ways which boost our economy.

Cambridgeshire Police Authority (Government Support)

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his response to the request by Cambridgeshire Police Authority for central Government support for the cost of *(a)* policing animal rights demonstrations during 2001–02, and *(b)* Operation Fincham in Soham during the current year. [90047]

Mr. Denham: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, approved two special grants on 7 January totalling £4.65 million for the Cambridgeshire constabulary. He has awarded them a grant of £1.1 million for the additional costs of policing demonstrations in connection with Huntingdon Life Sciences in 2001–02. This is in addition to the £1 million special grant the force received in 2000–01.

The police authority has also been given a special grant of £3.55 million as a contribution to the additional costs of Operation Fincham in Soham.

The additional assistance we have provided has been welcomed by the Chairman of the Police Authority (Councillor John Reynolds) and the Chief Constable (Tom Lloyd QPM).

Charities

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if his Department will take lead responsibility for the Government response to the Strategy Unit Review of Charities and the wider Not-for-Profit sector; [89288]

(2) what plans the Government have to propose legislation in response to the recommendations of the Strategy Unit Review of Charities and the wider Not-For-Profit sector. [89289]

Beverley Hughes: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has responsibility for charities, charity law and the voluntary and community sector in England and Wales. The Active Community Unit of the Home Office has responsibility for managing the programme of implementation of the recommendations in the Strategy Unit report, working in conjunction with other Departments and agencies as appropriate.

The consultation period for the report ran until the end of December 2002. Work has now started on analysing the responses that have been received. The Active Community Unit will later this year publish an implementation plan for the recommendations arising from the report. The Government are in principle committed to legislate and will be looking for an early opportunity to do so.

Children in Prison

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children were in prison in each of the last 10 years. [88518]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 7 January 2003]*: The number of people under the age of 18 held in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales in the past 10 years is as follows. Information is shown as at 30 June each year.

1992—1,328
1993—1,304
1994—1,526
1995—1,675
1996—2,093
1997—2,479
1998—2,466
1999—2,422
2000—2,434
2001—2,448
2002—2,609

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 4 November 2002 from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. Jabar Abdullah Mawlood. [89234]

Mr. Blunkett: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 17 December 2002.

Crime Initiatives

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what Government initiatives have been put in place in the *(a)* Twickenham constituency, *(b)* London Borough of Richmond upon Thames and *(c)* London, designed to bring down crime; and if he will make a statement. [88823]

Mr. Denham: There has been much work on crime reduction during 2002–03 within the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames which has been funded through Government initiatives: Communities Against Drugs (£169,000), Safer Communities Initiative (£54,000), and the Partnership Development Fund (£20,000). This has helped Richmond Crime Reduction Partnership, which covers Twickenham, to implement local schemes such as the development of a youth project targeting those at risk of committing street crime, pro-active policing of suppliers of class 'A' drugs, and supporting a closed circuit television (CCTV) control room.

Across London, Government funding has been provided for several crime reduction initiatives including over £16 million through Communities Against Drugs; £21 million for CCTV equipment since 1999; £1.5 million on Reducing Burglary Initiative; £7.3 million for the neighbourhood wardens and street wardens initiative; £7.2 million for Targeted Policing Initiative, and £9.1 million for the Robbery Reduction Initiative.

Domestic Violence

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he has issued to police forces on linking the investigation of child physical abuse and the potential for domestic violence against women in the same household. [89124]

Mr. Denham: The core inter-agency child protection guidance is "Working Together to Safeguard Children". It was published jointly by the Department of Health, the Home Office and the Department for Education and Skills in 1991, and revised and updated in 1999. The guidance is addressed to all those whose work brings them into contact with children and families, including the police. Chapter 6 of the document provides guidance on 'Child Protection in Specific Circumstances', and includes a section on domestic violence. It highlights the need for professionals to be alert to the frequent inter-relationship between domestic violence and the abuse and neglect of children. It specifically states that when there is evidence of domestic violence, the implication for any children in the household should be considered, including the possibility that the children themselves may be subject to violence or other harm. Conversely, where it is believed that a child is being abused, those involved with the child and family should be alert to the possibility of domestic violence within the family.

In addition to this, 'Policing Domestic Violence—a Modular Training Programme', was developed by Centrex in 2002. It is a national training product, intended to provide a structured, but flexible approach to the delivery of domestic violence training within the Police Service. Module 4 is dedicated to 'Domestic Violence and Children', and aims to explain the relationship between domestic violence and child abuse and give detailed information to operational staff on this subject. The material has been developed with the assistance of the Women's Aid Federation of England and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), and has been widely circulated both within and outside the Police Service for comment and enhancement.

Drugs (Coalfield Communities)

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what additional assistance does he plan to invest in *(a)* coalfield communities and *(b)* Bassetlaw following the re-launch of the Government's drugs strategy. [88963]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Additional funding from the spending review 2002 for tackling drug misuse will mean that from April 2003 all drug action team areas will see an increase of at least 10 per cent. in pooled treatment budget allocations.

Over the next three years, new money will be invested in the introduction or extension of a range of interventions within the criminal justice system and will initially be focussed on those areas with the very worst drug problems. However all areas will benefit from the major investment in improvements we are delivering across the country.

Heroin Addicts

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the

Department of Work and Pensions to ensure that ex-heroin misusers can re-enter employment following a criminal conviction. [88962]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The Home Office and the Department of Work and Pensions are in regular contact to ensure that those with a history of illegal drug use—including heroin use—are able to secure and maintain employment.

Illegal Immigrants

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if illegal immigrants who have spent a long period of time in the UK will be considered for deportation in the same way as those who have just arrived in the country. [88857]

Beverley Hughes: Length of residence in the United Kingdom is one of the factors taken into account when deciding whether or not to remove an illegal entrant. Other factors include: age; strength of connections with the United Kingdom; personal history; domestic circumstances; previous criminal record and the nature of any offence of which the person has been convicted (where applicable); any compassionate circumstances; and any representations received on the person's behalf.

Under the Long Residence Concession, persons who have continuously been in the United Kingdom for 14 years unlawfully, or a mixture of lawfully and unlawfully, before the commencement of enforcement action are normally given indefinite leave to remain unless there are strong countervailing factors.

In addition, it is our policy not to proceed with enforcement action against those families where there are children who have lived continuously in the United Kingdom for seven years or more. However, there may be cases where it is appropriate to depart from this policy, for example, if one of the parents has been convicted of a serious offence.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people he estimates are in the UK illegally but not in contact with authorities. [88858]

Beverley Hughes: There is currently no official estimate of the number of immigrants unlawfully present in the United Kingdom who are not in contact with the authorities. The Home Office has commissioned a review of methods of estimating the size of the illegally resident population used in other countries.

Nursing Staff (Work Permits)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much correspondence he has received from *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* members of the public on the licensing checks made by Work Permits (UK) on nursing agencies who recruit overseas nurses. [89345]

Beverley Hughes: I am not aware that the Home Office has recently received any correspondence specifically concerned with this subject.

Prison Health

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his Answer of 18 December, ref 87475, how much funding has been allocated and over what time period for the full time and part time suicide prevention co-ordinators; what definition he uses of the term prisoner listeners; what the purpose of the initiative is; and if he will list the establishments piloting the new health care screening procedures. [89346]

Hilary Benn: For the most high-risk prisons £780,000 a year has been allocated for 30 full-time suicide prevention co-ordinators (SPCs). This money is allocated directly from the central funds. The costs of the other 99 full and part-time SPCs are funded from local budgets, and not aggregated centrally. These SPCs combine suicide prevention duties with other prison work at the discretion of individual Governors.

"Listeners" are prisoner volunteers who are selected, trained and supported by the Samaritans to offer confidential support to their fellow prisoners who may be at risk of suicide, otherwise in crisis, or simply in need of someone to talk to. The scheme's objectives are to assist in preventing suicide, reducing self-harm and to help alleviate the feelings of those in distress.

Between August 2001 and June 2002 the new health care screening procedure was piloted in ten local prisons. Of the ten establishments, six were adult male remand prisons (Leeds, Wandsworth, Holme House, Liverpool, Manchester and Durham), two were for female remand prisoners (Eastwood Park and New Hall) and two were young offender institutions (Feltham and Glen Parva). The two female prisons include both adults and women aged 16–21 years. An evaluation of the pilot project supported implementation of the new reception screening arrangements across the estate, and a rolling programme is planned to start in April 2003.

Private Action, Public Benefit

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to bring in new legislation suggested in the publication, "Private Action, Public Benefit" of December 2002; and if he will make a statement. [88840]

Beverley Hughes: The report, "Private Action, Public Benefit", was published on 25 September 2002 and the consultation period ran until the end of December 2002. Work has started on analysing the responses which have been received. The Active Community Unit will later this year publish an implementation plan for the recommendations arising from the report. The Government are in principle committed to legislate and will be looking for an early opportunity to do so.

Religious and Ethnic Groups

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures have been taken to prevent the separation and isolation of minority religious and ethnic groups from the rest of UK society. [88729]

Beverley Hughes: We are committed to ensuring the fair treatment and inclusion of all communities within our society. We are actively working to ensure that

where there are divisions along lines of race, religion, class—or any other factor—barriers are broken down, discrimination is eradicated and positive relationships are encouraged.

The Government are committed to social inclusion and equality of opportunity for all. Since 1997 we have done much to stamp out unlawful race discrimination in the United Kingdom. The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 is the most far-reaching reform of race law in Britain for 30 years. And we have some of the most comprehensive anti-discrimination laws in Europe.

The law has also been strengthened on incitement to racial hatred and racially and religiously aggravated offences in the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001.

We have an on-going dialogue with the minority religious communities to ensure that Government policy is sensitive to their needs and to reassure them that the Government values the part that they have to play in building cohesive communities. We also encourage and support inter-faith dialogue and activity.

Since the disturbances of summer 2001—which demonstrated the isolation of certain communities—we have taken forward a number of programmes specifically aimed at improving community cohesion in England and Wales.

Among other things we have: funded a summer activities programme; set up a new programme of community facilitation; established a community cohesion panel and a number of practitioner groups to ensure that our policies and programmes help rather than hinder community cohesion; published—jointly with the Local Government Association, Commission for Racial Equality, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Inter Faith Network—guidance to local authorities on community cohesion; worked with local areas—including Bradford, Oldham and Burnley to enable them to produce action plans on community cohesion; launched a community cohesion pathfinder programme; and adopted a public service agreement target on community cohesion.

Rohypnol

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he plans to reclassify rohypnol. [88696]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Rohypnol, the proprietary name for the substance flunitrazepam, is one of the benzodiazepine family of drugs. It is controlled as a Class C drug—there are no plans to reclassify it.

Suffolk Punch

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether his Department has reached a decision concerning the future of the Suffolk Punch Stud at Hollesley Bay Prison and Young Offenders' Institution; if he will allow the care of the horses to continue to be carried out by the inmates, while transferring the financial responsibility of maintaining the Suffolk Punch Stud from the Prison Service to the Suffolk Punch Trust; and if he will meet the hon. Member for Huddersfield and members of the Suffolk Punch Trust to discuss the future maintenance of the Suffolk Punch Stud. [87757]

Hilary Benn: The Prison Service has been reviewing its farming operations, including the future of the Suffolk Punch Stud at Hollesley Bay. The Prison Service is in contact with the Suffolk Horse Trust and recently held a meeting with Mr. Marsh of the Trust. It is the Service's aim for the horses to remain within Suffolk and for opportunities to continue in training of prisoners in equine skills. I would be happy to meet the Suffolk Horse Trust when proposals for the way forward are further developed.

Sussex Traffic Police

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many police officers have been attached to Sussex traffic police in each of the last 10 years; [89349]

(2) what *(a)* number and *(b)* percentage of Sussex Police are engaged in speed management. [89351]

Mr. Denham: Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) has provided the following information.

Sussex Police (Traffic Officers)

Year (as at 31 March)	*Number of Traffic Officers*[1]	*Percentage of force strength*[2]
1997–98	206	6.9
1998–99	197	6.9
1999–2000	191	6.8
2000–01	190	6.6
2001–02	174	6.0

[1] Police officers who are predominately employed on motor cycles or in patrol vehicles for the policing of traffic and motorway related duties. Not including officers employed in accident investigation, vehicle examination and radar duties.
[2] Traffic officers as a percentage of force strength.

The basis on which HMIC classify Police Service staff changed in the year 1999–2000, so the figures for 31 March 2000 and 31 March 2001 are not directly comparable with those for earlier years. Some officers counted as deployed to traffic duties in earlier years may, from 1999–2000 onward, have been recorded as deployed to duties relating to traffic wardens.

Deployment of officers to traffic and speed management duties are matters for the Chief Constable. I understand from the Chief Constable that about 142 constables are currently deployed on traffic duties.

I am told by the Chief Constable that speed management is designed to influence driver behaviour and is directed to those instances where there can be a link between collisions and speed. Speed enforcement tactics are targeted where there is likely to be the greatest chance of casualty reduction. I understand that all Sussex traffic officers can be directed to speed management activities and are trained for it. However, I am told that the equivalent of four full-time officers are regularly directed to this activity.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many mobile camera speed checks have been carried out by Sussex traffic police in the last year. [89352]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I understand from the Chief Constable of Sussex that over the last year members of the Sussex Police Safety Camera Team have undertaken 262 mobile speed camera checks in which speeding offences were detected. This figure does not take account of other checks where there was no such detection.

Transnational Sex Trade

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many victims of transnational sex trade have been reported to British authorities in each of the last five years. [89021]

Beverley Hughes: Information is not held on the number of victims of transnational sex trade that have been reported to British authorities in the last five years.

Vehicle Clamping

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action the Government propose to take to regulate motor vehicle clamping by private organisations. [88570]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Regulation of motor vehicle clamping by private security firms on private land will be introduced by the Security Industry Authority, a non-departmental public body (NDPB) being set up by the Home Office under the Private Security Industry Act 2001. The authority is currently preparing for regulation, which will take the form of licensing all individuals carrying out activities covered by the Act. The suitability of individuals applying for a licence will be assessed in accordance with published criteria relating to criminality and competency. The Security Industry Authority will be established as an NDPB on 1 April 2003 and it is expected that it will start licensing clamping operatives by the end of this year/early 2004. It will be a criminal offence to engage in licensable conduct without a licence.

Visa Processing

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidelines are given to case workers at the Immigration and Nationality Directorate to assist them in determining what constitutes *(a)* a straightforward and *(b)* a non-straightforward further leave to remain visa application. [88699]

Beverley Hughes: There are no specific guidelines. A straightforward application for leave to remain in the United Kingdom is one where it is clear from the information and evidence submitted that the requirements of the immigration rules are satisfied. An application which is not straightforward may require further inquiries, additional checks or discretionary consideration before it can be decided. Whether individual applications are straightforward depends on the individual circumstances of the case.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how long it is taking the Immigration and Nationality Directorate to process *(a)* a non-straightforward and *(b)* a straightforward further leave to remain visa application; and which month's post is being opened by the Immigration and Nationality Directorate with regard to visa applications. [88700]

Beverley Hughes: We aim normally to screen all postal applications within three weeks and decide those that are straightforward at that point. However, because of the high number of applications in the latter part of 2002, this is currently taking around 10 weeks on average. Some that are not straightforward because they need further inquiries or more detailed consideration can take around 12 months to decide, subject to how easy it is to obtain the information and how quickly applicants respond to such requests. We are taking measures to improve this situation and expect to make significant progress towards our three-week target for initial screening over the next two to three months, and to reduce the turnaround time for deciding more complex cases.

Postal applications received at the very end of December 2002 are currently being opened and details entered on to the General Casework Information Database. Those received in early January 2003 will be opened and entered very shortly and it is anticipated that the time-lag will be reduced to a week or less by the end of January.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Zimbabwe

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the *(a)* extent and *(b)* degree of malnutrition in Zimbabwe and of the (i) distribution and (ii) availability of food supplies in Zimbabwe, broken down by region. [90046]

Clare Short: No credible nutritional assessment took place during 2002. Such data as was collected suggests that in August 2002, 24 per cent. of six month to five year olds were underweight. This compares to 13 per cent. in 1999. This indicates a significant level of chronic or 'background' malnutrition. Under current circumstances it is reasonable to predict that levels of severe malnutrition will be increasing. DFID is funding a rapid nutrition assessment, to include other health indicators, which will take place in the first two weeks of February.

The following table gives the distribution of maize since April 2002 by Government (as at early November) and by the World Food Programme (as at end December). Other food flows from bilateral feeding programmes are not currently available by district and are lower in total than WFP flows. These statistics do not include wheat and other commodities.

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Area	*Government*	*World food programme*
Masvingo	34,662	36,174
Matabeleland	33,588	26,972
Mashonaland	96,431	21,040
Midlands	44,102	15,234
Manicaland	49,259	14,513
Harare	218,823	—
Bulawayo	92,438	—
Total	569,303	113,933

Bangladesh

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what financial assistance has been given to Bangladesh by her Department in each of the last three years. [89770]

Clare Short: The financial assistance given to Bangladesh by my Department in each of the last three years is set out in the table:

£ million

Period	*Amount*
1999–2000	71.8
2000–01	76.9
2001–02	65.8

Cambodia

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much her Department is giving to Cambodia in 2003–04; and if it is tied to sustainable forestry management. [90419]

Clare Short: No final decision on the 2003–04 allocation for Cambodia has yet been made. We are currently reviewing our funding promoting sustainable forestry but the bulk of our support will continue to be in the areas of health and sustainable rural livelihoods and will not be tied to forest management. Further information is set out in the Cambodia Country Strategy Paper of March 2000, a copy of which has been deposited in the Library of the House.

Capita Group

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the contracts that have been awarded to the Capita Group by her Department. [89971]

Clare Short: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave the hon. Member for Henley on 6 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 337W and 7 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 466W. Since then, we have issued a further contract to Capita RAS, Support to the Ethiopian Civil Service Reform Programme at a cost of £51,250. Information on low value contracts is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Christmas Expenses

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many departmental Christmas cards she and her Ministers intend to send in 2002; how much these cards will cost *(a)* to buy, *(b)* to post and *(c)* in staff time to sign, address and place in envelopes; and if she will place in the Library a sample copy of the official Christmas card she has sent this year. [88113]

Clare Short *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* I did not send any departmental Christmas cards.

Sally Keeble sent 81 departmental Christmas cards which cost 95p each to purchase. They took approx one and a half hours of staff time to sign, address and envelope. They were posted as second class mail. All expenditure incurred in the purchase and despatch of official Christmas cards was made in accordance with the departmental guidance on financial procedures and propriety, based on the principles set out in Government Accounting.

I have placed a copy of the Christmas card in the Library of the House.

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much will be spent on *(a)* entertaining, *(b)* Christmas decorations and *(c)* other festive activities this Christmas season by her Department and Government agencies answerable to her Department; and of this sum how much will be spent in Ministers' (i) private offices and (ii) official residences. [88128]

Clare Short: *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* An official reception was held at a cost of £2,261.44. Otherwise nothing was spent on entertainment, decorations or other festive activities this Christmas season. We do not have official residences. DFID does not have any Government agencies answerable to it.

Expenditure incurred for the reception was made in accordance with the departmental guidance on financial procedures and propriety, based on the principles set out in Government Accounting.

North Korea

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether her Department gives development aid to North Korea. [89551]

Clare Short: The United Kingdom is not providing development assistance, to North Korea.

However, we continue to respond to humanitarian needs through the European Commission, the United Nations and International Red Cross Movement. In financial year 2001–02, my Department provided just over £2 million to the International Federation of the Red Cross and the United Nations Children's Fund, for support to flood victims and to emergency primary health care programmes. In 2002, ECHO provided 15 million euros in food emergency aid and will provide a further 9.5 million euros for food aid in 2003. The UK contribution is 19 per cent.

Theft/Fraud

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her estimate is of the cost of theft and fraud to *(a)* her Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in 2002. [89866]

Clare Short: The estimated cost to DFID's budget of theft and fraud in the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 is £84,000. Details of suspected or proven fraud are provided to the Treasury on an annual basis. The annual report that the Treasury prepares is deposited in the Libraries of both Houses.

PRIME MINISTER

Boundary Committee

Keith Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister when he wrote to the Boundary Committee; and about which boundaries. [89755]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on Monday 16 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 522W.

Delivery Unit

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister to which Minister the Delivery Unit is accountable; and if he will make a statement. [89557]

The Prime Minister: The Delivery Unit reports to me. Lord Macdonald, Minister for the Cabinet Office, oversees its work on a day-to-day basis.

Euro (Swedish Referendum)

Keith Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he has had with the Prime Minister of Sweden concerning the Swedish referendum on the Euro scheduled for 14th September. [90109]

The Prime Minister: I have discussed a range of EU issues with the Prime Minister of Sweden recently, on 15 November in Warsaw and at the Copenhagen European Council on 12–13 December.

Farming and Food Commission

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Prime Minister how many written representations he has received in support of the recommendations of the Policy Commission on the future of farming and food. [88382]

The Prime Minister: I received over 300 letters last year about farming, including ones on the recommendations of the Policy Commission report on the Future of Farming and Food.

Overall, there was widespread support for the broad thrust of the recommendations. The Strategy for Sustainable Farming and Food for England, launched on 12 December 2002, incorporates the Government response to the recommendations and builds on the vision set out in the Policy Commission's report.

Honours

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Prime Minister how many persons *(a)* knighted or equivalent and *(b)* admitted to each rank of the orders of chivalry in each honours list since January 2002 were honoured for their contribution as (i) employees of Her Majesty's Government or a Government-sponsored organisation, (ii) employees of local government or a local government-sponsored organisation, (iii) private sector employees, (iv) voluntary sector employees, (v) health service employees, (vi) school staff and (vii) volunteers. [89564]

The Prime Minister: I can give details of those honoured in the Birthday 2002 and New Year 2003 lists which I recommended to Her Majesty. The information available is as follows:

(i) Four State Servants were honoured at Knight/Dame level in the Birthday Honours List and another four in the New Year Honours List—2003. 33 were honoured at CB, CMG or CBE, 33 at OBE and 61 at MBE in the Birthday Honours. 33 were honoured at CB, CMG or CBE, 31 at OBE and 57 at MBE in the New Year Honours List. It is not possible to readily identify employees of Government sponsored organisations.

(ii) Among local government employees, including police officers and fire fighters, there were four honours at Knight/Dame level, eight CBEs, 10 OBEs and 34 MBEs in the Birthday List. At New Year, there were four honours at Knight/Dame level, nine CBEs, 12 OBEs and 46 MBEs. Figures for people employed by local government sponsored organisations cannot be readily identified.

(iii) It is not possible to identify from the names on the Lists those people who are employed in the private sector, many of whom will have been honoured because of what they have done outside their place of employment.

(iv) The list does not distinguish between paid and unpaid workers in the voluntary sector. Overall, people from the voluntary sector accounted for almost half of those on the List in the Birthday Honours and more than half of those in the New Year Honours.

(v) The list does not distinguish between NHS employees and others working in the health sector. In the health sector overall, there were five awards at Knight/Dame level, 12 at CBE, 28 at OBE and 66 at MBE in the Birthday List. There were four awards at Knight level, 12 at CBE, 21 at OBE and 68 at MBE in the New Year List.

(vi) In education, the list does not distinguish between those involved in primary and secondary education and those involved in tertiary and vocational education. In the education sector overall, five awards were made at Knight/Dame level in the Birthday List and again in the New Year List. 18 awards were made at CBE level, 35 at OBE and 60 at MBE in the Birthday List. In the New Year List, 16 awards were made at CBE level, 35 at OBE and 63 at MBE.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Prime Minister how many persons in each county were *(a)* knighted or equivalent and *(b)* admitted to each rank of the orders of chivalry in each honours list since January 2002. [89565]

The Prime Minister: The information available is outlined in tables showing the number of awards made on my recommendation in each county in each honours lists since January 2002. The tables will be placed in the Library.

National Insurance

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister pursuant to the answer of the right hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) of 19 September 2002, Official Report, column 919W, on national insurance, if he will require departments to reject any potential supplier who uses offshore arrangements intended to avoid employers' national insurance liabilities, or has done so in the last three years. [89811]

The Prime Minister: I have nothing further to add to the answer my right hon. Friend, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury gave the hon. Member on 19 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 919W.

New Deal

Mr. Heald: To ask the Prime Minister how many New Deal participants have secured *(a)* subsidised and *(b)* unsubsidised employment in his Office; and if he will make a statement on his Office's policy with regard to the employment of New Deal participants. [89767]

The Prime Minister: My Office's policy is to take New Deal participants from Jobcentre Plus on secondment and provide them with up to six months work experience. During the secondment they continue to be paid by Jobcentre Plus. Since 1998, six New Deal participants have been on secondment to Number 10.

No. 10 Downing Street (Receptions)

Keith Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister how many times in 2002 10 Downing Street was used by charities for receptions; what the cost of the receptions was; and which charities were involved. [90110]

The Prime Minister: During 2002, 27 charity receptions were held at 10 Downing Street, including events for Sane, Sight Savers International, Prisoners of Conscience, Saving Faces and Guide Dogs for the Blind. The cost of these receptions was funded by the Charities concerned.

Nuclear Power

Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what recent advice he has received from the Government's Chief Scientific Adviser in respect of the option to use nuclear power in the future. [89559]

The Prime Minister: The Chief Scientific Adviser has been advising me and other Ministers on nuclear power and other scientific aspects of energy policy. He is invited to attend the Cabinet committee, DA(N), overseeing the development of the Energy White Paper, which is due to be published shortly.

Peerages

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Prime Minister how many persons elevated to the peerage since 20th July 2001 were resident at the time of their elevation in each region of *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* Northern Ireland. [89563]

The Prime Minister: Since 20 July 2001, there have been seven people elevated to the peerage. The following table shows where they were resident at the time of their elevation. It is, of course, possible that some peers may have had more than one residence of which we would be unaware.

	Number
London	2
South East England	1
South West England	1
Northern Ireland	1
Wales	1
Judicial	1

We do not keep records of the home addresses of judicial peers as all correspondence is addressed to their office.

Single Currency

Keith Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister what steps he has taken to put in place a timetable for a referendum should the five economic tests on entry into the single currency be met. [90108]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) on 11 December 2002, *Official Report*, columns 379–80W.

SCOTLAND

Government Expenditure and Revenue

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland 2000–01 will be published; and what input she has had into its preparation. [89425]

Mrs. Liddell: The planned publication date of Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland (GERS) 2000–01 by the Scottish Executive is 20 January. The Scottish Executive take the lead in compiling the report which draws on data from a variety of Government sources.

Gross Domestic Product

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what Scotland's real GDP growth rate was from *(a)* 1972 to 1999 and *(b)* 1989 to 1999. [89392]

Mrs. Liddell: Data compiled by the Scottish Office up to 1999 and subsequently by the Scottish Executive indicates that Scotland's annual real GDP growth rate was 1.8 per cent. from 1972 to 1999 and 2.1 per cent. from 1989 to 1999.

Population Statistics

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when revised population statistics will be released for Scotland. [89391]

Mrs. Liddell: This is a matter for the General Register Office for Scotland, an Associated Department of the Scottish Executive. I understand, however, that revised population statistics will be published by the end of February.

Scottish University Graduates

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of Scottish university graduates left Scotland after graduation in the last three years. [89474]

Mrs. Liddell: Higher Education in Scotland is a devolved matter. The relevant statistics can be found in the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning section on the Scottish Executive's website.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

International Bribery and Corruption

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Solicitor-General what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of UK legislation against international bribery and corruption. [89228]

Hilary Benn: I have been asked to reply.

The provisions on international bribery and corruption under Part 12 of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 came into force on 14 February 2002. They are subject to review under section 122 of the 2001 Act by a committee of members of the Privy Council, which is due to report by 13 December this year. As announced in the Queen's Speech, a draft Bill to reform the law of corruption generally will be published this session.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Academies

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the academies which *(a)* have been established and *(b)* are proposed, giving the public expenditure which has been (i) incurred and (ii) budgeted in relation to start-up of each. [88893]

Mr. Miliband: Three academies have been established so far in Bexley, Haringey and Middlesbrough. A further 21 academies have been proposed and are in various stages of development. The tables show the budgets and expenditure incurred for the current projects across the whole cycle of their development. For the three academies already open, the first table also shows their operating budget and expenditure incurred to date.

Academy projects receive modest funding to develop proposals to a point where the Secretary of State is satisfied that an academy is viable and a formal funding agreement can be signed. From this point, projects receive additional funding to implement their proposals and prepare for the opening of the academy. Once open, academies receive an annual operational budget to cover their day-to-day running costs, which is comparable to similar maintained schools within their local authority. Similarly, the level of capital funding is intended to ensure that academies are built and equipped to a standard comparable with the best in the maintained sector.

Open academies

£000

	Recurrent				Capital	
	Development budget	*Development expenditure*	*Operational budget 2002–03*	*Operational expenditure 2002–03*	*Capital budget*	*Capital expenditure*
The Business Academy, Bexley	989	989	4,245	1,794	25,750	14,450
Unity Academy	604	604	4,769	2.307	18,590	0
Greig City Academy	957	957	4,823	2,046	11,000	2,892

Academies in development

£000

	Recurrent Development budget	*Capital Development expenditure*	*Capital budget*	*Capital expenditure*
Barnet	900	443	[1]20,300	430
Bradford	250	36	[1]19,500	0
Brent	900	596	[1]21,400	3,836
Bristol	900	250	20,213	390
Ealing	900	257	27,527	418
Hackney	900	118	20,498	961
Hillingdon (i)	900	430	19,000	285
Hillingdon (ii)	250	0	[1]19,500	0
Kent	250	0	[1]19,500	0
Lambeth	900	252	22,281	32
Leeds	250	25	[1]19,500	0
Liverpool (i)	250	90	[1]23,000	0
Liverpool (ii)	250	0	[1]19,500	0
Manchester	900	99	10,620	4
Northampton	250	35	[1]19,500	0
Nottingham	900	212	14,600	57
Sandwell	250	0	[1]19,500	0
South Middlesbrough	900	491	19,200	5,253
Southwark (i)	900	196	[1]27,125	53
Southwark (ii)	900	460	19,970	885
Walsall	900	476	15,500	5,737

[1] Estimated figures, subject to change, and will be finalised only when the projects are in a position to sign a funding agreement with the Secretary of State.

Admissions Consultation Paper

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which organisations were consulted formally on the admissions consultation paper published on 16 September. [89591]

Mr. Miliband: The consultation was targeted towards admission authorities, as they would have the most direct interest in changes to the codes and regulations. Therefore, all local education authorities—as the admission authorities for community and voluntary controlled schools—were consulted, along with a representative sample of foundation and voluntary aided schools, who are their own admission authorities, and a smaller sample of other non-admission authority schools. Academies, representative bodies of all school types, as well as many national bodies, were also formally consulted. These were:

Churches and other belief organisations

All Church of England and Catholic Dioceses

Church of England Board of Education

Catholic Education Service

The Board of Deputies of British Jews

Greek Orthodox Church

British Sikh Education Council

Association of Muslim Schools (UK)

Free Church Federal Council
Methodist Church
Seventh-Day Adventist Church
Society of Friends/Quakers
Council of African and Afro-Caribbean Churches
British Humanist Association
The Muslim Educational Trust
United Synagogue Board of Education
National Secular Society

Key organisations

Advisory Centre for Education (ACE) Ltd.
The Association of Foundation and Voluntary Aided Schools
Association of London Government
Campaign for State Education (CASE)
Centre for Academies Support Service
Commission for Racial Equality
Consortium for Selective Schools in Essex
Council on Tribunals
CTC Principals' Forum
Equal Opportunities Commission
Information for School and College Governors
Local Government Association
Local Government Ombudsman
National Federation of Parent Teacher Associations
National Governors Council
Office of the Schools Adjudicator
The Education Network
Secondary Heads Association
National Union of Teachers
NASUWT
Ministry of Defence Service Personnel (Policy Families)
Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Personnel Services Education Unit)
The Welsh Assembly
Department of Health
Home Office Immigration and Nationality Division
Cabinet Office (Public Sector Team)

Others with parental interest

African Caribbean Evangelical Alliance
Black Parents in Education
National Family and Parenting Institute

We supported the paper consultation by also holding four regional events which were attended by approximately 400 representatives of LEAs and schools.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what discussions took place with *(a)* local education authorities and *(b)* schools and colleges on paragraph A.45 of the admissions consultation paper. [89592]

Mr. Miliband: We consulted all local education authorities, a representative sample of foundation and voluntary aided schools, who are their own admission authorities, and a smaller sample of other non-admission authority schools, as well as academies, on all aspects of changes to the code. We also held four regional events which were attended by approximately 400 representatives of LEAs and schools.

However, Annex A of the Code explains the law. Schools have always been required to have an admission number for each relevant age group, including sixth form admissions if they recruit from outside the school. The wording of A.45 differs from the previous code only insofar as it takes account of the abolition of standard numbers. The Code of Practice does not apply to further education colleges.

Child Support

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if the rules that apply to CSA payments in relation to assessing household income will apply to maintenance payments paid via a court order when the scheme for educational maintenance allowances is introduced nationally. [89117]

Margaret Hodge: The rules in connection with child maintenance are applicable only to the pilot Education Maintenance Allowance scheme. When the national EMA scheme is introduced in September 2004 the income assessment will be revised. We will introduce a household income assessment, in line with that applied by the Inland Revenue for the new Tax Credits. This will not include any income earned by a natural parent who no longer resides with the student, but will count the income of any step-parent in the household.

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much it would cost to award maintenance allowance to those students in the pilot areas who have been ruled ineligible because maintenance from the absent parent is paid via a court order rather than through the Child Support Agency and is added to the resident parent's household income. [89119]

Margaret Hodge: Evidence from the Local education authorities piloting the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) suggests that less than 1 per cent. of applications have been turned down on these grounds. The total cost of paying and administering EMA in all 56 pilot areas in the 2001–02 financial year was £97.25 million. Therefore, it is estimated that to pay EMA to families in these circumstances, where the joint parental income is over the maximum threshold applicable in the pilot area would incur an additional cost of approximately £1 million.

Education Funding (Leicestershire)

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the level of education funding in Leicestershire; and if he will estimate the *(a)* percentage and *(b)* cost difference between Leicestershire and the top funded education authority outside London. [88632]

Mr. Miliband: The new system of funding for LEAs consists of a basic entitlement which is the same for all pupils, plus a top up for all deprived pupils, which is the same for all deprived pupils, and a further top up for those LEAs in areas with additional costs for recruitment and retention of staff. Where the average formula spending share per pupil is higher, that reflects a higher number of deprived pupils, and higher area costs. The average Education Formula Spending Share (EFSS) per three to 15 pupil for Leicestershire is £2,939

and for Slough (the authority with the highest average EFSS per pupil outside London) it is £3,828. The difference is just over 30 per cent. or £890 per pupil. The estimated proportion of deprived pupils in Slough is: 36 per cent. in primary schools and 33 per cent. in secondary schools. The proportions for Leicestershire are: 13 per cent. in primary and secondary schools. In addition Slough attracts an Area Cost Adjustment of 13.5 per cent. whereas Leicestershire does not.

FE Colleges (Special Measures)

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many further education colleges are subject to special measures by the Learning Skills Council as a result of unfavourable inspection reports; and in how many cases in the past 12 months they have intended to replace college management. [87264]

Margaret Hodge: The LSC published guidance in March 2002. This sets out the powers and arrangements for intervening where further education colleges have unfavourable inspection grades. Neither the Secretary of State nor the LSC has the power to replace the management team of a college. However, the Secretary of State can issue directions to a college corporation or replace members of the corporation, if he feels that a college is being mismanaged. In the past 12 months, 96 out of a total of 400 FE colleges were inspected. Of these, 17 colleges were judged to be inadequate and will require a full re-inspection. A further 35 colleges will require a partial re-inspection, where some areas were found to be less than satisfactory. In all of these cases, it was possible to agree an action plan for improvement without needing to use the statutory powers.

Higher Education

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to increase the attraction, reward and ease of access to higher and further education in areas where exceptionally low proportions of school leavers go into higher and further education. [88925]

Margaret Hodge: We are committed to extending opportunity in both further and higher education. As part of our Success for All reform strategy for further education and training—worth an extra £1.2 billion by 2005–06 or over this spending review period, a programme of Strategic Area Reviews led by local Learning and Skills Councils will help build a network of local providers working to increase choice and widen access to further education for young people. The Excellence Challenge—worth £190 million over three years—is already encouraging wider participation in higher education, and is focused on areas of deprivation, many of which have particularly low participation rates in further and higher education. The joint initiative by the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the Learning and Skills Council, which will be launched in April 2003, also aims to encourage progression in each region.

We will be publishing our review of higher education shortly, which will reflect our commitment to widening participation.

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will commission an assessment of the likely impact of the General Agreement in Trade and Services on higher education. [88943]

Margaret Hodge: Work is already taking place to consider the impact should we decide to make any offers of further commitments in education services under the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). No such decisions have been taken. The Department for Trade and Industry (DTI), which has the UK lead on the GATS, has recently concluded a public consultation on all aspects of the current round of negotiations. The consultation document was produced with input from the Department for Education and Skills and the Devolved Administrations. Close liaison over the education services sector within the GATS will continue throughout the negotiations. The consultation document noted that many of the principal suppliers of publicly funded higher education in the UK also engage in some commercial activity, and that the Government are reflecting carefully on any GATS implications that the current structure may give rise to.

Officials in my Department have also consulted directly with Universities UK, the Association of University Teachers and the National Union of Students to take their views and encourage them, and other higher education sector organisations across the UK, to respond to the public consultation.

Language Assistants

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many language assistants are currently employed in maintained private schools. [89329]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 7 January 2003]:* Information on non-teaching staff in independent schools is not collected centrally.

Language Teaching

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what choices first to third year pupils at secondary school and those at GCSE level have as to the languages they wish to learn; which languages are compulsory; and how long these are taught for. [87368]

Mr. Miliband: The National Curriculum currently states that secondary schools must offer, in key stages 3 and 4, one or more of the official working languages of the European Union. Only when they have met this condition may they offer non-EU languages. Within this requirement, it is for schools to decide which and how many languages they choose to offer.

However, as we announced in our Languages Strategy, published on 18 December 2002, we intend to amend the statutory requirement at key stage 4 so that schools will no longer be required to teach modern foreign languages to all pupils. All schools will be required to ensure that they are available to any pupil wishing to study them.

National Director for Languages

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the job description for the National Director for Languages will be; when the appointment will be made; and what resources will be allocated to the National Director. [89327]

Margaret Hodge: The National Director for Languages post has yet to be advertised but we expect the successful candidate to take up post by September 2003. The National Director will, by 2005–06, have financial resources of £10 million per annum to deliver the numerous initiatives detailed in our strategy document.

Public Education

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what areas of public education are supplied in competition with the private sector. [88592]

Mr. Miliband: There are many areas of public education that are supplied by both the public and private sectors. They range from basic schooling, where there are 2,190 independent schools in England, to the provision of education services such as curriculum services, IT support, school transport and support for failing schools.

School Funding (Kent)

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pre-school places the Government funded in Medway in *(a)* 1996 and *(b)* 2002; and what the change in cost is. [87729]

Mr. Miliband: The available information relates to early years places for three and four-year-olds and is shown in the table.

Nursery Education Grant (NEG) funding for early years places for four-year-olds was introduced in 1996–97; the NEG rate was £1,100 per place. Places in the private, voluntary and independent sectors were eligible for NEG funding. Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) funding for early years places for four-year-olds was introduced and replaced NEG funding in 2001–02; the SSA rate was £2,341 per place in maintained nursery and primary schools and £1,188 per place in the private, voluntary and independent sectors.

NEG funding of free early years places for three-year-olds was introduced in 1999–2000; for 2001–02, the NEG rate was £1,188 per place. Places in the private, voluntary and independent sectors were eligible for NEG funding.

In 1996–97, Medway received £3.3 million to fund early years places for four-year-olds. In 2001–02, Medway received £6.6 million to fund early years places for four-year-olds and £2.6 million to fund early years places for three-year-olds. Total funding of early years places increased by £5.9 million, from £3.3 million in 1996–97 to £9.2 million in 2001–02.

Number of three and four-year-olds taking up free early education places, January 1997 and 2002

	Medway[2]
1997	
3-year-olds	
Maintained nursery and primary schools[1]	310
Other maintained and private, voluntary and independent providers	n/a
4-year-olds	3,000
Total 3 and 4-year olds[4]	3,300
2002	
3-year-olds	
Maintained nursery and primary schools[1]	390
Other maintained and private, voluntary and independent providers[3]	2,200
4-year-olds	
Maintained nursery and primary schools[1]	2,400
Other maintained and private, voluntary and independent providers[3]	860
Total 4-year-olds	3,300
Total 3 and 4-year-olds	5,900

[1] Headcount of children at 31 December in the previous calendar year, from the Annual Schools' Census.
[2] Local Government re-organisation established Medway as a local authority in 1998; figures for 1997 were obtained by apportionment.
[3] Part-time equivalent number of children at 31 December in the previous calendar year, from the Nursery Education Grant data collection exercise.
[4] Summer term 1997.

School Staff (Turnover Rates)

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the staff turnover rates were in schools in England in each year since 1997, broken down by *(a)* local education authority and *(b)* Government Office region. [89296]

Mr. Miliband: Staff turnover rates are not available at Local Education Authority level.

The staff turnover rates for schools in England by Government Office region are shown in the table.

(Percentages)

	1997–1998[1]		*1998–1999*[1]		*1999–2000*[2]	
	Full-time	*Part-time*[3]	*Full-time*	*Part-time*[3]	*Full-time*	*Part-time*[3]
North East	15.0	36.0	11.4	31.4	11.6	31.4
North West	15.4	33.6	11.4	29.0	13.2	30.3
Yorkshire and The Humber	16.1	31.8	11.4	26.2	13.0	27.7
East Midlands	14.9	33.6	13.5	30.1	14.6	31.3
West Midlands	15.2	32.2	13.8	32.3	14.1	32.9
East of England	16.3	32.8	15.8	32.7	16.7	33.7
London	20.1	31.0	18.4	27.2	19.7	28.8
of which :						
inner London	22.3	34.1	19.3	28.8	21.3	30.3
outer London	18.9	29.6	18.1	26.4	18.8	28.1

(Percentages)

	1997–1998[1]		1998–1999[1]		1999–2000[2]	
	Full-time	Part-time[3]	Full-time	Part-time[3]	Full-time	Part-time[3]
South East	17.4	32.7	16.3	31.7	17.2	32.1
South West	16.1	32.5	14.7	30.2	14.9	32.0
England	16.5	32.6	14.3	30.1	15.3	31.3

[1] Revised data.
[2] Provisional data.
[3] The figure excludes 10 per cent to 20 per cent. of part-time teachers not included on the teacher pension scheme records.
Full-time turnover is defined as all teachers in full-time service in the English maintained schools sector on 31 March who were not in full-time service in the same establishment on 31 march the following year. Turnover therefore includes wastage, transfers to other establishments within the maintained schools sector and teachers leaving to part-time service. Not all employers record all movements between schools within their employ so rates are underestimated.
Part-time turnover is defined as all teachers in part-time service in the English maintained schools sector on 31 March who were not in part-time service in the same establishment on 31 March the following year. Turnover therefore includes wastage, transfers to other establishments within the maintained schools sector and teachers leaving to full-time service. Not all employers record all movements between schools within their employ so rates are underestimated.

School Standards

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to run pilot schemes for plans contained in his Department's report "Time for Standards", to remove administrative and clerical tasks from teachers; and if he will publish the results of those pilots. [89305]

Mr. Miliband: On 4 January 2002 my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State for Education and Skills announced the Transforming the School Workforce Pathfinder Project—which is working with 32 schools to explore new ways of working to tackle workload, including the use of support staff and ICT to relieve teachers of non-teaching tasks so that they can concentrate on their core teaching responsibilities. Lessons learnt from these projects will be shared with all schools. The project is being evaluated and a report will be published towards the end of 2003.

As set out in "Time for Standards", we are seeking agreement with national partners on a range of contractual and other changes, including relieving teachers of administrative and clerical tasks.

Schools (Earned Autonomy)

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps he has taken towards awarding earned autonomy to schools; and which schools he proposes to be in the first tranche. [88882]

Mr. Miliband: We shortly expect to publish a consultation paper on the proposed criteria which schools should meet to qualify for earned autonomy. Until the outcome of consultation is known it is not possible to say which schools will be eligible.

Schools (Specialist Status)

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what changes have been made to the selection criteria for schools applying for specialist status since 1997. [89300]

Mr. Miliband: Apart from minor amendments, including those designed to clarify existing criteria, the changes made have been:

a) schools are required to show how links with other schools and the wider community will be extended by achieving specialist status, through the production of a community plan.

b) the sponsorship requirement has been reduced to 50,000; with a further reduction in the sponsorship requirement for mainstream schools with under 500 pupils.

c) schools are asked to submit four year development plans (instead of three year plans).

d) an introduction—and subsequent removal—of a limit on the proportion of specialist schools in an area.

e) removal of the criterion relating to the proximity of other schools with the same specialism.

f) priority for applicant schools in Excellence in Cities areas—which was rendered unnecessary by the 28 November 2002 announcement on the expansion of the programme. This announcement also made redundant other criteria relating to location.

g) the exclusion of schools in Special Measures or with Serious Weaknesses from being able to attain specialist status.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the schools that have had their applications for specialist status turned down and the reasons their applications were turned down, in each year since 1997, broken down by *(a)* local education authority and *(b)* category of specialism. [89301]

Mr. Miliband: Applicant schools seeking designation as a specialist school are assessed against published criteria. In the past, applicants were unsuccessful if they did not meet the meet the criteria or if their development plans were not as strong as other applicants in the same competition round. For the future, applicants will not be in competition for places, provided they meet the criteria.

Copies of the full list of schools, broken down as requested, has been placed in the Libraries.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what criteria a secondary school has to fulfil to achieve specialist status. [89303]

Mr. Miliband: Any such school has to: *(a)* produce a four-year development plan demonstrating effectively how the school will raise standards in the relevant specialist subjects and across the whole school; *(b)* demonstrate effectively in the plan that links with

other schools and the wider community will be extended through attaining the status; and *(c)* secure the required sponsorship.

Standards Funds

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the total cash value in 2002–03 was of the standards funds programmes and specific grants which are to be abolished, as announced in the ministerial statement on 9 December. [88968]

Mr. Miliband: The total cash values, in 2002–03, being provided by DfES in respect of programmes that will cease to attract grant funding over the next three years is:

£ million

Programmes that will cease to attract grant funding in:	*Cash value provided in 2002–03*
2003–04	736
2004–05	343
2005–06	696

These sums are accumulative. They represent both programmes where the activities previously supported are scheduled to cease; and programmes where it will be for schools and LEAs to use part of the increases in Education Formula Spending for the next three years announced in the 2002 Spending Review, if they wish to continue all of the activities for which grant funding was provided in 2002–03.

Alongside this, DfES will be transferring £500 million in 2003–04, £500 million in 2004–05 and £1,340 million in 2005–06 from its grant provision to Education Formula Spending. This transfer of resources to Education Formula Spending, and the associated cessation of ring-fenced grant support, demonstrate DfES' commitment to reduce the proportion of local authority funding provided as ring-fenced grant.

Student Loans

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to change the method of funding student loans and administration of student loans; and if he will make a statement. [88271]

Margaret Hodge: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will announce the outcome of the review of student finance later this month. In addition, we are working with local education authorities and the Student Loans Company to modernise the administration of student support so that studentscan obtain financial help more easily and quickly.

Terrorism

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what discussions his Department has had with each local education authority in England with regard to the provision of guidance for a possible terrorist attack. [89366]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: My Department continues to work closely with the Cabinet Office and Home Office on what additional advice local authorities and schools need in order to safeguard pupils, staff and property. Local authorities, which have direct responsibility for contingency and emergency planning, will be able to use such advice to determine policy in their locality, including what should be said specifically to schools. To date, no local education authority has asked the Department about this. We have previously provided advice and guidance for authorities and schools collectively on school security generally (www.dfes.gov.uk/schoolsecurity), and specific guidance following the events of September 11 (www.dfes.gov.uk/sept11 guidance).

Trainee Teachers

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of teacher trainees left the profession permanently after *(a)* one year, *(b)* two years, *(c)* three years, *(d)* four years and *(e)* five years, in each of the last five years for which information is available. [89313]

Mr. Miliband: The information is not available in the form requested. The table shows the proportion of newly-qualified teachers who gained their teaching qualifications in England in the period 1996–2000 who were not in full- or part-time regular service in any sector[1] in England on 31 March 2001:

[1] Teachers for which we have a record of being in service in the FE, HE or the independent schools sector are counted as being in service. However, some teachers who work in the FE, HE or independent sector are not included on the Teacher Pension Scheme records and so will be counted as not being in service in the table.

Year qualified	*Percentage not in service on 31 March 2001*
1996	29
1997	27
1998	25
1999	20
2000[1]	23

[1] Numbers of completers in 2000 are provisional and may be revised upwards.

The figures exclude 10 per cent. to 20 per cent. of part-time teachers not included on the Teacher Pension Scheme records.

Some teachers who are recorded as not being in service may be teaching in Wales or in other countries. Others that are not currently in service may return after a career break.

University Admission Standards

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to the answer from the Prime Minister of 18 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 844, what the requisite standard for admission to university is. [89318]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 9 January 2003]:* Admission to university is the responsibility of individual institutions, and each institution determines the requisite standards of entry to the courses it offers. Decisions taken by institutions should be made on the basis of merit, by judging the potential of the applicant to succeed on the course.

University Degrees

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much Government money has been allocated towards funding university degrees in *(a)* fashion knitwear, *(b)* surf science, *(c)* football studies, *(d)* golf course studies and *(e)* jazz studies in the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [87943]

Margaret Hodge: The Government allocates funding for higher education to the Higher Education Funding Council for England. Institutions receive funding from the Council as a block grant, calculated on the basis of the number of students who attended in previous years plus any extra student places awarded through the Additional Student Numbers exercise. It is for each institution to determine which courses it offers. They will clearly have regard to the demand as they will only receive funding for students they teach, not courses they run.

PRIVY COUNCIL

Members' Expenses

David Winnick: To ask the President of the Council above what amount claimed by an hon. Member for expenses, receipts and documentation is required; and if it is the policy to adopt best practice in this matter. [90421]

Mr. Robin Cook: The threshold at which documentation is required for Members' claims varies according to the allowance concerned. I am told that requirements for the main allowances are as follows:

Incidental expenses provision: receipts or invoices required for each item costing £250 or more;

Additional costs allowance: documentation required for large items of expenditure;

Members' travel: the Department of Finance and Administration generally pays the costs of rail and air tickets direct to the supplier, and Members who use their cars receive a mileage allowance. Members normally have to supply documentation if they buy a travel ticket from their own resources and then seek reimbursement, and must provide a detailed account if they claim for constituency mileage in excess of 350 miles per month.

In addition, the Department of Finance and Administration may ask for additional information in individual cases if it is needed.

State Opening

David Winnick: To ask the President of the Council what plans he has to modernise the Commons procedure relating to the state opening of Parliament. [89760]

Mr. Robin Cook: I have no such plans at present.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Children and Family Court (Support Service)

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans the Lord Chancellor has to allow staff working for the children and family court advisory and support service to be paid to work at weekends and to be given travel allowance. [89685]

Ms Rosie Winterton: None. The chief executive of the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) is responsible for the day to day operation of the service.

Under their contractual terms, CAFCASS staff are expected to tailor their work to the needs of each individual case. This may involve working some unsocial hours including weekends, for which staff are able to claim appropriate expenses, including travel allowances; and are either paid for planned overtime agreed with their manager, or are granted time off in lieu to cover working additional hours.

Legal Services Commission

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will list the regional offices of the Legal Services Commission, stating for each *(a)* the complement of staff and *(b)* the number of vacancies at the most recent date for which information is available. [89561]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The regional offices of the Legal Services Commission are located as follows, covering the regions denoted in brackets: London (London), Brighton and Reading (south-east), Bristol (south western), Cardiff (Wales), Birmingham (west midlands), Manchester (north western), Newcastle (north-east), Leeds (Yorkshire and Humberside), Nottingham (east midlands), Cambridge (eastern) and Liverpool (Merseyside).

The complement of permanent staff for each regional office, as of November 2002 and number of vacancies as of 12 December 2002 were as follows:

Office	*Staff*	*Vacancies*
London	201	6
Brighton and Reading	115	13
Bristol	76	5
Cardiff	68	6
Birmingham	87	0
Manchester	98	0
Newcastle	85	7
Leeds	83	0
Nottingham	115	0
Cambridge	75	1
Liverpool	68	0

The commission also has a processing centre in Chester, which employed 47 permanent staff as of November 2002.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department on what basis decisions were made on the location of Legal Services Commission offices; and what population number is served by each office. [89562]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The locations of the individual offices of the Legal Services Commission are for the commission to determine. Offices are, in general, located in either the major town or city in each region as

detailed in the table. The number, location and size of the regional offices have been reviewed on several occasions, most recently in August 1998.

With the exception of the head office buildings in London, each of the commission's offices is sited within a region (locations denoted in brackets next to the regions in the table). In England, the commission's regional boundaries match those of the Government Offices for the English Regions, with the exception of Merseyside for which there is no separate Government Office. The commission also has an office covering Wales.

Based on figures from the 2001 census, the population numbers served by each region and Wales, are as follows:

	Number
East Midlands (Nottingham)	4,172,179
Eastern (Cambridge)	5,388,154
London (London)	7,172,036
Merseyside (Liverpool)	1,362,034
North East (Newcastle)	2,515,479
North Western (Manchester)	5,367,766
South East (Brighton and Reading)	8,000,550
South Western (Bristol)	4,928,458
West Midlands (Birmingham)	5,267,337
Yorkshire and Humberside (Leeds)	4,964,838
Wales (Cardiff)	2,903,085

HEALTH

Waiting Times

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of patients waited *(a)* over four hours, *(b)* between two and four hours and *(c)* under two hours in accident and emergency departments in (i) England and (ii) each NHS region in each quarter since the first quarter of 1996–97. [84970]

Mr. Lammy: The Department collects data on total time in accident and emergency from arrival to admission, transfer or discharge. This information has been collected since August 2001 and the first full set of data was published in Quarter 2, 2002–03. It is available on the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/hospitalactivity.

In Quarter 2, 2002–03, 23 per cent. of patients waited over four hours in accident and emergency departments in England.

The Department does not collect information on between two and four hour and under two hour waits for total time in accident and emergency.

Response Times

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the response times against target for category A, B, and C calls in each ambulance trust in the last reporting period. [86025]

Mr. Lammy: The latest information available about the proportion of Category A, B and C emergency calls resulting in an ambulance arriving at the scene of the reported incident within the Government's target response times for all ambulance trusts is contained in the Department of Health Statistical Bulletin, Ambulance Services, England 2001–02. A copy of the bulletin is available in the Library and also at www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0213.htm.

A and E Transport

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hours of accident and emergency transport were provided by each NHS ambulance trust in each *(a)* region and *(b)* health authority in each year since 1997. [89787]

Mr. Lammy: This information is not collected centrally.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hours of accident and emergency transport were provided by S. John Ambulance in each *(a)* region and *(b)* NHS ambulance trust in each year since 1997. [89788]

Mr. Lammy: This information is not collected centrally.

Abortions

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS funded abortions there were in each health authority in England and Wales in each of the last five years. [89121]

Ms Blears: The information requested is shown in the table by health authority.

NHS funded abortions by health authority of residence, England and Wales 1997–2001

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Avon	2,110	2,231	2,198	2,083	1,957
Barking and Havering	871	1,115	1,068	1,101	1,428
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey	2,736	3,369	3,329	3,303	3,185
Barnsley	334	455	421	426	364
Bedfordshire	1,476	1,467	1,538	1,481	1,538
Berkshire	1,440	1,429	1,548	1,641	1,885
Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich	1,979	2,078	2,093	2,123	2,465
Birmingham	2,811	2,824	2,903	3,348	3,426
Bradford	1,035	1,046	1,016	1,013	1,054
Brent and Harrow	2,723	2,781	2,734	2,804	2,859
Buckinghamshire	1,378	1,486	1,482	1,538	1,644
Bury and Rochdale	718	694	621	784	761
Calderdale and Kirklees	1,272	1,295	1,260	1,288	1,180
Cambridge and Huntingdon[1]	1,008	988	—	—	—
Cambridgeshire[1]	—	—	1,509	1,495	1,514
Camden and Islington	2,189	2,343	2,151	2,162	2,129

NHS funded abortions by health authority of residence, England and Wales 1997–2001

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	924	946	998	938	962
County Durham	1,322	1,310	1,151	1,163	1,127
Coventry	1,308	1,294	1,202	1,439	1,458
Croydon	1,388	1,609	1,329	1,430	1,587
Doncaster	696	746	810	757	768
Dorset	1,074	1,113	1,043	960	1,006
Dudley	582	649	565	622	681
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	2,827	2,793	2,674	2,786	2,737
East Kent	843	873	941	1,226	1,399
East Lancashire	1,173	1,225	1,257	1,304	1,197
East London and The City	3,402	3,667	3,728	3,995	3,979
East Norfolk[1]	1,278	1,349	—	—	—
East Riding	1,368	1,424	1,364	1,348	1,303
East Surrey	765	722	753	786	866
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	1,242	1,280	1,599	1,450	1,537
Gateshead and South Tyneside	799	761	772	747	706
Gloucestershire	1,221	1,260	1,214	1,162	1,274
Herefordshire	310	357	341	345	339
Hertfordshire	1,882	2,210	2,086	2,180	2,190
Hillingdon	737	792	803	842	894
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and south east	1,584	1,620	1,532	1,5826	1,566
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	2,103	2,054	1,816	1,780	1,753
Kingston and Richmond	665	712	624	639	621
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	4,744	5,716	5,443	5,689	5,766
Leeds	1,918	1,835	1,720	1,849	1,718
Leicestershire	2,080	2,390	2,321	2,275	2,237
Lincolnshire	1,149	1,267	271	1,209	1,196
Liverpool	1,597	1,639	1,562	1,414	1,376
Manchester	1,247	1,282	1,406	1,877	1,851
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	2,312	2,373	2,235	2,219	2,150
Morecambe Bay	621	636	595	572	586
Newcastle and North Tyneside	1,397	1,415	1,443	1,408	1,357
Norfolk[1]	—	—	1,567	1,572	1,650
North and East Devon	1,021	972	937	869	929
North and Mid Hampshire	611	659	661	763	945
North Cheshire	855	810	806	798	825
North Cumbria	715	753	712	710	720
North Derbyshire	717	793	713	708	711
North Essex	1,430	1,837	1,650	1,619	1,595
North Nottinghamshire	747	809	726	760	734
North Staffordshire	775	854	776	759	785
North West Anglia[1]	684	827	—	—	—
North West Lancashire	584	722	632	817	929
North Yorkshire	1,405	1,386	1,266	1,292	1,263
Northamptonshire	1,170	1,269	1,267	1,250	1,341
Northumberland	673	652	635	670	642
Nottingham	1,413	1,591	1,600	1,536	1,608
Oxfordshire	1,622	1,709	1,543	1,505	1,516
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	1,110	1,686	1,292	1,340	1,696
Rotherham	529	556	590	574	569
Salford and Trafford	762	735	958	1,069	1,134
Sandwell	866	888	800	883	942
Sefton	593	576	567	545	591
Sheffield	1,416	1,416	1,354	1,346	1,416
Shropshire	712	836	823	908	857
Solihull	268	249	226	325	320
Somerset	906	1,031	983	886	928
South and West Devon	1,326	1,254	1,398	1,403	1,355
South Cheshire	1,404	1,486	1,356	1,291	1,316
South Essex	1,555	1,741	1,644	1,676	1,691
South Humber	772	817	875	871	792
South Lancashire	453	444	504	488	515
South Staffordshire	1,022	1,095	1,194	1,267	1,254
Southampton and South West Hamps	1,212	1,201	1,144	1,123	1,230
Southern Derbyshire	1,118	1,188	1,174	1,141	1,127
St. Helens and Knowsley	755	804	802	756	782
Stockport	596	622	612	560	659
Suffolk	1,245	1,171	1,277	1,234	1,272
Sunderland	771	818	787	790	772
Tees	1,226	1,431	1,444	1,365	1,331
Wakefield	567	493	430	471	564
Walsall	552	555	546	545	545
Warwickshire	1,443	1,415	1,284	1,389	1,417

NHS funded abortions by health authority of residence, England and Wales 1997–2001

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
West Kent	1,922	2,295	2,261	2,281	2,448
West Pennine	879	872	809	1,069	1,211
West Surrey	1,321	1,377	1,374	1,418	1,435
West Sussex	1,053	1,119	1,100	1,194	1,280
Wigan and Bolton	1,062	1,130	1,119	1,182	1,160
Wiltshire	787	891	886	982	1,117
Wirral	765	858	803	845	815
Wolverhampton	478	510	455	578	757
Worcestershire	946	1,051	900	1,067	1,044
Bro Taf	1,507	1,602	1,573	1,620	1,660
Dyfed Powys	876	954	949	915	973
Gwent	1,228	1,372	1,310	1,271	1,285
Morgannwg	1,225	1,200	1,183	1,210	1,110
North Wales	1,598	1,598	1,512	1,441	1,472
Total	123,886	131,900	128,258	131,474	134,611

[1] A time series is not possible for these health authorities as there were boundary changes between 1997 and 2001.
Note:
Prepared by Statistics Division 3G, Department of Health.

Accreditation

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his Department is doing to support the Government's policy on accreditation. [88089]

Mr. Lammy: The United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) is recognised by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry as the sole national body for the accreditation, against international standards, of certification and inspection bodies, testing and calibration laboratories. The Department uses UKAS accreditation services whenever it is appropriate to do so.

Clinical Pathology Accreditation (UK) Ltd. (CPA) accredits the majority of national health service pathology laboratories, and has a Council partnership and a Memorandum of Understanding with UKAS.

Active Care

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many complaints the NHS has received in the past 12 months about lack of active care for people suffering from delayed discharges from acute hospitals. [88760]

Mr. Lammy: Data on the number of national health service complaints made each year are set out in the Department of Health publication "Handling complaints: monitoring the NHS complaints procedures". Due to the diverse range of issues for which complaints may be made under the NHS complaints procedures it is not possible to provide the information requested.

Alcohol and Drug Rehabilitation

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many alcohol and drug rehabilitation places are available on the NHS in the Leeds Strategic Area Health Authority; and if he will make a statement. [83474]

Jacqui Smith: I refer my hon. Friend to the response I gave to him on Thursday 12 December 2002, *Official Report*, vol. 396, col. 492W.

Alcohol Strategy

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish the consultation document on the Government's alcohol strategy. [88767]

Ms Blears: The Department of Health and the Cabinet Office Strategy Unit published the national alcohol harm reduction strategy consultation document on 15 October 2002. Copies of the document can be obtained from the following web addresses: www.strateqv.gov.uk/2002/alcohol/consultationdoc.shtml, or www.doh.qov.uk/alcohol/alcoholstrategv.htm.

The consultation period runs until 15 January 2003.

Automated Defibrillators

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many new automated defibrillators have been sited in public places since April 2000. [88748]

Ms Blears: 680 automated external defibrillators have been installed at a total of 110 sites across England.

Breast Cancer

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research projects focusing on *(a)* the link between physical activity and the development of breast cancer, *(b)* diet and the development of breast cancer and *(c)* breast cancer prevention his Department is funding; and if he will make a statement. [88716]

Ms Blears: The Medical Research Council (MRC), which receives its funding from the Department of Trade and Industry via the Office of Science and Technology, is the main agency through which the Government supports research on the causes and treatments of disease, including all types of cancer. The Department of Health contributes to the strategies and priorities of the MRC by meeting the national health service costs of the MRC's research (and of charity funded research). The Department also directly funds research to support policy development in health and social care, and to support effective practice in the NHS.

In terms of directly funded research, the Department's main focus is on interventions to promote healthy living, including diet and physical exercise, and on research on breast cancer screening. For example, the Department is funding research projects with the following titles:

A health impact assessment of agricultural policy, using the impact on fruit and vegetable consumption as a case study;

Reducing inequalities in health and diet: the impact of a food retail development—a pilot study;

Field co-ordination in health promotion linked to the Cochrane Collaboration.

The Department also funds a programme of work at the cancer screening evaluation unit, which evaluates the effectiveness of screening. Part of this programme includes work on breast cancer screening. There are plans for an observational individual-based study of the efficacy of the breast screening programme. The Department provides joint funding for the age trial, on the effect on breast cancer mortality of annual screening from age 40.

Over 75 per cent. of the Department's total expenditure on all health research, including on cancer, is devolved to NHS organisations and details are not routinely collected centrally. Summary information about this research is available on the national research register, which is on the web at www.doh.gov.uk/research.

The Department is a member of the National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI). The recent NCRI report "Strategic Analysis 2002" analysed most of the directly funded research of Government and charity funders. The analyses revealed relatively low sums spent on cancer prevention, which has prompted the NCRI to set up a strategic planning group to look at this area to see what further research may be possible and what extra resources might be needed to bring this about. The Department will be working in partnership with its Government and charity cancer research funding partners to take this work forward.

Building Capacity Grants

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library his Department's evaluation of the uses to which the *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03 building capacity grants have been put. [88563]

Jacqui Smith: How councils spent the grant in 2001–02 is shown in the table. Councils have not yet reported for 2002–03. The funding allocated to councils will provide for a continued reduction in the number of delayed discharges from hospitals, so that 20 per cent. fewer beds are blocked in March 2003 compared to March 2002.

Percentage of building care capacity grant 2001–02 spent

Area of spend	*Councils targeted for extra help*	*Other Councils*
Residential/nursing care placements	32	52
Intensive home care packages	16	18
Increased fees	20	16
Improved assessment/capacity processes	14	2

Percentage of building care capacity grant 2001–02 spent

Area of spend	*Councils targeted for extra help*	*Other Councils*
Preventative services[1]	10	—
Community equipment[1]	—	5
Other (including community equipment)[1]	8	—
Other (including preventative services)[1]	—	7

[1] Information was collected on a differential basis in two separate exercises

Chest Pain Clinic

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many primary care trust areas have a rapid access chest pain clinic within their areas. [88751]

Ms Blears: Rapid access chest pain clinics are a service provided by acute hospital trusts. Information on numbers of clinics by primary care trust areas is not collected centrally, but every general practitioner in England should be able to refer their patients to a rapid access chest pain clinic.

Children's Nurses

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children's nurses there were in the *(a)* Adur, Arun and Worthing Primary Care Trust and *(b)* Worthing and Southlands Hosptial Trust in each year since 1997. [89356]

Ms Blears: The information requested for Worthing and Southlands Hospitals National Health Service Trust is shown in the table.

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS): Qualified nursing staff within the Paediatric nursing area of work in Worthing and Southlands Hospitals NHS Trust as at 30 September each year

Whole-time

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Total qualified staff	27	32	42	43	38

Headcount

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Total qualified staff	36	46	53	60	50

Notes:
1. Figures are rounded to the nearest whole number.
2. Figures exclude learners and agency staff.

Source:
Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census

Information is not available centrally on the number of children's nurses employed by Adur, Arun and Worthing Primary Care Trust.

Children's Vision

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what programmes have been initiated by his Department to *(a)* promote early detection of specific ophthalmic conditions in children and *(b)* monitor their visual development; and what evaluation has been carried out as to the benefits of such programmes; [88894]

(2) what estimate he has made of the percentage of children between infancy and primary school age who have undetected vision problems; [88895]

(3) whether it is his Department's policy that identification of visual defects between infancy and primary school age should rely on *(a)* parental concern and *(b)* professional awareness; [88897]

(4) what recent representations he has received on the issue of children's vision screening; [88898]

(5) if he will make a statement on how and when he plans to implement universal vision screening for children aged between four and five in England; [88899]

(6) what assessment he has made of the likely impact of ceasing screening for vision problems in children between infancy and primary school age. [88896]

Jacqui Smith: Many cases of visual defect are detected by parents or family members, others by health professionals in the course of a physical examination. We value and support both approaches. The personal child health record and the "Birth to Five" manual of child health, given to parents around the time of birth, promote the former approach. Programmes of health and development screening checks undertaken by local primary health care teams promote the latter. The purpose of the screening programme is to maximise every child's opportunity to realise their full potential for health, well being and development, and to ensure that remediable disorders are identified and acted upon as early as possible. Local programmes are a matter for primary care trusts to determine and monitor, in accordance with professional advice. This will include the content of and optimal timing for vision screening checks undertaken in childhood and the relative benefits of eye checks between infancy and primary school. I have not received recent representations on this subject but expect there to be active debate during preparation of the national service framework for children, which will set standards aimed at raising the quality of the health and social care services that children receive.

Coronary Care

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients have been waiting more than 12 months for *(a)* revascularisation and *(b)* heart surgery. [88755]

Ms Blears: At the end of September 2002, two patients had waited more than 12 months for revascularisation. Both patients have now been treated. Equivalent figures for heart surgery are not collected in this way but 2001–02 Hospital Episode Statistics suggest a mean waiting time of 124 days for all cardiothoracic surgery.

Drug Treatment

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce compulsory *(a)* methadone and *(b)* diamorphine prescription training for general practitioners. [88964]

Ms Blears: The Clinical Guidelines, Drug Misuse and Dependence—Guidelines on Clinical Management (1999) clearly outline the role of general practitioners (GPs) in prescribing to drug users. These guidelines are supported by training for GPs. The Royal College of General Practitioners has, with Department funding, developed a certificate in drug misuse for primary care practitioners, aimed at accrediting GPs.

E Coli

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on the labelling and cooking instructions for products which may be susceptible to infection by E coli-0157. [88989]

Ms Blears: The Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food has advised on the provision of appropriate instructions for products like raw minced beef, raw minced beef products, and beefburgers. This advice is already incorporated in guidance notes to the Food LabellingRegulations and makes clear that such products should be cooked right through so the juices run clear and are not pink inside.

Electronic Patient Records

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which NHS trusts in the south east have introduced electronic patient records. [88517]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 7 January 2003]:* All national health service trusts in the south east are in the process of introducing electronic patient records.

Farmed Salmon

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Health *[pursuant to the Answer of 9 December 2002, Official Report, column 23W]*, if he will publish the advice from independent experts when it is received. [88667]

Ms Blears: The Food Standards Agency will publish the advice when received from independent experts on the paper it is preparing on the consumption of fish.

Food Hygiene

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been spent on the Food Standards Agency's food hygiene campaign; and how much money has been allocated for the campaign over the next five years. [88720]

Ms Blears: As part of the Food Standards Agency's remit to cut food borne disease by 20 per cent. by 2006, £4.1 million was spent in 2001–02 and £4.9 million in 2002–03. There is currently an allocation of £4 million per year for the next three years.

Foundation Hospitals

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the independent regulator for NHS foundation hospitals will be appointed. [87893]

Mr. Hutton: The position is explained in paragraph 3.28 of "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts". Details will be included in forthcoming legislation.

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how he estimates foundation hospital status will improve acute services for NHS patients. [88288]

Mr. Hutton: National health service foundation trusts will have the freedom to develop new ways of working that reflect local needs and priorities, within a framework of NHS standards and inspection to guard against two tier health care and protect NHS patients. This new localism is the key to improving the responsiveness of services to local NHS patients.

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if it will be possible for foundation hospitals to withdraw from provision of health services that they deem not to be profitable. [88289]

Mr. Hutton: The position is set out in paragraphs 3.10–3.12 of "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts". Details will be set out in forthcoming legislation.

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether there will be restrictions on foundation hospitals providing services other than health-related ones. [88290]

Mr. Hutton: National health service foundation trusts will be bound by legislation to have a primary purpose of providing health related services for the benefit of NHS patients and the community (paragraph 1.20 of "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts"). Activities undertaken by a NHS foundation trust will be limited to those that are conducive to and not detrimental to achievement of the primary purpose (paragraph 3.5 of "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts").

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the potential change in transaction and legal costs resulting from the legally binding contracts proposed for foundation hospitals. [88291]

Mr. Hutton: The introduction of legally binding agreements for National Health Service foundation trusts takes place alongside a move to payment by results based on a national tariff across the NHS, which is designed to reduce transaction costs. The number of NHS foundation trusts will also affect the costs.

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what protection he will put in place to ensure that legal and professional fees to support the new legal framework for foundation hospitals do not affect the provision of frontline health care. [88292]

Mr. Hutton: The Department of Health will provide support for primary care trusts and other commissioners and national health service foundation trust applicants to develop competency in negotiating and framing legally binding contracts. This will include the production of a template legally binding agreement (paragraph 4.12 of "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts").

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether foundation hospitals will be permitted to dispose of assets. [88293]

Mr. Hutton: The position is set out in paragraphs 3.18–3.19 of "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts".

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ensure that primary care trusts are involved in negotiations when foundation hospitals are seeking to raise capital independent of the NHS so that PCTs can be aware of the potential revenue implications. [88294]

Mr. Hutton: National Health Service foundation trusts will have freedom to borrow from the public or private sectors primarily on the strength of their cash flows. These will depend on the levels of activity that they agree to provide under longer term binding agreements with primary care trusts. The cost of NHS services provided in facilities funded by private borrowing will be governed by the national tariff for NHS services, not by the cost of associated debt.

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of how foundation hospital trust status will affect the way that primary care trusts deliver the modernisation programme within the NHS. [88295]

Mr. Hutton: National health service foundation trusts will be at the cutting edge of the programme of reform that supports modernisation of the NHS. Freed from detailed performance management and with the opportunity to concentrate on results that matter for local people, NHS foundation trusts will contribute to the delivery of primary care trust modernisation programmes.

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he will take if foundation hospitals fail to work in partnership with primary care trusts and social services to deliver improvements in health and social well-being. [88296]

Mr. Hutton: It will be for the independent regulator to decide whether and how to intervene, using a range of powers to be set out in forthcoming legislation (see paragraphs 3.34–3.38 of "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts").

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he will take if a foundation hospital fails *(a)* financially and *(b)* to meet targets for service provision. [88297]

Mr. Hutton: It will be for the independent regulator to decide whether and how to intervene, using a range of powers to be set out in forthcoming legislation (paragraphs 3.34–3.38 of "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts").

Foundation Trusts

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence will be required to demonstrate that local people support an application for foundation status. [87747]

Mr. Hutton: The position is set out in paragraph 7.11 of "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts".

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what requirements there will be for governors of NHS foundation trusts publicly to state their political allegiances. [87748]

Mr. Hutton: This will be a matter for national health service foundation trusts to decide.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what control NHS foundation trusts will have over changes in the level of accident and emergency facilities. [87749]

Mr. Hutton: The position is set out in paragraphs 3.10–3.12 of "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts". Details will be included in forthcoming legislation.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health with reference to paragraph 1.41 of "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts", what sorts of organisations could become NHS foundation trusts. [87751]

Mr. Hutton: The position is set out in paragraph 7.3 of "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts".

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what freedom there will be for NHS foundation trusts to vary pay and conditions for clinical staff outside the Agenda for Change Agreement. [87752]

Mr. Hutton: The position is set out in paragraphs 6.1–6.7 of "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts". Details will be set out in forthcoming legislation.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if boards of governors of a NHS foundation trust will be able to remove members of a management board. [87774]

Mr. Hutton: New legislation will set out the provisions for both appointment and dismissal of members of the management board.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who will determine whether *(a)* a chair and *(b)* a non-executive director of a management board of a NHS foundation trust meets criteria laid down by the independent regulator; and what will happen if a person is elected as (i) a chair and (ii) a non-executive director but does not meet those criteria. [87777]

Mr. Hutton: A national health service foundation trust will set its own criteria for elections of these individuals taking into account guidance from the independent regulator and statutory requirements. A person who does not meet the NHS foundation trust's criteria would not be eligible for election.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether there will be a mechanism for appeal against a decision of the independent regulator on matters relating to NHS foundation trusts. [87780]

Mr. Hutton: Arrangements will be set out in forthcoming legislation.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will have a power of direction over the independent regulator for NHS foundation trusts. [87781]

Mr. Hutton: No.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his statement of 11 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 272, if he will make a statement on the meaning of creation of a legal lock on the assets of NHS foundation trusts. [87782]

Mr. Hutton: National health service foundation trusts will be prevented from selling and distributing assets necessary for the continued provision of essential services.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimates he has made of the costs to a NHS foundation trust of *(a)* setting up and *(b)* administering a membership register. [87783]

Mr. Hutton: The Department of Health will work with second stage applicants to prepare for formal establishment, including practical support to develop the new governance arrangements.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether local authorities will be able to appoint members to the board of governors of an NHS foundation trust. [87787]

Mr. Hutton: The constitution of a national health service foundation trust will set out the arrangements for appointing representatives of partner organisations to the board of governors. The minimum requirements are set out in paragraph 2.17 of "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts". As explained in paragraphs 2.17–2.23 there will be flexibility for each NHS foundation trust to decide whether to include other partner organisations, including local authority social service departments.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of the costs of setting up an Independent Regulator for NHS foundation trusts. [87788]

Mr. Hutton: Costs will depend on the roles and responsibilities of the Independent Regulator, which will be set out in forthcoming legislation and on the number of national health service foundation trusts.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether it is his policy that borrowing by an NHS foundation trust from the private sector may be guaranteed by *(a)* the Secretary of State for Health, *(b)* strategic health authorities, *(c)* primary care trusts and *(d)* other bodies within the NHS. [87789]

Mr. Hutton: The regime for managing financial failure in national health service foundation trusts will safeguard the Secretary of State's overriding priority—that NHS patients continue to have access to the health care they need, free at the point of delivery. The regime will not underwrite institutions that have failed to deliver under the terms of their service agreements and/or licence.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether an NHS foundation trust will be able to carry out work for NHS patients without charge. [87790]

Mr. Hutton: National health service foundation trusts will provide services that are free at the point of use according to clinical need, not the ability to pay.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if boards of governors of NHS foundation trusts will be able to take independent advice on matters, with particular reference to the requirement to advise the management board on the trust's forward plans. [87810]

Mr. Hutton: It is for the board of governors of each national health service foundation trust to determine what advice it requires in order to carry out its responsibilities. Any provision for allocation of resources to the board of governors will be determined by the NHS foundation trust's constitution.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the policy of primary care trusts will need to be towards a foundation trust application to allow such an application to go forward; and which PCTs will be entitled to have their view considered. [87811]

Mr. Hutton: The position is set out in paragraph 7.11 of "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts". We will work with short-listed applicants to identify the relevant primary care trusts.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consultation he has had with the Office for National Statistics about the classification of NHS foundation trusts in the national accounts; and what advice he received. [87812]

Mr. Hutton: None.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how he defines suitable comfort in relation to private finance initiative schemes for NHS foundation trusts, as mentioned in paragraph 5.22 of "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts". [87813]

Mr. Hutton: For national health service trusts with existing private finance initiative (PFI) projects, suitable comfort means that legislation introducing NHS foundation trusts must not affect any new NHS foundation trust's ability to meet its obligations under its PFI contract. Legislation will also ensure that NHS foundation trusts, once created, will be able to sponsor their own PFI projects using the same legislative framework as NHS trusts.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether an NHS foundation trust may appear within the private sector in the national accounts. [87814]

Mr. Hutton: This is a matter for the Office for National Statistics.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the Government will act as the lender of last resort for NHS foundation trusts if they are unable to borrow from private sector sources. [87815]

Mr. Hutton: The arrangements for borrowing by national health service foundation trusts are set out in paragraph 5.13–5.16 of "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts".

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether there will be age criteria for membership of an NHS foundation trust. [87816]

Mr. Hutton: The criteria for membership are set out in paragraph 2.6 of "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts".

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the amounts due under private finance initiative contracts will be treated as borrowing for the purpose of the borrowing limits to be set for NHS foundation trusts. [87818]

Mr. Hutton: No. The contract with a private finance initiative project company is for a service, and as such, does not constitute borrowing.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether NHS foundation trusts will be able to transfer their existing assets as part of a private finance initiative transaction. [87819]

Mr. Hutton: National health service foundation trusts will continue to be able to procure capital schemes using the private finance initiative process, subject to the same degree of oversight as applies under current arrangements.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether NHS foundation trusts will be able to carry out work for private patients through the medium of *(a)* subsidiary companies and *(b)* public private partnership arrangements. [87820]

Mr. Hutton: Subject to compliance with licence conditions explained in paragraph 3.14–3.15 of "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts", national health service foundation trusts will be able to carry out work for private patients through a range of corporate arrangements.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether membership of an NHS foundation trust will be available to persons who live in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* Wales. [87821]

Mr. Hutton: Subject to legislation, membership will be open to residents in Scotland and Wales if they meet the eligibility criteria set by a national health service foundation trust.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what freedom the Independent Regulator will have to interpret the terms *(a)* 'NHS standards' and *(b)* 'NHS values' when deciding to (i) issue and (ii) monitor NHS foundation trust licences. [87822]

Mr. Hutton: The role and responsibilities of the Independent Regulator will be set out in forthcoming legislation.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provision there will be for the elections to boards of governors of NHS foundation trusts. [87823]

Mr. Hutton: The position is set out in paragraphs 2.25–2.28 of "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts". Details will be included in forthcoming legislation.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who will assume control of a foundation trust which is dissolved; and how services will continue to be provided in that case. [87824]

Mr. Hutton: The position is set out in paragraph 3.38 of "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts". Details will be included in forthcoming legislation.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health from when care trusts will be eligible for establishment as NHS foundation trusts. [87825]

Mr. Hutton: The position is set out in paragraph 7.3 of "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts".

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if a person will need to be on the electoral register in order to register as a member of an NHS foundation trust. [87826]

Mr. Hutton: The criteria for membership are set out in paragraph 2.6 of "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts".

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who will draw up each foundation trust's statement of purpose; what legal status a statement will have; and what powers the Secretary of State will have to alter such statements. [87827]

Mr. Hutton: Details will be set out in each national health service foundation trust's constitution subject to requirements in forthcoming legislation (see paragraph 3.5 of "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts"). The Secretary of State will have no power to alter a NHS foundation trust's statement of purpose.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what definition he uses of the term protection of the public interest in paragraph 1.16 of "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts". [87828]

Mr. Hutton: Protecting the public interest in this context refers to safeguards that will ensure the continued provision of essential public services and prevent distribution of the assets necessary for the continued provision of those services.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether an NHS foundation trust will be able to invest surplus financial assets as it wishes. [87877]

Mr. Hutton: The position is explained in paragraph 3.5 of "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts". Details will be set out in forthcoming legislation.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish the prudential code referred to in paragraph 5.17 of "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts". [87878]

Mr. Hutton: The position is set out in paragraph 3.17 of "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts".

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the willingness of the private sector to lend money for capital projects to NHS foundation trusts in the absence of security on the related assets. [87879]

Mr. Hutton: There has been widespread consultation with the financial community throughout the development of the national health service foundation trust policy. Lenders are not looking to take security over assets crucial to the provision of essential public services. NHS foundation trusts will borrow primarily on the strength of their projected cash flows.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the strict limits on the provision by NHS foundation hospitals of services to private patients referred to in paragraph 3.4 of "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts" will be defined; and whether it will be possible for an NHS foundation hospital to apply for a revision to the limits. [87889]

Mr. Hutton: The position is set out in paragraph 3.15 of "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts". The limit will not be subject to revision. Details will be included in forthcoming legislation.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what calculations he has made of the potential membership communities for NHS foundation hospitals situated in *(a)* London and *(b)* other large urban areas. [87890]

Mr. Hutton: The membership community will vary across national health service foundation trusts and it will be up to each applicant to set out boundaries on the basis of minimum criteria to be set out in forthcoming legislation.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if an NHS foundation trust will be required to charge standard tariffs for each area of its activity. [87894]

Mr. Hutton: The position is set out in paragraphs 5.6–5.12 and 5.25–5.29 of "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts".

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how it will be determined what portion of debt of an NHS trust is associated with particular assets that are transferred. [87895]

Mr. Hutton: The intention is that on establishment a national health service foundation trust will inherit the balance sheet of its predecessor NHS trust. Assets will be transferred at the value shown in the accounts of NHS trust.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which council is referred to in paragraph 2.22 of "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts". [87896]

Mr. Hutton: The term "council" should read "board of governors".

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the statutory responsibilities of *(a)* member of a board of governors, *(b)* chair of a board of governors, *(c)* chair of a management board, *(d)* non-executive director of a management board and *(e)* executive member of a management board of an NHS foundation trust will be. [87897]

Mr. Hutton: The statutory responsibilities of these individuals will be set out in forthcoming legislation.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what resources will be available to boards of governors of NHS foundation hospitals to enable them to carry out their functions. [87898]

Mr. Hutton: Subject to legislation, this will be a matter for the national health service foundation trust to determine.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the level of *(a)* financial and *(b)* other resources available to the independent regulator for NHS foundation hospitals will be determined. [87899]

Mr. Hutton: Provision for the establishment of the independent regulator, including funding, will be set out in forthcoming legislation.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reasons NHS foundation trusts will not be able to use their regulated assets as security for borrowing. [87900]

Mr. Hutton: National health service foundation trusts will not be allowed to use their regulated assets as security against borrowing to ensure the continuity of essential services in the event of financial failure.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is meant by public interest mandate in paragraph 5.24 of "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts". [87901]

Mr. Hutton: Public interest mandate in this context refers to the public interest duties that will be enshrined in the licence of each national health service foundation trust that are described in paragraph 3.5 of "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts".

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in what ways the independent regulator for NHS foundation trusts will be independent of the Secretary of State for Health. [87903]

Mr. Hutton: The independent regulator will not be subject to direction by the Secretary of State for Health.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if it is his policy to ensure that the board of governors of a NHS foundation trust is not dominated by *(a)* a particular group of members and *(b)* a sectional interest. [87904]

Mr. Hutton: Yes, paragraphs 2.17–2.28 of "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts" set out clearly that national health service foundation trusts will need to establish a properly representative public and patient membership base and set up a board of governors that is balanced and representative of the whole membership community.

Halal Foods

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce legislation to regulate the sale of halal foods. [89027]

Ms Blears: There are no plans. However, the Food Standards Agency is about to issue advice to food law enforcement officers on halal food issues, and they will be asked to have regard to this advice and consider action under appropriate legislation where this is necessary.

Health Provision

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what areas of public health provision are supplied in competition with the private sector. [88591]

Ms Blears: In general there is no competition between the private and public sector in the provision of public health. An occasional exception is the complementary provision of microbiological pathology laboratory services by the Public Health Laboratory Service and the National Health Service, where some private laboratories also provide analysis of food environmental and water samples. At local level it is for primary care groups to determine the mix of public/private provision and public sector providers may tender for contracts, for example, those advertised in the Official Journal of the European Communities.

Hospices

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to end the differences in funding for children's hospices and adult hospices in Leicestershire; [88629]

(2) what guidance he has issued to PCTs in their purchase of palliative care in children's hospices; [88630]

(3) if he will make available some of the additional funding he has allocated for palliative care to children's hospices. [88627]

Ms Blears: Guidance was issued in 1998 entitled "Evaluation of the Pilot Project Programme for Children with Life Threatening Illnesses". This evaluation included the role of children's hospices. Further consideration will be given to this role during the preparation of the national service framework for children. It will also be highlighted through the New Opportunities Funding for children's palliative care projects—and I understand this funding will be available shortly. Purchasing decisions for health care services, including palliative care services, will however remain a matter for local primary care trusts. Hospices serving the needs of either children or adults need to engage with PCTs and negotiate funding for services provided, from that which has been made available.

Hospital Beds

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the definition is of a hospital bed for statistical purposes. [85773]

Mr. Lammy: The full definition of what is counted as a hospital bed for statistical purposes is included in the National Health Service information authority's data dictionary, available through their website at http://www.nhsia.nhs.uk/datastandards/pages/version2.asp

In summary, a bed includes a device that may be used to permit a patient to lie down when the need to do so is as a consequence of the patient's condition rather than the need for active intervention such as examination, diagnostic investigation, manipulation/treatment, or transport.

Labelling

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made towards a clearer labelling system on animal meat products to ensure that the consumer can tell where the animal *(a)* originated and *(b)* was slaughtered. [89084]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 8 January 2003]:* Compulsory labelling rules already apply to all fresh, chilled and frozen beef and veal, including mince. These rules require information about the country or countries of birth, rearing, slaughter and cutting to be given on the label. The European Commission is expected to submit a report to the European Parliament and the Council

later this year on extending the scope of these rules to cover processed products containing beef, and beef based products.

The Government wants to see compulsory origin labelling on a wider range of foods, particularly other meats and meat ingredients in meat products, and statutory controls on the use of terms like "produce of". The European Commission has identified rules on origin labelling as one of the key issues to be taken forward in a comprehensive review of food labelling legislation, which is due to be initiated shortly.

Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust decision on the use of NHS professionals. [84599]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* The Leeds Teaching Hospitals National Health Service Trust has decided not to renew their two-year contract with their current provider of NHS Professionals when it expires in June 2003.

However the trust remains completely committed to the principles of NHS Professionals. They are keen to see improvements in the management of temporary staffing and achieving the NHS Professionals standards. The trust is working with the local work force development and NHS Professionals to ensure the timescales and standards set by the Department of Health on temporary staffing are met before their current contract expires.

Looked After Children

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which 10 authorities have the *(a)* highest and *(b)* lowest numbers of looked-after children listed as missing. [88516]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 7 January 2003]:* The total number of looked-after children who went missing from their usual place of residence at any time during the year ending 31 March 2001 was 920. There are currently no statistics available to distinguish the 10 local authorities with the highest and lowest numbers of looked-after children listed as missing.

Data on children who have gone missing from care is obtained from the Department of Health form SSDA903, a statistical return completed by local authorities for one third of all looked-after children. As these data are based on a one-third sample and the figures reported by authorities on children missing from care are small, it is not possible to produce a reliable comparison across authorities. In addition, analysis on the sample numbers has shown that there is a wide variation in the figures between local authorities-suggesting inconsistency in recording practices which may in turn suggest under-reporting. The figures may therefore be under-stating the actual numbers of children who go missing from care during the year.

The SSDA903 data collection will start recording information for 100 per cent. of looked-after children for the year ending 31 March 2004. A robust analysis of children missing from care by local authority will be possible when those results are analysed in the autumn of 2004.

Mental Health

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on how his Department ensures that every mental health patient has access to a general practitioner. [86160]

Jacqui Smith: Improving the quality of and access to care is a strategic priority for the National Health Service. Anyone, including those with mental health problems, ordinarily resident in the United Kingdom is eligible for free treatment by a general practitioner.

In addition, NHS Direct (0845 4647), the nurse-led telephone helpline, now provides a country-wide confidential, consistent source of advice on health care, including mental health care, round the clock so people can manage their problems at home or be re-directed to the appropriate place.

We have also taken action to strengthen the mental health support that GPs provide. For example, 1,000 new primary care mental health workers and 500 more community mental health staff ('Gateway' workers) will be appointed by 2004 to help GPs manage care for people with mental health problems of all ages, including those in a crisis.

Further information about these initiatives can be found on the mental health website at www.doh.qov.uk/mentalhealth.

Mid-Essex Hospital Trust (Waiting Times)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the mid-Essex hospital trust area were waiting for in-patient treatment on the latest date for which figures are available. [88347]

Mr. Lammy: There were 9,675 patients waiting for in-patient treatment at mid-Essex Hospital Services national health service trust at the end of October 2002.

Source:
KHO7 return

National Insurance

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the extra cost will be in a full year to *(a)* the Mid-Essex Hospital Trust; and *(b)* employees of the Mid-Essex Hospital Trust of the increase in national insurance contributions from April 2003. [88575]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 7 January 2003]:* It is not possible to estimate the exact cost to Mid Essex Hospital Services National Health Service trust and its employees of the increase in national insurance (NI) contributions from April 2003. It is estimated that the changes to employees' NI contributions will increase pay costs by an average of 0.7 per cent. next year.

NHS Dentistry

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what criteria were used to allocate the

funds which were announced in "Modernising NHS Dentistry: Implementing the NHS Plan" to improve access to NHS dentistry; [88365]

(2) if he will list the name of each dental practice and dental access centre that has received money from the funds that were made available to NHS dentistry which were announced in the Government's dental strategy, "Modernising NHS Dentistry: Implementing the NHS Plan", broken down by primary care trust. [88366]

Mr. Lammy: Some of the funding announced in "Modernising NHS Dentistry: Implementing the NHS Plan" was paid to the then health authorities to pass on to individual dental practices in accordance with local needs. Information is not held centrally on which individual practices received the money.

The funds of £25 million revenue and £7 million capital announced in "Modernising NHS Dentistry: Implementing the NHS Plan" were made available to the following 27 dental access centres:

Avon
Bury and Rochdale
East Kent
Gloucestershire
Hereford
Hull and East Riding
Kings Lynn and Wisbech
Lincolnshire
Milton Keynes
Morecambe Bay
North Cumbria
North and East Devon
North Mersey
North Staffordshire
Oxfordshire
Peterborough
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire
Plymouth
Shropshire
Somerset
South Cheshire
South Staffordshire
Surrey (East and West)
Victoria Mill
Warrington
Warwickshire
Worcestershire

While individual primary care trusts (PCTs) have been identified to take lead responsibility for each dental access centre, the service is available to patients regardless of where they live. A single dental access centre may be providing services from a number of different sites located within more than one PCT.

The criteria used to allocate the Modernisation Fund of £35 million have been placed in the Library.

Allocations of the £4 million Dental Care Development Fund and the subsequent £6 million Dentistry Action Plan monies were based on (in order of importance):

a) health authorities' reports to the Department on the situation in their areas;

b) estimates of the percentage of national health service dental surgeries taking on new patients, based on new registrations reported to the dental practice board;

c) the change in NHS adult registrations between June 1999 and June 2000;

d) the area not covered by NHS surgeries taking on new patients; and

e) existing and prospective schemes to improve NHS dental availability—i.e. dental access centres, personal dental service projects and investing in dentistry schemes.

Dental practices were able to use the dental care development fund money to expand their surgeries or buy extra equipment, for example, and were expected to treat an agreed number of additional NHS patients in return.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funds have been made available to dentists for *(a)* the establishment of new NHS practices and *(b)* the refurbishment and extension of existing NHS dental practices in the last 12 months. [88364]

Mr. Lammy: The modernisation fund, the dental care development fund and the dentistry action plan fund were made available in 2001–02 to health authorities (HAs) and primary care trusts (PCTs) to improve local access to national health service dentistry. These monies could be used towards the establishment of new NHS dental practices or refurbishment and extension of existing ones. Information about funding allocated, including any financial contributions from the NHS locally to individual practices by HAs or PCTs, is not held centrally.

NHS Organisations

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what criteria are used to determine whether an organisation is a part of the NHS. [87902]

Mr. Hutton: National health service services are provided by a mix of public and private sector organisations. The service provided for NHS patients must be free at the point of use and provided according to clinical need not ability to pay.

Official Travel

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the total budget of *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies is for official travel in 2002–03; [84934]

(2) what the total expenditure of *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies was on official travel in 2001–02. [84797]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answers 3 December 2002]:* The total expenditure for travel and subsistence by officials of the Department and its Agencies for 2001–02 was £14.3 million. Travel and subsistence costs are one element in the overall budget for administrative costs and there is no separate budget figure for official travel costs in 2002–03.

Orthopaedic Surgery

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the length of the waiting list for orthopaedic surgery

in the *(a)* Luton and Dunstable Hospital NHS Trust area, *(b)* the Bedfordshire Hospital NHS Trust area, *(c)* the East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust area and *(d)* the Addenbrookes NHS Trust area (i) is now and (ii) was in each of the preceding five years. [89338]

Mr. Hutton: The table shows the requested national health service trusts in-patient waiting list size for specialty Trauma and Orthopaedics from the end of June (Q1) 2002 to the end of September (Q2) 2002.

	Total number of patients waiting for an in-patient admission in specialty Trauma and Orthopaedics	
Name of Trust	*End of June (Q1) 2002*	*End of September (Q2) 2002*
Luton and Dunstable Hospital NHS Trust	1,305	1,345
Bedford Hospital NHS Trust	1,107	1,141
The East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust	2,413	2,403
Addenbrooke's NHS Trust	1,645	1,476

Source:
Department of Health form KH07
(See also: www.doh.qov.uk/waitinqtimes)

Postcodes

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what use his Department and its agencies make of postcode areas for *(a)* the collection and publication of data, *(b)* devising formulae for the distribution of grants and awards and *(c)* the delivery of services; and when such usages were last reviewed. [87745]

Mr. Lammy: The Department, including its Agencies, uses postcodes or postcode-related information as follows:

(a) In collection of a variety of information by geographical area, including use as a sampling frame on which to base sample surveys. Postcode information is used both to identify locations and as a basis to derive data about larger geographic areas, including for fixed geographic areas over time. Where published, including through maps, data are usually presented in terms of defined administrative areas derived from postcode information, not in terms of postcode areas. All departmental data collection is reviewed periodically and the use of postcodes and postcode-related information is included in such review.

(b) Postcode information is used as part of the process of determining eligibility for additional payments to dentists relating to children aged under six years in deprived areas. This arrangement was made in 1998 and was amended from being based on the postcode of the dentist's surgery to the postcode of residence of the patient in April 2002.

(c) The Department does not use postcodes in its own delivery of services other than for addressing and indexing correspondence, or for referring enquirers to local services.

The Department is also involved in projects under the neighbourhood statistics initiative to improve the geographic referencing of its statistics, and this will include reviews of current collection and use of postcode information.

Prostate Cancer

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the statistical incidence of prostate cancer in each of the last 10 years for which records exist. [89679]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Pullinger to Mr. Robert Spink, dated 13 January 2003:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question concerning the statistical incidence of prostate cancer in each of the last ten years for which records exist. I am replying in his absence. (89679)

The latest available cancer incidence rates are for newly diagnosed cases of cancer in 1999. The directly age standardised registration rates for prostate cancer in England for the ten year period 1990–99 are given in the table below.

Directly age standardised[1] registration rates per 100,000 males for prostate[2] cancer in England, 1990–99

	Malignant neoplasm of prostate[2]
1990	47.2
1991	49.6
1992	54.4
1993	58.5
1994	66.1
1995	69.0
1996	72.3
1997	71.2
1998	68.5
1999	72.6

[1] Using the European Standard Population
[2] For the year 1991 to 1994, International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision Code (ICD-9), code 185. For the years 1995 to 1999, International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD-10), code C61.
Source:
Office for National Statistics. "Cancer statistics—registrations, England 1999". Series MB1 no. 30. London: The Stationary Office, 2002. Available on the National Statistics website at http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_health/Mb1_30/MB1_30.pdf

Rainbows Children's Hospice

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much statutory funding has been paid to Rainbows Children's Hospice in 2001–02. [88628]

Mr. Lammy: For the year 2001–02 Leicestershire Health Authority allocated £26,000 to the Rainbows Children's Hospice. This funding was provided under Section 64, of Health Services and Public Health Act 1968, providing a grant to a voluntary group for respite, palliative and terminal care for children.

The Department's view on funding in support of children's hospices is that this should be through negotiation between the hospices, primary care trusts and social services departments, which are responsible for delivering services locally and are best placed to work in partnership with organisations like hospices and to agree an appropriate level of funding.

There is, however, a case for pump priming these negotiations. We expect this to be facilitated through the New Opportunities Fund, which has a budget of

£48 million to support projects for children with life threatening illness, including children's hospice respite services. £15.3 million has been earmarked specifically for hospice care. Awards will be available next year.

Secure Psychiatric Accommodation

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many places are available for secure psychiatric accommodation for women; how many such places were available five years ago; and if he will make a statement on the adequacy of such provision with special reference to changes in the prison population. [88241]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 7 January 2003]:* Currently, beds in secure psychiatric accommodation are not always designated by gender so it is not possible to be specific about the number of places that are available for women. Returns indicate that at the end of March 2001, the latest date for which information is currently available, there were 4,847 secure beds, compared to 3,845 secure beds at the end of March 1998. These figures include high, medium and other secure bed numbers and cover all genders.

The consultation document "Women's Mental Health: Into the Mainstream", published in September last year, envisages the development of dedicated, integrated, secure services for women. The needs of women requiring transfer from prison to hospital will be taken into account as part of the process of planning these proposed new services.

Sex Selection

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) whether in reaching his decision to ask the HFEA to consult the public on sex selection, he considered the results of the previous (1993) HFEA public consultation on this; and if he will make a statement; [89034]

(2) if he will publish the results of the HFEA 1993 public consultation on sex selection; [89039]

(3) what conclusions were drawn from the HFEA 1993 public consultation on sex selection; and what assessment he has made of public perception of the issue. [89040]

Ms Blears: The results of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority's 1993 public consultation on sex selection were published in an HFEA press release on 20 July 1993 and were summarised in the HFEA's third annual report, published in July 1994. The HFEA concluded that sex selection should only be permitted for medical reasons where there is a risk of a child of a particular sex inheriting a serious life-threatening disorder. A copy of the annual report is available in the Library and a copy of the press release is available from the HFEA.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what basis the HFEA in their current consultation on sex selection stated that India does not prohibit social sex selection. [89041]

Ms Blears: The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority advises that regrettably this was an error in the consultation document. The law in India prohibits the use of pre-natal diagnostic techniques to determine the sex of an embryo for social reasons but variations in practice have been reported.

Thrombolysis

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what proportion of NHS ambulance trusts publish data on their thrombolysis protocols and procedures; [88754]

(2) what steps he is taking to improve the ability of ambulance paramedics to provide thrombolysis for appropriate patients. [88753]

Mr. Lammy: Currently eight of the 31 ambulance services are providing paramedic thrombolysis according to protocols agreed by local health economies. These protocols are based on a clear guideline from the Joint Royal Colleges Ambulance Liaison Committee (JRCALC) published on the Royal College of Physicians' and Ambulance Services Association websites. They are available from the individual ambulance services on request. Paramedic training is essential for safe and effective thrombolysis. Central funding of £14 million from 2002 to 2004 is being invested in ambulance trusts to support paramedic training and provide 12 lead ECG monitors/defibrillators and linked to accident and emergency departments. All front-line 999 ambulances will be equipped by December 2003.

Visually Impaired Children

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what treatment is available on the NHS to visually impaired children; and what services are available to visually impaired children living in disadvantaged areas to assist them in managing in their neighbourhood environment. [87361]

Mr. Lammy: The national health service provides ophthalmic services to visually impaired children, making use of a multi-disciplinary approach to meet their needs. The hospital eye service (HES) works closely with each child's general practitioner, education, social and rehabilitation services, exchanging reports and information.

Ophthalmologists aim to identify the underlying cause of the problem and offer treatment if indicated. They also co-ordinate the response from the HES.

Orthoptists work closely with ophthalmologists and assess visual function, visual acuity and binocular vision; under the direction of an ophthalmologist, they provide treatment aimed at improving visual acuity and oculo-motor control.

Optometrists test the sight of visually impaired children and prescribe glasses and/or low vision aids. Children under the age of 16, and under the age of 19 in full-time education, are entitled to help with the cost of their glasses through the NHS voucher scheme. Optical low vision aids are supplied on loan through the HES.

The Government's cross government programmes for children give priority to children in disadvantaged areas and to disabled children. Sure start partnerships aim to work with parents and children up to four years old to provide appropriate early intervention and support. The £450 million children's fund is being targeted on

preventive work with children, primarily in the five to 13 age group and their families, helping them before they hit crisis.

Under the Children Act 1989, local authority social services departments in England, working with other local authority departments and health authorities, have a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in their area who are in need and to promote the upbringing of such children, wherever possible by their families, through providing an appropriate range of services. Under the definitions in the Children Act, all disabled children are included as children in need. A wide range of family support services is provided by the public and voluntary sectors. Services can include short-term breaks, guidance and counselling, day care, family centres and home help.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 14 January 2003

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Christmas Cards (Expenditure)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much each ministerial office in her Department spent on the printing and posting of Christmas cards in 2002. [90111]

Dr. Howells: Ministers sent 1,120 of the 3,800 Christmas cards produced by my Department this year. The design and print costs totalled £1,985 and the majority of cards were sent by second class post.

Annual Report

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much producing her Department's latest annual report cost; how many copies were printed; how many copies of it were sold at its cover price; to whom copies of the report have been provided free of charge; and how many copies were provided free of charge. [90878]

Dr. Howells: The cost of producing the Department's 2002 annual report was as follows:

	£
	Cost
Design, typesetting, pdfs, etc.	56,105
Print (buy back of copies from The Stationery Office)	24,774
Proofreading	570
Total	81,449

Design costs included the development of a new template which the Department plans to follow for the next two to three years.

1,400 copies of the final report were purchased at a discounted rate from The Stationery Office (TSO) for distribution to staff, the media and to key players within the Department's non-departmental public bodies and agencies.

TSO are responsible for the distribution of departmental annual reports and the number of reports printed and sold is a matter for them.

Capita Group

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the contracts that have been awarded to the Capita Group by her Department. [89964]

Dr. Howells: The DCMS have used Capita in the past as shown but have had no dealings with that organisation since February 2002.

CAPITA

		£
1998–99 (Jan—Apr 98)	Recruitment of Chairman and Members -New Opportunities Fund	14,000
1998–99 (Jan—Apr 98)	Recruitment of Chairman and Trustees -National Endowment for	13,000
1998–99 (Feb—Apr 98)	Recruitment for BBC Appointments	12,000
2001–02 (Oct—Nov 01)	Training for Recruitment Scheme—Middle and Senior Managers	17,000
2001–02 (Feb—Mar 02)	Providing and Marking Standard Civil Service Written Tests	1,000
2001–02 (Nov 01—Feb 02)	Civil Service Junior Manager Recruitment Scheme	8,000
	Total	65,000

Includes Royal Parks (nil return)

Sporting Venues (Community Transport)

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to improve *(a)* availability of, *(b)* access to, and *(c)* use of community transport for children travelling to sports facilities and events; and if she will make a statement. [90002]

Mr. Caborn: As part of the PE, Schools Sports and Club links Project, DCMS are liaising with colleagues from the Department for Education and Skills and the Department for Transport to address the transport problems that arise from school children needing to travel to sporting venues after school hours.

Fair Trade

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what fair trade criteria she sets when deciding upon what suppliers to use. [89907]

Dr. Howells: In all procurement, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport follows the requirements of Government accounting, Government procurement guidance and Office of Government Commerce advice. As with environmental considerations those of fair trade are given due consideration but the absence of fair trade credentials are not used to disqualify an otherwise suitable contractor. Where the demands of propriety and value for money can be met equally by all tenderers, the social impact of fair trade will be added to the balance.

National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what is the total of payments made by NESTA, since its creation, to external businesses and individuals involved in creating, upgrading and maintaining its web site. [90003]

Dr. Howells: Total expenditure on the website in the four financial years from creation of NESTA to 31/03/02 has been £242,567. In addition, capital expenditure related to the website of £225,629 has been incurred.

Public-Private Partnerships

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many departmental minutes issued by her Department were outstanding on 30 November, that referred to public private partnerships as included in Table B14 of the Consolidated Fund and National Loans Fund Accounts; and what their value was. [89415]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 13 January 2003]:* A Departmental Minute was issued on 6 December 1993, relating to the indemnity between the Royal Armouries, and the British Waterways Board, to the site of the Royal Armouries Museum in Leeds. The amount was unquantifiable as at 31 March 2002. This Minute is still outstanding.

Television Licence Fee

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when consultations will be completed between officials and the BBC regarding amendments to the television licence fee regulations to introduce measures to preserve the rights of beneficiaries of the accommodation for residential care concessionary television licence scheme when the social mix and the level of warden cover in sheltered housing changes. [90221]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 13 January 2003]:* The purpose of the consultations currently in progress is to ensure that the regulations to introduce preserved rights to the accommodation for residential care concession do not create any new anomalies or unnecessary administrative burdens. We hope to be able to bring forward amending regulations shortly.

Tote

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to change the status of the Tote; when such proposals will be brought forward; and if she will make a statement. [90575]

Dr. Howells: We plan to bring forward a Bill which will include provision for the sale of the Tote. We have made it clear that our wish is to sell to a trust that represents relevant horseracing interests. The Bill will be introduced as soon as Parliamentary time allows.

ADVOCATE-GENERAL

Theft/Fraud

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Advocate General what her estimate is of the cost of theft and fraud to her Department in 2002. [89868]

Dr. Lynda Clark: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, at column 514W.

SCOTLAND

Capita Group

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list the contracts that have been awarded to the Capita Group by the Office. [89976]

Mrs. Liddell: No contracts have been awarded to the Capita Group by my Department.

Population/Electorate Statistics

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what her latest estimates are of *(a)* the population and *(b)* the electorate in Scotland. [90005]

Mrs. Liddell: Population statistics in Scotland is a matter for the General Register Office for Scotland, an associated Department of the Scottish Executive. I understand, however, that revised population statistics will be published by the end of February.

The Office for National Statistics is responsible for the collection of electoral data. I understand that the figures for the electorate as at 1 December 2002 will be published on 27 February.

Economy

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which sectors of the Scottish economy are in recession; and if she will make a statement. [89473]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 13 January 2003]*: Output in the agriculture, forestry and sector has fallen for the last three consecutive quarters (to Q2 2002). The service, production and construction sectors all grew in the last quarter for which data are available. The Scottish economy as a whole is performing well against a backdrop of difficult global economic conditions.

Public Expenditure

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what her estimate is of the real increase in spending at the Scottish Office between 1999–2000 and 2002–03; and if she will make a statement. [90440]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scottish Office ceased to exist on 30 June 1999 and the Scotland Office was established on 1 July 1999. Details of expenditure by the Scotland Office are set out in the departmental report and the accounts. As the department was set up during the course of financial year 1999–2000, and expenditure since then has reflected the fact that the department is still moving towards its agreed staffing and operational levels, it would therefore be premature to make estimates of real terms changes in expenditure.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what her estimate is of total public spending on the Scottish Office for each year from 1999–2000 to 2005–06; and if she will make a statement. [90441]

Mrs. Liddell: Details of expenditure from 1999–2000 to 2003–04 are set out in the most recent departmental report by my department. Details for the later years will be published in future reports.

Theft/Fraud

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what her estimate is of the cost of theft and fraud to *(a)* her Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in 2002. [89867]

Mrs. Liddell: No cases of theft or fraud were reported in my Department, or in the Boundary Commission for Scotland, in 2002.

TREASURY

Gold

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the profit or loss on sales of gold by the Bank of England since May 1997, calculated by comparing the price achieved on sale with the current price of gold. [89856]

Ruth Kelly: The gold sales programme announced in May 1999 was part of a restructuring programme to reduce the riskiness of the Reserves portfolio.

This was a long-term investment decision and as such it is inappropriate to measure gains or losses resulting from fluctuations in market values on a particular day or over a short-term period. Gains and losses should be measured over the longer term, taking account of all the elements of the restructuring programme. In particular, the returns gained from the foreign currency assets purchased with the proceeds of the gold sales should also be included (see Part 2 of the National Audit Office Report on "The Sale of Part of the UK Gold Reserves", published on 12 January 2001).

Home Insurance

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will introduce measures to abolish the switching fees which some home insurance companies charge consumers when they arrange home insurance with someone other than their mortgage providers. [90216]

Ruth Kelly: The Government is giving the Financial Services Authority (FSA) responsibility for regulating mortgage business. I understand that the FSA will shortly be consulting on the basis that fees charged for switching insurances taken out as a condition of the mortgage, such as buildings insurance, are disclosed up front.

Import Controls

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answer of 7 January 2003, refs 88430–88432, *Official Report*, column 165W, when he expects to conclude discussions between the various Departments and agencies involved and to announce the Government's decisions. [89800]

John Healey *[holding answer 13 January 2003]*: This matter is being progressed within Government under the leadership of the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs who are working actively with Customs to effect the transfer as soon as possible.

Income Tax

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will estimate the additional yield of an income tax rate of 50 per cent. on taxable incomes exceeding *(a)* £100,000 per annum, *(b)* £125,000 per annum, *(c)* £150,000 per annum and *(d)* £200,000 per annum; and if he will make a statement; [90173]

(2) if he will estimate the additional yield from levying a 45 per cent. rate of income tax on *(a)* taxable and *(b)* gross incomes exceeding £100,000 per annum; and if he will make a statement. [90176]

Dawn Primarolo: The additional yield of making the changes is set out in the table.

Income tax yield in 2003–04

	£ billion
(a) 50 per cent. rate for taxable incomes over £100,000	4.9
(b) 50 per cent. rate for taxable incomes over £125,000	4.2
(c) 50 per cent. rate for taxable incomes over £150,000	3.7
(d) 50 per cent. rate for taxable incomes over £200,000	3.0
(a) 45 per cent. rate for taxable incomes over £100,000	2.6
(b) 45 per cent. rate for gross incomes over £100,000	2.7

The estimates are based on the Survey of Personal Incomes and are consistent with the November 2002 pre-Budget report. These estimates exclude any behavioural response to the tax change.

Public Borrowing

Norman Lamb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his latest assessment of public borrowing this financial year; and whether his projections remain in accordance with those set out in the pre-budget report. [90689]

Mr. Boateng: The latest estimate of public sector net borrowing for this financial year, in £ billion, is set out in Table B1 of the 2002 pre-budget report. Consistent with the code for fiscal stability, an update of projections for the public finances will be published in the forthcoming budget.

Self-assessment

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answer of 3 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 680–81W, on self-assessment, if he will update the figures; and if he will make a statement. [90314]

Dawn Primarolo: The statistical data requested is detailed in the table:

Tax Year/Date	*SA ITRs Issued*	*SA ITRs Received*	*SA ITRs Processed*	*SA ITRs waiting to be processed*
2000–01				
1 July 2001	8,940,513	1,323,115	864,497	458,618
29 July 2001	8,990,292	1,943,901	1,350,597	593,304
2 September 2001	8,989,043	2,798,153	1,966,795	831,358
30 September 2001	9,152,255	4,241,952	2,677,145	1,564,807
4 November 2001	8,842,560	4,682,767	3,421,658	1,261,109
2 December 2001	9,360,099	5,383,846	4,436,261	947,585
30 December 2001	9,299,623	5,745,572	4,839,285	906,287
3 February 2002	9,552,433	8,362,361	5,848,319	2,514,042
3 March 2002	9,610,687	8,732,139	6,892,084	1,840,055
31 March 2002	9,644,313	8,805,949	8,009,457	796,492
2001–02				
5 May 2002	8,984,089	287,223	74,244	212,979
2 June 2002	9,081,092	751,541	323,265	428,276
7 July 2002	9,167,807	1,397,759	709,556	688,203
4 August 2002	9,300,825	2,717,767	1,591,565	1,126,202
6 October 2002	9,394,724	4,475,890	2,438,405	2,037,485
3 November 2002	9,463,002	4,948,989	3,300,392	1,648,597
24 November 2002	9,511,680	5,280,197	4,008,768	1,271,429
1 December 2002	9,527,269	5,395,919	4,265,782	1,130,137
5 January 2003	9,587,431	5,955,224	4,979,671	975,553

Working Families Tax Credit

Mr. Willis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many families with children aged 16 to 19 are claiming Working Families Tax Credit. [90916]

Dawn Primarolo: At August 2002 there were 187,000 families receiving Working Families' Tax Credit who, at the application dates, had one or more children who were aged 16 to 18 and who were in full-time education up to "A" level or equivalent standard. This is subject to seasonal variation; there were 159,000 such families at November 2001, 166,000 at February 2002 and 183,000 at May 2002.

PRIME MINISTER

EU Constitution

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Prime Minister if a decision to adopt a constitution for the EU will first be the subject of a referendum in the United Kingdom. [90680]

The Prime Minister: A new constitutional treaty would need to be ratified according to the individual constitutional arrangements in each of the member states. As with all previous EU treaties, any new treaty would be subject to rigorous scrutiny by Parliament before the UK could ratify it.

Iraq

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he will seek assurances from the US President that intelligence from the US Security Services relating to the location of WMD in Iraq have been passed to the UN Weapons inspectors; and if he will make a statement; [90692]

(2) whether intelligence from the security services concerning the location of WMD in Iraq has been passed to the UN weapons inspectors. [90693]

The Prime Minister: We regularly discuss with the US Administration issues about the provision of support for the UN inspection teams, including making intelligence material available.

Intelligence material has been made available to UNMOVIC and the IAEA for some time. We shall continue to provide them with such material as appropriate.

Israel

Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what recent discussions he has had with his Israeli counterpart; what recent representations he has made to Israel about possession of weapons of mass destruction; and when he last made representations to Israel on behalf of Mordecai Vanunu. [90233]

The Prime Minister: I wrote to Prime Minister Sharon last week about the Israeli ban on travel to London by Palestinian Authority Ministers. I last spoke to Mr. Sharon on 29 November 2002.

The Government presses on all states the importance that we attach to universal adherence to all international non-proliferation treaties. Foreign Office officials last held non-proliferation talks with Israeli officials in March 2002.

Our Embassy in Tel Aviv last raised our concerns about Mr. Vanunu's imprisonment with the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 17 October 2002.

HEALTH

NHS Services (South Wiltshire)

16. **Mr. Key:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with the Ministry of Defence about the impact of Project Allenby on the provision of NHS services in south Wiltshire; and if he will make a statement. [90204]

Ms Blears: Although Ministers have not been directly involved in the discussions that have taken place, I understand that at official level the discussions have been positive. I am advised that the Ministry of Defence planned improvements include the provision of an Army Primary Health Care Team to meet the health care needs of army personnel.

The impact of Project Allenby on local health services is expected as a result to be minimal.

Overseas Doctors

17. **Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what his assessment is of the speed and efficiency of procedures to assess the competence of overseas qualified doctors; and if he plans to revise them. [90205]

Mr. Hutton: Assessing the competence of doctors who have qualified outside the European Economic Area is the responsibility of the General Medical Council, the Specialist Training Authority and the Joint Committee on Postgraduate Training for General Practice. At present this process can be unduly lengthy. We are consulting on legislation which will replace two of these bodies with a single new body—the Postgraduate Medical Education Training Board. The Board will be under a duty to complete the processing of applications from overseas doctors within three months.

Health Services (East Kent)

18. **Hugh Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the reconfiguration of health services in East Kent. [90206]

Ms Blears: A decision on the reconfiguration of acute services in East Kent could not be made while the judicial review of the consultation process was under consideration. This has now been completed and Ministers will shortly be considering the recommendation made by Kent and Medway Strategic Health Authority. A decision will be made as soon as possible.

Medical Negligence

19. **Mr. MacDougall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost to the NHS of medical negligence compensation payments was in the last year for which figures are available. [90207]

Mr. Lammy: The latest figure, for the financial year 2000–01, is that national health service expenditure for clinical negligence amounted to £392 million. Figures for the financial year 2001–02 are being prepared by the National Audit Office and will be available later this year.

Nurses

20. **Tony Baldry:** To as the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the retention of nurses. [90208]

Mr. Hutton: The Government are committed to retaining more staff in the national health service. As a result of the action we have taken on better pay, working conditions, and access to training and development vacancy rates for nurses are falling and the NHS Plan target for an extra 20,000 more nurses was met two years early. Since 1997, there are more than 40,000 extra nurses working in the NHS.

Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital NHS Trust

22. **Mr. Bacon:** To as the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the re-financing of the PFI project for Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital NHS Trust. [90210]

Mr. Hutton: Initial discussions have taken place involving Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital NHS Trust, its Private Sector Partner Octagon and the Department of Health about the possible re-financing of the PFI scheme at the trust. If an agreement is reached, the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital NHS Trust will benefit from a 30 per cent. share of resulting gains.

Surrey and Sussex NHS Healthcare Trust

23. **Mr. Blunt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the financial position of the Surrey and Sussex NHS Healthcare Trust. [90211]

Ms Blears: Surrey and Sussex NHS Healthcare Trust has a budget of £140 million. The Trust has reported a deficit to the end of November of £2.8 million and is projecting a surplus of £193,000 by the year end.

Multiple Sclerosis

24. **Andrew George**: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of the prescription plus initiative in respect of sufferers of multiple sclerosis. [90212]

Jacqui Smith: A survey of Strategic Health Authorities conducted last autumn showed that services were being developed to initiate treatment under the scheme. We understand that the majority of designated specialist centres are now recruiting patients under the scheme.

Children's Hospices

25. **Mr. Llwyd**: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions he has had on the funding of hospices for children; and if he will make a statement. [90213]

Ms Blears: I met the Association of Children's Hospices on 9 January to discuss ways in which funding levels can be determined through negotiation with primary care trusts. We also discussed the benefits to be obtained through the New Opportunities Fund. Awards from this programme will be announced later this month.

Attention Deficit Disorder

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimates he has made of the number of adults suffering from *(a)* ADD and *(b)* ADHD. [89677]

Jacqui Smith: No such assessment has been undertaken.

Capita Group

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the contracts that have been awarded to the Capita Group by his Department. [89969]

Mr. Lammy: The Department does not centrally hold a record of individual contracts.

Expenditure by the Department with the Capita Group for the last three years is shown in the table.

Financial year	£
2000–01	792,433
2001–02	250,172
2002–03	125,942 (to 12/02)

The bulk of the expenditure has been in relation to contracts placed with Capita RAS (part of the Capita Group) for staff recruitment exercises.

Care Homes

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 9 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 152W, on care home inspectors, when information on the number of different types of establishment will be available. [90119]

Jacqui Smith: Data will be available from the end of March.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what methodology was used in indicating the increase in the number of people being supported in care homes in the next three years as set out in the document "Improvement, Expansion and Reform: The next three years". [83465]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 28 November 2002]:* The modelling methodology took account of projected changes in the numbers of older people generally and in the numbers of emergency hospital admissions of older people between 2003–06.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many CAMHS consultants are employed in the NHS in each health authority. [85156]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the tables. The data shows an increase since 1997 of 9.1 per cent., in the number of child and adolescent psychiatrists.

NHS consultants, all specialties and child and adolescent psychiatry specialty

	All specialities	*Child and adolescent psychiatry*
England		
1997	21,370	440
1998	22,220	460
1999	23,220	490
2000	24,310	480
2001	25,690	490
2002	26,350	480

Note:
Figures are at 30 September each year, except 2002 which is at 31 March.
Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
Source:
Department of Health medical and dental workforce census.

Hospital medical consultants in the specialty child and adolescent psychiatry by strategic health authority

At 31 March 2002	
Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire	20
Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire	10
Birmingham and The Black Country	20
Cheshire and Merseyside	20
County Durham and Tees Valley	20
Coventry, Warwickshire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire	10
Cumbria and Lancashire	10
Dorset and Somerset	10
Essex	0[1]
Greater Manchester	20
Hampshire and Isle of Wight	20
Kent and Medway	10
Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Rutland	10
Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire	30
North and East Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire	10
North Central London	20
North East London	20
North West London	30
Northumberland, Tyne and Wear	20
Shropshire and Staffordshire	10
South East London	20
South West London	20
South West Peninsula	0[1]
South Yorkshire	10
Surrey and Sussex	30
Thames Valley	30
Trent	30
West Yorkshire	20

[1] Figure less than 5.

Note:
Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
Source:
Department of Health 2002 consultant census.

Cumberland Infirmary

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of elective surgery operations performed at the Cumberland Infirmary related to residents of *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* Dumfries and Galloway in the last 12 months. [88596]

Jacqui Smith: During 2001–02, of the 29,130 elective "finished consultant episodes" (FCEs) at the North Cumbria Acute Hospitals National Health Service trust, 1.95 per cent., or 570, were residents of Scotland and 1.77 per cent., or 520, were residents of Dumfries and Galloway.

Note:
A FCE is defined as a period of patient care under one consultant in one health care provider. The figures do not represent the number of patients, as one person may have several episodes within the year.
Figures have not yet been adjusted for shortfalls in data.
Source:
Department of Health Hospital Episode Statistics (HES).

NHS Dentistry

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 19 December 2002, ref 87420, if he will list the dental practices that accept NHS patients in *(a)* Shrewsbury and Atcham and *(b)* Shropshire. [90134]

Mr. Lammy: The situation as at 10 January is as follows:

One practice in Shrewsbury accepting charge exempt adults and children only:

David Barker Dental Practice

Other practices in Shropshire (including Telford and Wrekin)

Accepting all categories of new national health service patients:

Webb Dental Practice, Dawley

Accepting charge-exempt adults and children only:

Albrighton Dental Surgery
Dawley Dental Practice
K. S. Gakhal Dental Practice, Wellington
High Street Dental Practice, Whitchurch
Kearney-Mitchell and Holgate Dental Practice, Whitchurch

Only accepting children:

I. S. Clapworthy Dental Practice, Church Stretton
Lyness Dental Practice, Church Stretton
Shifnal Dental Practice
M. J. Davies Dental Practice, Wellington

Source:
Shropshire County Primary Care Trust

Digital Hearing Aids

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions he has had with private companies on digital hearing aids; and whether he has communicated information on his discussions to NHS trusts. [86757]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 December 2002]:* I met with Scrivens, a high street supplier of digital hearing aids, on 19 March 2002.

There have been no discussions between Ministers and private companies who manufacture digital hearing aids. Manufacturers of moderate powered digital hearing aids were invited to tender for the national health service contract let in 2000 in an advertisement placed in the Official Journal of the European Communities (OJEC). At present the NHS purchasing and supplies agency are tendering for high powered and paediatric digital hearing aids and as part of this process have been in discussions with suppliers who expressed an interest in that OJEC advert placed earlier this year. All interested suppliers were invited to a pre-offer briefing meeting where the requirements of the tender were outlined including the specifications.

Audiology departments are informed of the products available under the NHS contract.

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much trusts in England and Wales allocated to digital hearing aids in the last year for which figures are available. [90226]

Jacqui Smith: The Department of Health has allocated £30.75 million to its modernising hearing aid services project over the financial years 2000–01 to 2002–03 to national health service trusts in England. This modernised service includes the provision of digital hearing aids. Twenty sites joined the project in the first wave, with a further 30 second-wave sites joining in 2002–03.

For second wave sites the Department pays the cost of upgrading information technology and other systems, 75 per cent. of additional staff costs and 75 per cent. of the difference between the cost of providing digital and analogue aids. Local primary care trusts pay the remaining 25 per cent. of revenue costs.

A further 17 sites will be receiving training and equipment, this financial year, to allow them to dispense digital hearing aids.

Drug Rehabilitation

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average period of *(a)* residential and *(b)* non-residential drug rehabilitation was in the last year for which figures are available. [85713]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* This information is not collected centrally.

The periods will vary according to the different drug treatment modalities and depend on the clinical and social needs of each individual drug user. The variations in the length of treatment times, in individual cases, are such that comparisons could be very misleading.

Electronic Services

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients have online secure access to their electronic records. [88758]

Mr. Lammy: Trials involving a very small number of patients are currently taking place. The My HealthSpace project, which is the personal electronic record under development by NHS Direct Online, is conducting a pilot trial to give patients access to their records.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when he expects electronic prescribing to be available through the NHS; [88739]

(2) what development work has been done for the introduction of electronic prescribing. [88738]

Mr. Lammy: Three pilots are currently transferring prescription data electronically from general practitioners to community pharmacies and the Prescription Pricing Authority. These are being run by three private sector consortiums on behalf of the Department.

The pilots are being fully and independently evaluated, and will inform the business case and how best to establish and rollout the electronic transmission of prescriptions in the national health service in line with "Pharmacy in the Future—Implementing the NHS Plan".

Emergency Readmissions

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out the rate of growth in emergency readmissions of people over 75 per thousand emergency admissions in each of the last five years in *(a)* each region and *(b)* England. [88785]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 7 January 2003]:* The emergency readmission rates collected by the Department use number of discharges from hospital as the denominator, rather than number of emergency admissions. The information requested, therefore, is not available.

Fair Trade

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what fair trade criteria he sets when deciding upon what suppliers to use. [89914]

Mr. Lammy: No set criteria are used but tenders are evaluated against a range of criteria to select the one giving best value for money. These include company policies in relation to environmental and similar considerations.

Foundation Hospitals (Scotland)

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance will be given to foundation hospitals on recruitment from existing Scottish NHS hospitals. [90403]

Mr. Hutton: National health service foundation trusts will be under a duty of partnership with NHS bodies (see paragraphs 3.21 and 6.1 of "A guide to NHS Foundation Trusts"). This duty of partnership will apply to NHS and social care providers and commissioners in the local health economy, including where appropriate in Scotland.

Social Care Register

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in what order the General Social Care Council will register each category of care worker. [89790]

Jacqui Smith: The General Social Care Council will open a register of social care workers in April 2003. Professionally qualified social workers and students of social work will be the first to be registered. Heads of homes are the next priority group.

Other parts of the register will be opened at a time determined by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate the General Social Care Council has made of the number of people it will be able to register each year. [89791]

Jacqui Smith: Once in full operation, the General Social Care Council expects to process an average of 60,000 applications each year.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact on registrations by the General Social Care Council of the requirement to undertake Criminal Record Bureau checks. [89792]

Jacqui Smith: There is no requirement on the General Social Care Council to undertake criminal checks to register an applicant. In December 2002 the GSCC provided the Department of Health with an assessment of the potential demand on the Criminal Records Bureau if the GSCC decided to make such checks. The result of this assessment was that theGSCC estimated their output, once fully operational, would be in the region of 5,000 applications per month.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the General Social Care Council will have access to the sex offenders' register when processing applications. [89793]

Jacqui Smith: If the General Social Care Council sets rules for registration that require such checks to be completed, then the Council will be granted the same access as any other registration body.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the planned dates were for each of the milestones in the procurement of an IT system for the General Social Care Council; and when each milestone was achieved. [89794]

Jacqui Smith: The delivery date for the provision of a social care register, supported by an information technology (IT) system, is 1 April 2003.

The planned milestones and completion dates for the procurement of an IT system for the General Social Care Council social care register are as follows:

	Milestone	Planned date	Actual date
1.	Issue of Statement of Requirement	27 March 2002	27 March 2002
2.	Selection of preferred bespoke system supplier	24 May 2002	24 May 2002
3.	Completion of requirements scoping study	9 August 2002	23 August 2002
4.	Complete availability of COTS packages	26 September 2002	26 September 2002
5.	Shortlist COTS package suppliers	11 October 2002	11 October 2002
6.	Receive COTS package supplier bids	28 November 2002	28 November 2002
7.	Select preferred COTS package supplier	10 December 2002	10 December 2002
8.	Initial customer/supplier engagement complete	20 December 2002	20 December 2002
9.	Demonstration system available	16 January 2003	—
10.	Initial package configuration complete	7 February 2003	—
11.	User acceptance testing complete	28 February 2003	—
12.	Initial user training complete	31 March 2003	—
13.	Electronic social care register opened	1 April 2003	—

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements have been made to enable the General Social Care Council to check applications against the registers of the GMC, NMC and other relevant bodies. [89795]

Jacqui Smith: The General Social Care Council will be working with other relevant regulatory bodies on agreed protocols for the exchange of such information.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he has issued to the General Social Care Council concerning its priorities and method of working. [89796]

Jacqui Smith: Any guidance from the Department to the General Social Care Council concerning its priorities and method of working is contained in the Council's management statement and financial memorandum, which was agreed with the Department in September 2002. Copies were laid in the Library. Such guidance is reflected further in the Council's business plan.

Generic Drugs

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many generic drugs have been prescribed in *(a)* England and *(b)* each region in each of the last five years. [88805]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 7 January 2003]:* Information on the number of prescription items of generic drugs dispensed in the community in the last five years is shown in the table.

Number of genetically prescribed items and total number of prescription items that were dispensed in the community, 1997 to 2001 by regional office, England

Million

	Regional office area								
	Northern and Yorkshire	*Trent*	*West Midlands*	*North West*	*Eastern*	*London*	*South East*	*South West*	*England*
1997									
Generically prescribed items	44	31	31	50	28	36	45	28	292
Total items[1]	70	56	55	80	50	62	77	49	500
1998									
Generically prescribed items	47	33	34	53	30	38	48	31	314
Total items[1]	73	57	56	82	52	63	79	50	513
1999									
Generically prescribed items	50	36	37	56	33	41	52	34	339
Total items[1]	75	59	59	84	54	65	82	52	530
2000									
Generically prescribed items	56	42	41	61	39	45	59	38	381
Total items[1]	78	62	61	87	57	66	86	55	552
2001									
Generically prescribed items	62	47	45	68	43	49	65	42	422
Total items[1]	83	66	65	92	61	69	91	59	587

[1] The total number of prescription items includes dressings and appliances.

Notes:

1. The data are from the Prescription Cost Analysis (PCA) system from the Prescription Pricing Authority (PPA) and cover prescription items dispensed by community pharmacists, appliance contractors, dispensing doctors and items personally administered.

2. Figures in the table have been rounded to the nearest million. Therefore the sum of the Regional Offices may not equal the England total.

Genetics Green Paper

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish the Green Paper on Genetics. [88363]

Ms Blears: The Green Paper on genetics will be published shortly.

Health Screening (NHS Staff)

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what health screening tests are carried out on *(a)* existing NHS staff and *(b)* prospective recruits; and what are planned. [90188]

Mr. Hutton: Applicants for work in the national health service are required to pass a number of pre-employment checks prior to receiving an unconditional offer of employment. These include verification of qualifications, identity, professional registration, criminal records and occupational health. Guidance on pre-employment checks was issued to NHS employers under the cover of a Direction for the Secretary of State, in June 2002.

Following the recommendations made by an expert working group the Government is currently consulting the professions and patient organisations regarding the introduction of additional health clearance for serious communicable diseases.

Heroin

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many GPs prescribe drugs to combat heroin addiction, broken down by region. [82274]

Ms Blears: The information is not available centrally in this form.

In the six month period ending 31 March 2001 around 35,100 clients were reported at drug treatment agencies in England.

Of these, around 1,700 or five per cent. were reported to be clients presenting to general practitioners.

The information on the breakdown by region is shown in table 15 of the Statistical Bulletin, "Statistics from the Regional Drug Misuse Databases for the six months ending March 2001". The full Statistical Bulletin is available in the Library and on the Department's website at http://www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0207.htm

Table 15

Agency episodes reported by regional office area and health authority of treatment by type of agency during the period 1 October 2000–31 March 2001, provides information on the number of NHS funded general practices that have provided prescribing services to drug users by region.

	Number
Northern and Yorkshire	322
Trent	140
Eastern	259
London	171
South East	564
West Midlands	104
North West	160
South West	Not Available

Illness Prevention

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what priority his Department places on the prevention of illnesses. [90209]

Ms Blears: The Department—and this Government as a whole—places the highest priority on preventing illness, promoting the health of all and improving the health of the poorest fastest. This means tackling inequalities, and reducing mortality from cancer and coronary heart disease—the two biggest killers in England. As well as reducing the burden caused by infectious diseases.

Public Health (Landfill Sites)

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has received from the Health and Safety Executive regarding the effects of landfill sites on public health. [88595]

Ms Blears: The Department of Health has received no assessment from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) regarding the effects of landfill sites on public health.

The HSE contributes to a grant to the small area health statistics unit (SAHSU) at Imperial College, jointly with the Department of Health, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Environment Agency, the Scottish Executive, the National Assembly of Wales and the Northern Ireland Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. SAHSU was commissioned to carry out a national study of birth outcomes and cancer around landfill sites.

The results for birth outcomes were published in the British Medical Journal in 2001 (Elliott et al BMJ 2001: 323: 363–8: available at http://www.bmj.com). The results for the cancer outcomes were published in the British Journal of Cancer in 2002 (Jarup et al 2002: 86: 1732–6). A fuller report of the study may be found at the Department of Health website at: http://www.doh.gov.uk/pdfs/report augl3.pdf. The study found a small increase in congenital anomalies in populations living close to landfill sites. There was no suggestion of excess risks of cancer associated with landfill sites. The Department sought advice on the study from the independent expert Committee on the Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment (COT). COT noted that the findings for birth outcomes were not consistent, and that the study provided no evidence that the rates of anomalies increased after sites had opened. The opinion of the COT may be found at: http://www.doh.gov.uk/cotnonfood/landfil.htm.

Life Resources Incorporated

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what representations were *(a)* sought and

(b) received from the Scottish Executive regarding the purchase of Life Resources Incorporated; and what consultations have taken place between his Department and the Scottish Executive regarding access to resources stored in Life Resources Incorporated; [88780]

(2) what future consultations he plans with the Scottish Executive regarding access to resources stored in Life Sources Incorporated; and what financial resources *(a)* have been received from and *(b)* will be paid by the Scottish Executive regarding access to resources stored in Life Resources Incorporated; [88781]

(3) what role the Scottish Executive played in the purchase of Life Resources Incorporated; and whether the Scottish Executive will have representation at board level; [88782]

(4) what representations were received from the Scottish Executive regarding bonus payments to be paid out in future years to Life Resources Incorporated; [88783]

(5) whether contracts on behalf of the NHS in Scotland have been made with Life Resources Incorporated, for the purchase of plasma products that are free of vCJD, for use within the NHS in Scotland. [88784]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 13 January 2003]:* The Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service (SNBTS) has its own independent sources of non-UK plasma. The Scottish Executive were therefore not involved in the Government's decision to purchase Life Resources Incorporated to secure supplies of non-UK plasma for the national health service in England.Accordingly, no consultations or financial transactions took place with the Scottish Executive concerning the purchase of Life Resources and the Scottish Executive will have no involvement in the future management of the company.

SNBTS is not currently supplied with plasma by Life Resources Incorporated. Should SNBTS decide in future to tender for plasma supplies, Life Resources could be one of a number of commercial plasma suppliers that might compete for this contract.

Maternity Units

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many maternity units do not reach recommended levels for the number of deliveries per year, as defined by the relevant Royal College. [85790]

Jacqui Smith: This information is not collected centrally.

National health service maternity services are provided in a variety of settings, and the numbers of deliveries in each unit can vary from about five to 10 births per year in a very small midwife-led unit to large consultant-led units in hospitals with over 5,000 births.

Information relating to maternities in the NHS is collected by trusts and is available through the Hospital Episode Statistics System at www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb/o211.htm

Mental Health

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on promoting mental health services for *(a)* the disabled and *(b)* ethnic minorities; [86148]

(2) what plans he has to develop a research strategy for overseeing service solutions for *(a)* ethnic minorities and *(b)* the disabled, with mental health problems. [86145]

Jacqui Smith: The Department will be launching a comprehensive framework for black and minority ethnic mental health later this year. The framework will cover accessibility of services and relevant research. The National Institute for Mental Health in England (NIMHE) has set up a national black and ethnic minorities mental health innovations and research and development expert group to support the NIMHE research network to support implementation of the framework.

The Government White Paper, "Valuing People: A New Strategy for Learning Disability for the 21st Century", is clear that the national service framework for mental health applies to all adults of working age, including people with learning disabilities who have a mental illness. They should be enabled to use generic psychiatric services whenever possible. Each local service should have access to an acute assessment and treatment resource for the small number of individuals with significant learning disabilities and mental health problems who cannot appropriately be admitted to general psychiatric services, even with specialist support.

"A Sign of the Times", a consultation document on modernising mental health services for people who are deaf or deaf and blind, was published in July 2002. It set out proposals aimed at making a significant difference to the lives of deaf people with mental health problems whose needs were previously overlooked.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 7 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 199W, on mental health services, what assessment he has made of the contribution that a code of conduct for mental health professionals and users can make to improvements in the treatment of users of mental health services. [90702]

Jacqui Smith: The Government have made no assessment of the contribution of professionals' codes of conduct to mental health care and treatment. Although we believe codes of conduct can contribute to the maintenance of high standards, and have a place among the several systems in place to support the highest quality care, responsibility for their development and use lies with the statutory regulatory bodies and professional organisations.

National School Fruit Scheme

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Department will support the provision of organic fruit to school children as part of the national school fruit scheme; and if he will make a statement. [88256]

Ms Blears: Contracts to supply fruit under the National School Fruit Scheme are awarded through open, competitive tendering. The tendering process is open to all suppliers, including those who provide organically grown fruit.

NHS (Tariff System)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health to what extent the new national tariff system for NHS hospitals will vary to reflect regional differences in the cost of providing services. [89543]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 13 January 2003]*: The new national tariff takes account of unavoidable geographical differences in the cost of providing health care. The same market forces factor (MFF) used in the weighted capitation formula for resource allocation is used to adjust the tariff for individual providers.

More information on how the MFF is used to determine provider specific tariffs, and the actual MFF factors for 2003–04, is set out in Annex B of the guidance published on the Department of Health website: http://www.doh.gov.uk/nhsfinancialreforms/

NHS Appointments Commission

Angela Watkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reason applicants to the NHS Appointments Commission are required to declare their political allegiance. [88318]

Mr. Lammy: The code of practice issued by the Commissioner for Public Appointments that all candidates for appointment to public bodies are asked to answer the question ion political activity, as opposed to allegiance. This is for monitoring purposes only and the information is not passed on to sifting and interview panels considering candidates for appointment.

NHS Franchises

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who will be responsible for assessing the impact of problems which arise when an NHS management team takes on the franchise for running a further NHS trust. [89063]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 7 January 2002]*: The Boards of National Health Service trusts are responsible for the performance of their own trust. The strategic health authority monitors overall performance and progress in each trust. Assessments of performance are also made in clinical governance inspections by the Commission for Health Improvement.

Register of Experts

Mr. Frank Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* clinical and *(b)* non-clinical employees each of the private sector companies on the Register of Expertise has [89060]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 7 January 2003]*: The applications for the National Health Service Franchising Register of Expertise were in the names f corporate bodies rather than individuals. An organisation which tenders for a franchise will be required to name appropriately qualified individual*(s)* to carry out senior management roles in a hospital trust as part of their bid.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether any of the three-star NHS trusts included in the Register of Experts asked to be included. [89065]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 7 January 2002]*: As part of the earned autonomy package, all three star National Health Service trusts are given automatic entry to the franchising register of expertise and therefore do not need to apply. These trusts are not under any obligation to apply for franchise opportunities that arise.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the *(a)* private and *(b)* voluntary sector organisations which applied to be included in the Register of Experts but were rejected. [89058]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 7 January 2002]*: The selection and rejection of applicants for the National Health Service Franchising Register of Expertise is a matter for the independent panel which was set up by the National Health Service Appointments Commission to assess the applications.

It would not be appropriate to publish the names of organisations who applied, but were unsuccessful, as the applications were made in confidence to the independent panel.

Mr. Frank Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether NHS organisations will need the approval of their board before applying for a franchise to run another trust. [89059]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 7 January 2003]*: A National Health Service trust would need the agreement of its Board before it could apply for a franchise to run another National Health Service trust.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in each of the private sector companies on the Register of Experts, how many managers were previously employed in the NHS. [89061]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 7 January 2003]*: The applications for the National Health Service franchising register of expertise were in the names of corporate bodies rather than individuals. An organisation which tenders for a franchise will be required to name an appropriately qualified individuals*(s)* to carry out management roles in a hospital trust as part of their bid.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospitals are managed by each of the private sector organisations on the Register of Experts; and how many beds, emergency admissions and intensive care beds there are in each such hospital. [89064]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 7 January 2003]*: The independent panel set up by the National Health Service Appointments Commission assessed the general ability of each private sector organisation to run a hospital trust. The expertise and experience of every organisation which tenders for a National Health Service franchise will be thoroughly and rigorously assessed before any contract is awarded.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the sum to be paid to franchised managements of NHS trusts will be made public. [89066]

Mr. Hutton [holding answer 7 January 2003]: The management fee paid to private sector organisations for any franchise agreement is amatter for the Board of the relevant National Health Service trust.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the private management of franchised NHS trusts will be able to levy fines on local authorities which fail to provide sufficient help with hospital discharges. [89067]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 7 January 2003]:* Subject to legislation, the ability to levy fines on local authorities that delay hospital discharges will apply to the institution, not the management of the organisation. A private sector organisation awarded the management franchise of a hospital trust would not retain any money received for itself through this arrangement, but it would go into general funds.

Nursing Vacancies

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nursing vacancies exist in trusts in England and Wales. [90225]

Mr. Hutton: Information on vacancies lasting three months or more for nursing staff in England is shown in the table.

The three month vacancy rate was 3.1 per cent. in March 2002, a fall from 3.4 per cent. in March 2001 and the second successive fall in vacancies for qualified nursing staff.

Information for Wales is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

Department of Health Vacancies Survey, March 2002
Vacancies in NHS Trusts, qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff
Three month vacancy rates, numbers and staff in post

Qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff (excluding HA staff)	*England (excluding HA staff)*
Three month vacancy rate (percentage)	3.1
Three month vacancy number	8,394
Staff in post (whole-time equivalent)	265,717
Staff in post (headcount)	329,981

Notes:
1. Three month vacancy information is as at 31 March 2002.
2. Three month vacancies are vacancies which trusts are actively trying to fill, which had lasted for three months or more (whole-time equivalents).
3. Three month Vacancy Rates are three month vacancies expressed as a percentage of three month vacancies plus staff in post.
4. Three month Vacancy Rates are calculated using staff in post from the Vacancy Survey, March 2002.
5. Staff in post data is from the Non-Medical Workforce Census, September 2001.
6. Staff in post data excludes staff employed by Health Authorities, as vacancy information was only collected from Trusts, PCTs and Special Health Authorities.
7. Percentages are rounded to one decimal place.
8. Calculating the vacancy rates using the above data may not equal the actual vacancy rates.

Sources:
Vacancy Numbers and Rates: Department of Health Vacancies Survey March 2002
Non Medical Staff in Post: Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce census September 2001

Sleep Disorders

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans his Department has to ensure that health purchasers are encouraged to diagnose and treat obstructive sleep apnoea; [88235]

(2) if he will list the trusts and PCTs where the provision of diagnostic and therapeutic services for obstructive sleep apnoea are available; [88237]

(3) plans he has to include sleep apnoea and other sleep disorders in his national plan. [88236]

Mr. Hutton: Targets for National Health Service modernisation and reform set out in the NHS Plan will help improve services for everyone using NHS services, including those with sleep apnoea and other sleep disorders.

Substantial new investment in both health and social care services were recently announced in the Budget. The NHS will receive an annual average increase of 7.5 per cent. above inflation over the five years 2003–04 to 2007–08. This represents an increase of £34 billion in funding and is the highest sustained growth in funding in the history of the NHS. This increase will provide the investment needed to support services which best meet patients and users needs.

Information on the configuration of local services such as which primary care trusts (PCTs) provide diagnostic and therapeutic services for obstructive sleep apnoea is not held centrally. However, we are aware that there are specialised sleep disorder services at St Thomas' Hospital, London and at hospitals in Cambridge and Leicester.

PCTs, in partnership with local stakeholders, have the responsibility for deciding what services to provide for their populations including those with sleep apnoea. They are best placed to understand local health needs and commission services to meet them.

Patient Testing

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on near patient testing by NHS trusts. [87534]

Mr. Hutton: The NHS Plan set out the vision for the national health service to offer patients fast and convenient care offered to a consistently high standard. Subsequently, Delivering the NHS Plan confirmed our commitment to substantial increases in NHS capacity and to using the extra investment to modernise the way services are provided to bring them closer to patients, to expand the choices available to them and to make better use of the NHS work force.

The Department recognises the vital role of pathology services in the effective treatment and care of patients, and in providing fast and effective diagnoses to support improved access to services. We support the appropriate use of near patient testing in primary care, community clinics, accident and emergency

departments and on the wards, which can provide improved service for patients, speeding up diagnoses and treatment.

We are currently revising our draft guidance for the NHS on modernising pathology services, and will include advice on appropriate use of near patient testing in this.

Primary Care Trusts

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to publish the first report on the effectiveness of primary care trusts. [88524]

Mr. Hutton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) on 7 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 204W.

GP Recruitment

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what targets have been set for the recruitment of GPs in England. [84496]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* The NHS Plan set a target of 2,000 extra general practitioners by 2004. Delivering the NHS Plan, published in April, set out the next stage in this expansion—15,000 more GPs and consultants working in the national health service by 2008.

Recruitment of Nurses

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 25 November regarding ethical foreign nurse recruitment if he will list the names of the agencies that have been reported; what investigations have been undertaken; and what action has been taken against any agency found guilty of breaches. [84771]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* This information is held in confidence. In each case behaviour which appeared to be inconsistent with the Code of Practice was reported and the agency was given the opportunity to respond to the allegations. In each case officials have been satisfied that the organisation in question is operating in line with the Code of Practice.

This process will be followed in all cases, but if any allegation is substantiated, the agency will be removed from the list. At this stage, the information will be publicly available.

Spending Review

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for his Department *(a)* those Comprehensive Spending Review 1998 targets that were outstanding at the time of the statement on the Comprehensive Spending Review 2002, *(b)* progress on such targets since then and *(c)* the expected date when targets not yet achieved will be met. [87696]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 7 December 2002]:* The Department publishes progress against all its outstanding Public Service Agreement targets in its Departmental Report and Autumn Performance Report, copies of which are available in the Library.

Terrorism

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what facilities are available to deal with a terrorist attack involving chemical or biological agents, in each region; and which of these facilities were put in place in the last twelve months. [88399]

Mr. Hutton: Since 11 September 2001, National Health Service preparations have been stepped up to ensure we are as prepared as we can be in responding to a range of possible new threats, such as the deliberate release of chemical or biological agents.

In the past 12 months, specific medical countermeasures have been taken. However, information about these medical countermeasures and where they are placed is not made publicly available for security reasons.

Under a £5 million programme, the Department has funded the provision of 360 mobile decontamination units and 7,250 national specification personal protective equipment (PPE) suits which allow the ambulance service and accident and emergency departments to treat people contaminated with chemical, biological, radio-active and nuclear material. Theallocation of this equipment to health and social care regions is shown in the table.

Region	*PPE Suits*	*Mobile Decontamination Units*
London	862	46
Midlands & Eastern	1728	88
North	2174	109
South	2486	117

Urologists

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he plans to take to increase the ratio of urologists per capita in Great Britain. [89678]

Mr. Hutton: Since 1997, the number of consultant urologists has increased by 27 per cent. to 436 in March 2002. We are increasing the number of consultant urologists through expansion of registrar training places, improved recruitment and retention, international recruitment and promotion of flexible retirement.

In 2001 there were 0.9 urologists per 100,000 population.

As at 30 September 2001 there were 204 doctors in the registrar group for urology in the national health service in England. The output from these existing registrar training places, when combined with other increases and offset by expected retirements in the specialty is expected to result in around 582 trained specialists being available in surgery by 2010. The number of urologists per capita is therefore likely to increase significantly.

Waiting Times

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the 10 longest waiting times for NHS treatment according to the most recent data that he has available. [87538]

Mr. Hutton: The latest published commissioner data for England in October 2002 show there were a total of nine patients waiting over 15 months for in-patient admission.

Welsh Health Authority Referrals

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients referred from a Welsh health authority in the last year for which records are available were treated in each of the 10 English hospitals that treated the highest numbers of such patients; for each hospital, what the most common procedures carried out on such patients were; and how many such procedures were carried out. [88283]

Mr. Hutton: Data on the number of Welsh patients treated as in-patients in the 10 English national health service trusts that treated the highest number of Welsh patients in 2001–02 is shown in the table.

The five most common in-patient procedures carried out on Welsh patients in those NHS trusts are shown in the table. Data are collected on approximately 850 procedures carried out in NHS trusts.

Five most common in-patient procedures

NHS trust	*Total Welsh resident patients treated*	*Procedure*	*Number of patients treated*
Countess of Chester Hospital	7,729	X35 Other intravenous injection	332
		R24 Normal delivery	266
		H25 Diagnostic endoscopic exam/lower bowel using fibreoptic signoidoscope	172
		C75 Prosthesis of lens	160
		G45 Diagnostic fibreoptic endoscopic exam	149
Royal Shrewsbury Hospitals	6,819	X35 Other intravenous injection	518
		M45 Diagnostic endoscopic examination of bladder	269
		C71 Extracapsular extraction of lens	237
		G45 Diagnostic fibreoptic endoscopic exam	209
		R24 Normal delivery	199
Hereford Hospitals	2,949	C75 Prosthesis of lens	241
		R24 Normal delivery	75
		X35 Other intravenous injection	74
		M45 Diagnostic endoscopic examination of bladder	54
		W37 Total prosthetic replacement of hip joint using cement	51
Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt	2,885	X29 Continuous infusion of therapeutic substance	245
		W37 Total prosthetic replacement of hip joint using cement	243
		W82 Therapeutic endoscopic operations on semilunar cartilage	155
		W40 Total prosthetic replacement of knee joint using cement	151
		W83 Therapeutic endoscopic operations on other articular cartilage	130
Royal Liverpool Children's	1,559	A54 Therapeutic spinal puncture	97
		X29 Continuous infusion of therapeutic substance	96
		T19 Simple excision of inguinal hernial sac	59
		L91 Other vein related operations	52
		G45 Diagnostic fibreoptic endoscopic exam	44
The Cardiothoracic Centre, Liverpool	1,411	K63 Contrast radiology of heart	720
		K49 Transluminal balloon angioplasty of coronary artery	169
		K45 Connection of thoracic artery to coronary artery	133
		K26 Plastic repair of aortic valve	53
		K60 Cardiac pacemaker system introduced through vein	46
Central Manchester and Manchester	1,089	K63 Contrast radiology of heart	497
		K45 Connection of thoracic artery to coronary artery	143
		K49 Transluminal balloon angioplasty of coronary artery	98
		K57 Other therapeutic transluminal operations on heart	27
		K60 Cardiac pacemaker system introduced through vein	17
Walton Centre for Neurology	904	A55 Diagnostic spinal puncture	114
		A84 Neurophysiological operations	86
		A08 Other biopsy of lesion of tissue of brain	70
		X55 Other operations on unspecified organ	69
		X29 Continuous infusion of therapeutic substance	52
Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen	812	C82 Destruction of lesion of retina	61
		X29 Continuous infusion of therapeutic substance	52
		C79 Operations on vitreous body	40
		G45 Diagnostic fibreoptic endoscopic exam	36
		X33 Other blood transfusion	26

Five most common in-patient procedures

NHS trust	*Total Welsh resident patients treated*	*Procedure*	*Number of patients treated*
United Bristol Healthcare	768	C79 Operations on vitreous body	77
		X35 Other intravenous injection	33
		C82 Destruction of lesion of retina	31
		C75 Prosthesis of lens	25
		W30 Other external fixation of bone	21

Source:
Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Chemicals Policy

Sir Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the effect of the European Union's chemicals management system REACH on *(a)* the relative costs of the manufacture and use of chemicals in member states in competition with finished manufactured articles imported into the EU and *(b)* the confidentiality of commercially-sensitive product manufacturing information; and if she will make a statement. [87023]

Mr. Meacher: In May 2001, the Government prepared a partial regulatory impact assessment to consider the impact of the European Union's chemicals management system REACH. A full regulatory impact assessment, with a more detailed cost benefit analysis, taking into account the wider economic impact will be carried out once the Commission has published its proposals.

The Government are committed to having a transparent system and would expect to see as much information as possible made publicly available, which would certainly include basic hazard and exposure data associated with substances. However, in order to avoid free riders and to avoid stifling innovation, adequate controls on access to genuinely commercially sensitive data are needed whilst recognising the right of the public to have access to relevant and meaningful information on hazards and risk. We have had discussions with a number of stakeholders and will seek to work with the European Commission to ensure practical proposals come forward.

The Government and devolved Administrations have agreed a position statement on the New European Chemical Strategy, a copy of this is in the House Library and can be found on the Defra website at

Air Quality

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many days of poor urban air quality there have been in each year since 1993. [88437]

Margaret Beckett: The United Kingdom Government and the devolved administrations monitor levels of a number of pollutants through a national network of air quality monitoring sites. The monitoring network has undergone a large expansion from 24 urban sites in 1993 to 100 in 2002. Air quality monitoring data and statistics are published on the National Air Quality Information Archive website www.airquality.co.uk.

	Number of days with poor urban air quality	*Number of urban monitoring sites in operation*
1993	99	24
1994	73	30
1995	51	31
1996	60	51
1997	64	79
1998	51	84
1999	52	84
2000	38	86
2001	61	97
2002	29	100

The increase in the number of days with poor air quality in 2001 compared with the previous three years is partly due to the larger number of measurement sites in use in 2001 and partly due to the natural fluctuations in weather conditions leading to very localised high concentrations. The overall trend over the whole period from 1993 is downward.

Ancient Woodland

Mr. James Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to change planning regulations to strengthen protection for ancient woodland in England. [89756]

Mr. McNulty: The statement Sustainable Communities: Delivering through planning, given by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister last July, confirmed that all planning policy guidance notes (PPGs) are to be reviewed. The review of PPG9 on nature conservation will consider how land-use planning can take into account all aspects of nature conservation, including whether there is sufficient protection for ancient woodland. Any changes proposed to the PPG will be subject to public consultation.

Beef Premium

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many inspectors are employed by her Department to validate claims for *(a)* slaughter premium and *(b)* beef special premium scheme. [90393]

Alun Michael: In England, all on-farm bovine inspections take place during a single combined visit to a producer's premises. The actual inspections included will depend on the subsidy schemes against which the producer claims. 247 inspectors in the Rural Payments Agency's Inspectorate are trained to carry out inspections across the range of bovine schemes. These inspectors also carry out inspections under a wide range of other livestock and land based schemes.

Coastal Erosion

Mr. David Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what assessment she has made of the action required in *(a)* 2001–02, *(b)* 2002–03 and *(c)* 2003–04 to protect against the risk of coastal erosion; [89749]

(2) what assessment her Department made in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03 about the risk of coastal erosion. [89748]

Margaret Beckett: This Department has overall policy responsibility for coastal erosion risk but operational responsibility, for assessing risks, identifying the need for defence measures and deciding which projects to promote and their timing, rests with local authorities. However, as an aid for the planning by all flood and coastal operating authorities, DEFRA commissioned research into a National Appraisal of the Assets at Risk from flooding and coastal erosion. The results were published in 2000 and 2001.

Local authorities submit their medium term plans for capital works to reduce the risk of coast protection to DEFRA annually to inform our decisions on the allocation of funds.

Correspondence

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letter from Mr. D Paton of Pinetops Nurseries, Lymington, dated 8 October 2002. [89639]

Alun Michael: I cannot respond properly without knowing the subject of the letter in question.

Information on letters sent direct to the Department from members of the public is not collated centrally. Such letters are referred to the relevant division within the Department on receipt for answer.

Flooding

Mr. Andrew Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects to respond to the consultation on funding and organisation of flood defences. [89692]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 13 January 2002]:* I am considering the outcome of the flood and coastal defence funding review and will make an announcement on the conclusions as soon as possible.

Import Controls

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the transfer to Customs and Excise of responsibility for port checks on the importing of plant and animal products will become effective. [88429]

Margaret Beckett: Responsibility for anti-smuggling controls of plant and animal products will pass to HM Customs and Excise as soon as practicable, which we hope will mean by 1 April 2003. We are, however, currently discussing with Customs and other enforcement agencies the legislative options for achieving this transfer and what, if any, transitional arrangements need to be made, before any firm commitments on a date can be given.

Responsibility for port checks on plant and animal products imported legally will continue to lie respectively with the Plant Health and Seeds Inspectorate and the official veterinary surgeons appointed by the relevant local or port health authority.

Odour Emissions (Mushroom Substrate)

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what action is being taken to ensure that odour emissions from mushroom substrate manufacturing processes are reduced; [90558]

(2) if she will make a statement on the review of the Environment Protection Act 1990 Part 1; Processes Prescribed for Air Pollution controlled by Local Authorities; Secretary of State's Guidance Note PG6/30(97) on Mushroom Substrate Manufacturing Processes. [90559]

Alun Michael: Statutory guidance (PG6/30) was issued by the Government on what constitutes Best Available Techniques Not Entailing Excessive Cost for the mushroom substrate sector in February 1992, with a revision in February 1997. A second review of the guidance is currently being undertaken by the Environment Agency's Local Authority Unit. A draft, which can be found of the Agency's website: www.environment-agency.gov.uk/business/lapc/ is currently out for stakeholder comment, with a deadline of 20 January. The guidance will then be forwarded, within approximately two months, to my Department for a final consultation stage, and thereafter published.

Most processes manufacturing mushroom substrate are regulated under Part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. As such they must be authorised by the relevant local authority with the objective of using the Best Available Techniques Not Entailing Excessive Cost to minimise air polluting emissions, including odour.

Ultimately it is for local authorities to determine what constitutes Best Available Techniques Not Entailing Excessive Cost for any particular plant. While they must have regard to the statutory guidance, they are not bound by it, and could (subject to appeal) impose more stringent requirements if they considered it necessary and provided they met the relevant statutory test.

Rural Land Register

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage

of England's land area has been covered by the Rural Payments Agency through their Rural Land Register project. [90397]

Alun Michael: The Rural Land Register is designed to cover all fields in England which are registered for IACS purposes. Although this does not cover all agricultural land in England, it includes forage land used to support claims for livestock subsidies. I cannot quantify this precisely but coverage is likely to be in the region of 60–90 per cent. of agricultural land.

Shoreline Management

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which operating authorities have not updated their Shoreline Management Plans in line with High Level Target 8. [89750]

Margaret Beckett: The target is for relevant operating authorities to have in place, and provide to DEFRA, a programme for updating Shoreline Management Plans (SMPs) in accordance with DEFRA guidance. Further to full consultation, DEFRA has provided revised SMP guidance reflecting the experience gained in producing the original plans. This will be supplemented later this year with more working guidance which is being produced by DEFRA alongside the first three updated SMPs. All the relevant authorities have advised DEFRA of their proposed starting dates for updating SMPs and these are being made available publicly on the DEFRA website.

Water Framework Directive

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact on the competitiveness of British farming and the costs of implementation of the water framework directive. [88436]

Margaret Beckett: We have undertaken a regulatory impact assessment, which was published in March 2001 as part of The First Consultation Paper on the Implementation of the Water Framework Directive (available on the Defra website at http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/consult/waterframe/index.htm). This includes estimates of the costs of complying with the directive and discusses the implications for typical businesses, including farms. Competitiveness is affected by a multitude of factors acting in combination, and it is not possible to identify the effect of this directive in isolation.

We are working with other members of the European Union as part of a common implementation strategy to ensure a consistent approach to implementing the directive across the European Union. Also, we are currently undertaking a review of diffuse pollution by agriculture to identify the most cost-effective mechanisms for reducing such pollution. This review is considering the full range of policy measures that could be applied, including economic instruments and voluntary action, not just regulation.

DEFENCE

Overarching Personnel Strategy

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how widely the Action Plan for the armed forces Overarching Personnel Strategy is distributed within the Armed Forces; how many people are privy to it; what proportion of the armed forces this represents; and if he will make a statement. [88257]

Dr. Moonie: The Armed Forces Overarching Personnel Strategy Action Plan is the mechanism by which we measure and monitor the delivery of policy towards our service personnel. The Action Plan is updated annually. It is given a wide distribution to high-level management both within the Ministry of Defence and the Armed Forces and also to those staff who have a responsibility for delivering the goals contained within it. We do not, however, keep records of people who see the document through the year.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to review the effectiveness of the Armed Forces Overarching Personnel Strategy. [88284]

Dr. Moonie: The Armed Forces Overarching Personnel Strategy provides a high level framework for the delivery of service personnel policy.

The effectiveness of the strategy is kept under review by means of the annual Action Plan which evaluates and monitors progress made in each area.

Afghanistan Operations

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the use by British operations in Afghanistan of land-based supply routes in operations *(a)* Fingal, *(b)* Jacana, *(c)* Neritas, *(d)* Ptarmigan, *(e)* Snipe, *(f)* Condor and *(g)* Buzzard. [89278]

Mr. Ingram: There have been two main British operations in Afghanistan: Operation Jacana and Operation Fingal. Operation Fingal began in December 2001 and is the on-going United Kingdom support to the International Stabilisation Assistance Force (ISAF), assisting with the provision of security and stability in Kabul. Operation Jacana, which took place from April 2002 to July 2002, was the deployment of 45 commando and elements of 3 commando brigade in support of UK forces operating in south-eastern Afghanistan to deny and destroy the al-Qaeda terrorist infrastructure. Operation Veritas (rather than Neritas) is the name given to the overarching UK contribution to the US-led campaign against international terrorism, and encompasses Operations Fingal and Jacana. Ptarmigan, Snipe, Condor, and Buzzard were names given to objectives within Operation Jacana.

Common routes have been used for supply to all UK troops in Afghanistan (including during Op Jacana). During the initial period of operations in Afghanistan, all materiel was supplied by air. As the security situation stabilised, it has been possible to develop land supply routes both within Afghanistan and between Afghanistan and neighbouring countries. However, land re-supply has been limited to common

commodities such as food, fuel, bottled water, and building materials. Military equipment continues to be flown into Afghanistan from the UK.

There is one land supply route between Pakistan and Afghanistan (Kabul). It has been used to supply the majority of fuel to UK armed forces in Kabul and Bagram. This route is utilised and maintained solely by contractors, who are primarily based in Pakistan. There is a further permanent land supply route within Afghanistan (between Kabul and Bagram), and this is secured and maintained by coalition (including UK) military personnel and civilian contractors.

Army (Retention)

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to increase salaries for soldiers as a means to encourage retention; and if he will make a statement. [90356]

Dr. Moonie: Pay rates for the armed forces are recommended annually to the Prime Minister and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence by the independent Armed Forces Pay Review Body (AFPRB). Under its terms of reference, the Review Body is required to have regard to the need to recruit, retain and motivate suitably able and qualified people, taking account of the particular circumstances of Service life. The Ministry of Defence has therefore provided the Review Body with information on the manning situation and those areas it considers merit particular attention. The AFPRB is currently considering its recommendations, and is expected to submit its 2003 report to the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Defence before the end of February 2003.

CBW (Inoculation)

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether his Department has adopted improved types of inoculation against CBW attack, developed in the United States since 1991. [89878]

Dr. Moonie: We are not aware of any improved types of vaccine against biological warfare agents currently licensed for use in the United States. The only vaccine against biological warfare agents currently licensed for use in the United Kingdom is a vaccine against anthrax. The Ministry of Defence has a range of research, development and procurement programmes aimed at improving our armed forces defences against chemical and biological attack, including programmes to develop new vaccines. This work includes close co-operation and liaison with the United States.

It is not possible to immunise against chemical warfare agents.

Porton Down

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether a copy of the programme report known as CDEE 3/61 which was drawn up by scientists from the chemical and biological defence establishment has been placed in the Public Record Office by his Department; and at which classmark in the Public Record Office this document can be found. [89531]

Dr. Moonie: The policy of the Public Record Office is to select the final reports of research work and trials for preservation rather than the working documents. Therefore, the trial plan for Programme 3/61 has not been selected for preservation.

However, a copy of the final report Porton Technical Paper 794, entitled "Comparison of radio xenon & zinc cadmium sulphide particle tracers over medium distances of travel", can be found at WO189/1105. Additionally, a copy of the trial plan for programme 3/61 has been located in the historic archive at Dstl Porton Down and can be made available to the hon. Member.

Courts Martial

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many courts martial have taken place in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* overseas military bases, in each of the last three years. [89664]

Dr. Moonie: The following courts-martial have taken place in the UK and overseas in the last three years:

	United Kingdom			*Overseas*		
Year	*RN*	*Army*[1]	*RAF*	*RN*	*Army*[1]	*RAF*
2000	53	278	68	Nil	177	13
2001	59	394	97	Nil	238	12
2002	52	323	54	Nil	158	6

[1] Army figures represent the number of individuals tried.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women have appeared before a UK court martial in each of the last three years; what rank they were; and how many were found (i) guilty and (ii) not guilty. [89665]

Dr. Moonie: The following tables show the numbers of men and women, by Service and rank, that have appeared before United Kingdom courts martial in the last three years, together with the subsequent findings.

Royal Navy

	2000		*2001*		*2002*	
	Guilty	*Not guilty*	*Guilty*	*Not guilty*	*Guilty*	*Not guilty*
Male						
Captain	—	—	—	—	1	—
Commander	1	—	1	—	—	—
Lt Cdr	3	—	2	—	3	—
Lieutenant	5	—	8	—	4	1
Warrant Officer	1	—	—	—	—	—
Chief Petty Officer	6	—	3	2	3	1
Petty Officer	3	—	1	2	5	1
Leading Hand[1]	5	3	8	3	6	1
Junior rate	12	8	17	4	24	4
Sergeant RM	—	1	—	—	—	—
Corporal RM	—	2	1	—	—	—
Marine	—	—	1	—	—	—
Female						
Lieutenant	1	—	1	—	—	—
Leading Hand	1	—	1	—	—	—
Junior rate	1	2	4	3	2	1

[1] Although nine Leading Hands were tried by court-martial in 2000, the trial of one was dissolved without reaching a finding.

Army

	2000		2001		2002	
	Guilty	Not guilty	Guilty	Not guilty	Guilty	Not guilty
Male						
Lt Colonel	—	—	—	—	—	—
Major	2	1	1	2	2	—
Captain	2	—	1	1	—	2
Lieutenant	—	—	—	—	1	—
Warrant Officer 1	—	1	—	1	2	—
Warrant Officer 2	2	2	3	1	4	1
S Sergeant	4	2	12	4	6	1
Sergeant	10	2	11	4	11	4
Corporal	14	4	29	21	15	4
L Corporal	18	5	26	10	28	5
Private	187	15	231	25	220	10
Civilian	—	—	2	1	—	1
Female						
Corporal	1	—	—	—	2	1
L Corporal	—	—	3	—	—	1
Private	4	2	3	—	1	1

RAF

	2000		2001		2002	
	Guilty	Not guilty	Guilty	Not guilty	Guilty	Not guilty
Male						
Sqn Leader	—	1	—	—	—	1
Flt Lt	3	2	4	1	1	—
Fg Offr	1	—	—	—	—	—
Plt Offr	—	—	1	—	1	—
WO	—	—	—	—	—	—
Flt Sgt	1	2	—	—	—	—
Chf Tech	—	—	—	—	—	—
Sergeant	3	3	2	2	1	—
Corporal	10	0	33	1	3	—
Jnr Tech	1	2	5	2	1	2
SAC	21	10	28	9	16	13
LAC	1	1	2	—	2	—
AC	2	2	1	—	—	3
	—	—	—	—	—	—

RAF

	2000		2001		2002	
	Guilty	Not guilty	Guilty	Not guilty	Guilty	Not guilty
Female						
Corporal	—	—	—	—	1	1
SAC	1	1	5	1	6	—
AC	—	—	—	—	2	—

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women have been sentenced to a period of detention by a UK military court martial in each of the last three years. [89666]

Dr. Moonie: The following number of men and women have been sentenced to a period of detention by United Kingdom courts-martial in the last three years:

	Male			Female		
Year	RN	Army	RAF	RN	Army	RAF
2000	11	163	19	1	4	Nil
2001	18	216	30	2	3	Nil
2002	26	205	12	2	1	5

The above figures included suspended sentences of detention.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the longest period of detention was to which *(a)* a man and *(b)* a woman has been sentenced by a UK military court martial in each of the last three years. [89667]

Dr. Moonie: The longest period of military detention which was awarded to a male and female member of each Service over the past three years is as follows:

	Male			Female		
Year	RN	Army	RAF	RN	Army	RAF
2000	9 months[1]	1 year	9 months	9 months[2]	140 days	Nil
2001	9 months	1 year 2 months 29 days	1 year	90 days	112 days	Nil
2002	9 months	1 year 2 months	9 months	28 days	42 days	1 12 days

[1] Subsequently reduced to six months.
[2] Suspended.

Detention Centres

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the military detention centres in the UK. [89663]

Dr. Moonie: There is only one military detention centre, the Military Corrective Training Centre at Berechurch Hill Camp, Colchester, Essex. Servicemen and women from all three Services who are sentenced by courts-martial to undergo periods of detention serve their sentence there.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what independent organisations oversee the running of UK military detention centres; and if he will make a statement. [89668]

Dr. Moonie: The Military Corrective Training Centre (MCTC), Colchester, Essex, is visited on a regular basis by an independent Board of Visitors comprising twelve people. The Board is appointed by my right hon .Friend the Secretary of State for Defence and reports directly to him. MCTC is also included in visits by the Council of Europe Committee for the Prevention of Torture, who last visited on 12 and 13 February 2001 during a tour of United Kingdom penal establishments generally.

Development Sites

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many times since 1997 his Department has claimed money back from developers under clawback in the sale of sites for development because of the change in the level of development; what the total amount claimed is; and if he will make a statement. [90133]

Dr. Moonie: Information on the total clawback receipts that have been claimed by the Ministry of Defence from the sale of sites for the period 1996–97 to 2000–01 is given in the "Stewardship Report of the Defence Estate 2001." These figures are based on the following number of cases.

Financial Year	Amount Claimed (£million)	Number of cases
1996–97	0.781	3
1997–98	1.084	3
1998–99	3.386	3
1999–2000	3.269	8
2000–01	1.405	9

Further clawback receipts amounting to £4.305 million were claimed in nine cases during Financial Year 2001–02.

Fraud

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people in his Department, who are under investigation for potential fraud, have been suspended for *(a)* up to a year, *(b)* over one year and *(c)* over two years. [87645]

Dr. Moonie: Reported cases of suspected fraud are recorded centrally on a summary basis only and detailed information on periods of suspension relating to individuals under investigation could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

General Service Medal (Suez)

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans the Government have to award a General Service Medal to those involved in the Suez Crisis in 1956. [90728]

Dr. Moonie: Service in Operation Musketeer, the Anglo/French Landings during the Suez Crisis of late 1956, was marked by the institution of the General Service Medal 1918–1962 with clasp near east. It has been available for many years, and is still issued by the Ministry of Defence's four medal offices to eligible veterans who may not have applied previously for the medal.

Global Security

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what other nations are involved in discussions with the UK and the US regarding a co-operative programme to develop defences which enhance global security. [90317]

Mr. Hoon: In November 2002, the 19 NATO member states initiated a new feasibility study to examine options for protecting alliance territory, forces and population centres against the full range of missile threats. The United States also has bilateral discussions with a number of countries (including the United Kingdom) on territorial missile defence.

Iraq

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the inoculation against CBW attack, to be given to Royal Naval and Royal Marines personnel in the event of hostilities against Iraq, will be different from that used during the 1990–91 Gulf War. [89877]

Dr. Moonie: The United Kingdom anthrax vaccine is manufactured using a process developed during the 1950s and first licensed in 1979. Anthrax vaccinations currently offered to United Kingdom Service personnel, and those used during the 1990–91 Gulf conflict, were both manufactured using this process. The vaccine is manufactured in accordance with the requirements of the product licence. All doses currently being administered to Service personnel will have been manufactured within the last two years.

It is not possible to immunise against chemical warfare agents.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has received requests from the United States for *(a)* Royal Navy and *(b)* Royal Marines resources for use in a possible military campaign against Iraq. [89881]

Mr. Hoon: As I told the House on 25 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 126W, the United States approached a number of countries, including the United Kingdom, seeking support in the event that military action against Iraq proves necessary. I responded to this approach on 26 November, identifying the kind of contribution we might make, should that be required.

As I have made clear to the House, this request was part of a confidential exchange between Governments. I am withholding details of the exchange in accordance with Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to ensure that information which is appropriate for his Department to release about preparations for a military campaign against Iraq is released to the House of Commons prior to release to the media. [89885]

Mr. Hoon: Announcements are made in accordance with the requirements of the Ministerial Code.

Defence Ministers take seriously their responsibilities to Parliament. I have made two oral statements to inform the House of decisions about our contingency preparations on 18 December 2002, *Official Report*, columns 845–58W, and 7 January 2003, *Official Report*, columns 23–29W.

On that occasion, I undertook to inform the House of any further decisions at the earliest opportunity. In the meantime, I will continue to keep the House informed of progress in continuing preparatory activities via written ministerial statements and other appropriate means.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what UN Resolutions *(a)* the no-fly zone over Iraq, *(b)* British participation in policing it and *(c)* bombing as a means of enforcement or retaliation are based. [90128]

Mr. Hoon: The Royal Air Force, alongside coalition partners, patrols the Iraqi no-fly zones in support of UNSCR 688, which demands that Saddam Hussein immediately end the brutal repression of his own people.

Coalition aircraft are authorised to respond in self-defence to sustained efforts by the Iraqi air defence system to engage our aircrew carrying out these legitimate patrols. They do so, in accordance with international law, only against Iraqi integrated air defence targets posing a direct threat to the safety of our forces.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to send more troops to the Gulf; whether armoured regiments are to be sent; and what increases in naval and air forces are planned. [90328]

Mr. Hoon: I refer my hon. Friend to my recent statement on 7 January 2003, *Official Report*, columns 23–39, in which I announced the deployment later this month of substantial maritime forces. The vessels will conduct training in the Mediterranean with a view to proceeding to the Gulf region if and as necessary.

No decision has been taken to authorise military action against Iraq. Our military contingency planning aims to allow the flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances. This includes measures to ensure the availability of a range of units, and the preparation and movement of equipment that may be required. I will continue to inform Parliament at the earliest possible opportunity as and when decisions are taken to deploy additional forces.

The Ministry of Defence also routinely takes part in long-planned exercises in the Gulf region at the invitation of Governments in the region with which we have strong bilateral defence relationships. Recent media reporting has confused this with deployments for potential military action against Iraq.

NATO

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 9 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 11W, if he will make it his policy to discuss with NATO defence ministers the implications for NATO's naval capabilities of the creation of *(a)* an EU rapid reaction capability and *(b)* a France-Germany defence union. [90100]

Mr. Hoon: I take every opportunity to discuss with NATO colleagues the need for improved capabilities, including in the naval sphere, particularly in the context of the Prague capabilities commitment, launched at the Prague summit in November 2002, and the European security and defence policy. We are not aware of any specific plans for a France-Germany defence union.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment his Department has made of the implications for NATO's naval capabilities of the creation of *(a)* an EU rapid reaction capability and *(b)* a France-Germany defence union. [90101]

Mr. Hoon: The Rapid Response concept under development by the EU will be compatible with work on the NATO Response Force, and will therefore not result in any change to the level of naval forces declared to NATO.

We are not aware of any specific plans to create a France-Germany defence union.

Public-private Partnerships

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many departmental minutes issued by his Department were outstanding on 30 November 2002 that referred to public-private partnerships, as included in Table B14 of the Consolidated Fund and National Loans Fund Accounts; and what their value was. [89414]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 13 January 2003]*: There were none.

Royal Army Medical Corps

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what regular and reserve units are entitled to use the badge of the Royal Army Medical Corps. [90340]

Dr. Moonie: All regular and reserve force personnel of the Royal Army Medical Corps are entitled to wear the badge of the Royal Army Medical Corps.

Royal Navy and Royal Marines Families' Association

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement on the funding of the Royal Navy and Royal Marine Families' Association (RNRMFA); [90154]

(2) when the new agency to replace the RNRMFA will be set up; what performance indicators have been set for the new agency; who will be responsible for monitoring those indicators; and if he will make a statement; [90187]

(3) who made the decision to withdraw funding for the RNRMFA; on what basis was the decision made to withdraw the funding; and if he will make a statement; [90155]

(4) what performance indicators have been set for the RNRMFA; which of these has not been met in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement; [90156]

(5) if he will make a statement on the independence of the agency that will replace the RNRMFA. [90158]

Dr. Moonie: Public funding for the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Families' Association commenced under the terms of an agreed Charter in 1999. No formal performance indicators were set for the Association, but the Charter laid down its objectives and other requirements. Funding was withdrawn from October 2002 because the Association had consistently failed to meet its objectives, and had also failed to meet other requirements of the Charter, including the production of annual reports and accounts and the maintenance of an appropriate management structure. The decision to withdraw funding was made by the Second Sea Lord, as the top level budget holder accountable for these funds.

The Department's aim in setting up the Association was to develop an independent organisation to represent the views of Naval Service families. This remains our firm intention and we intend that a new body, with the title, 'Naval Families' Federation', will be in place this spring. We are considering a number of options to ensure that the new Federation grows safely into a well-managed and independent body, preferably with charitable status. This will include the use of carefully selected performance indicators, and the achievements of the Federation against these indicators will be monitored by the Second Sea Lord's Personal and Family Service staff.

Service Accommodation (Scotland)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many single accommodation places there are for each of the services in each location in Scotland for *(a)* officers and *(b)* other ranks; how many service personnel could be accommodated on shore in Scotland if all the available accommodation was utilised; and if he will make a statement. [86391]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Terror Attacks

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what facilities exist to protect Royal Naval *(a)* personnel, *(b)* ships, by class, and *(c)* shore bases from contamination by chemical, biological or radioactive attack. [89875]

Mr. Ingram: Royal Navy personnel have individual decontamination and protective equipment, which includes respirators, protective suit, boots and gloves and a range of medical countermeasures common across all three Services.

Royal Navy warships are equipped with both fixed and portable nuclear and chemical detection equipment. All Royal Navy ships, with the exception of the survey vessels, have a citadel as an integral part of their design. This area provides a positively pressurised, toxic-free environment supplied with filtered air. In the ships with no citadel, a range of 'sanctuary procedures' is followed to avoid ingestion of contaminated materials.

Ships can also be protected by spraying sea water over the upper deck to remove contamination and to minimise the subsequent decontamination effort. Likewise, ships carry equipment to decontaminate any aircraft and vehicles aboard.

There is a requirement for all RN personnel, ashore in the United Kingdom, to train annually to the NATO required standard for Nuclear Biological Chemical (NBC) protection and for contingency forces to be trained and equipped to operate in an NBC environment. There is no specific NBC protective equipment for shore bases, but the use could be made of ships alongside at the time of an attack and ad hoc decontamination facilities would be created.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what modifications there have been since 11 September 2001 in training of *(a)* Royal Naval and *(b)* Royal Marines personnel to deal with chemical, biological or radiological attack. [89876]

Mr. Ingram: The level of training given to Royal Navy and Royal Marines personnel to deal with chemical, biological and nuclear attack post 11 September has been fully reviewed. As a result, one modification has been made to the training undertaken by personnel who are serving in warship and Royal Fleet Auxiliaries. This is the re-introduction of practical nuclear biological and chemical (NBC) defence training as part of the core operational sea training syllabus. All naval personnel currently undertake a half day NBC defence training module prior to serving at sea at the facility located within the Maritime Warfare School at Whale Island, in Portsmouth. An increased awareness of the NBC threat has been incorporated into all appropriate courses.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Ethical Banking

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what contracts have been concluded as a result of the Government's commitment to support ethical banking. [89948]

Clare Short: None.

Fair Trade

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what fair trade criteria she sets when deciding upon what suppliers to use. [89910]

Clare Short: We take every opportunity to promote the use of fair trade products. We do not normally set fair trade criteria when deciding what suppliers to use. The contract for DFID refreshment facilities does require that a range of fair trade products is available.

Heavily Indebted Poor Countries

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the countries that have received help through the HIPC process who now have debt repayments that are sustainable; and if she will make a statement. [90042]

Clare Short: Twenty-six countries have qualified for relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative. Of these, six countries (Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Mozambique, Tanzania and Uganda) have reached their completion point and are receiving full debt relief. The remaining 20 (Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Guyana, Honduras, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Nicaragua, Niger, Rwanda, Sao Tome & Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Zambia) are receiving interim relief. The main objective of the initiative is to ensure that countries exit the HIPC process with sustainable levels of debt. The HIPC Initiative has the flexibility to provide, when appropriate, additional debt relief at completion point. The UK is pressing the World bank and the IMF to widen their approach to topping up, so that any HIPC eligible country facing unsustainable debts, that has demonstrated its commitment to poverty reduction and economic reform, should qualify for this additional relief.

Khmer Rouge

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action the Government are taking to promote bringing to justice members of the former Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia. [90277]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I have been asked to reply.

We are working with other interested states towards the establishment of a UN-supported tribunal to bring to justice those Khmer Rouge leaders most responsible for the atrocities committed during their regime (1975–79). We therefore welcome the recent resumption of talks between Cambodian and United Nations negotiators in New York. We remain prepared to offer advice and financial support for a UN-supported tribunal.

Swaziland

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of sex education, with particular reference to education about AIDS/HIV, for young people in Swaziland. [90410]

Clare Short: My Department believes that improved education about HIV/AIDS is a vital part in the effort to combat the epidemic. The Southern Africa Soul City Programme, which my Department is supporting, aims to educate young people through out-reach programmes that deal with de-stigmatisation, raising HIV/AIDS awareness and promoting behavioural change.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) how much money her Department gave towards AIDS/HIV programmes in Swaziland in *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2001 and *(c)* 2002; [90014]

(2) how much money her Department is giving towards AIDS/HIV programmes in Swaziland this year; and how the programmes will be delivered. [90013]

Clare Short: My Department currently supports the HIV/AIDS response in Swaziland through three technical assistance programmes covering the Southern Africa region: the SADC Regional HIV/AIDS programme that supports activities in Botswana, Namibia, Lesotho and Swaziland; the Central and Southern Africa HIV/AIDS programme that focuses on strengthening the response of multilateral organisations; and the Southern Africa Soul City Programme that uses mass media to promote awareness of HIV/AIDS. Our financial year expenditure through regional HIV/AIDS programmes has been:

£

2000–01	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
831,527	761,134	851,565

It is not possible to specify the proportion of this which has been spent in Swaziland.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent discussions she has had with NGOs on the food shortage in Swaziland; and if she will make a statement. [90015]

Clare Short: My Department has conducted two humanitarian assessment missions to Swaziland in the last three months. On both missions, local and international NGOs were consulted. The current humanitarian crisis in Swaziland is serious, and my Department is providing support through The World Food Programme.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent discussions she has had with King Mswati of Swaziland on *(a)* the provision of antivirus drugs and *(b)* the food shortage in that country, and if she will make a statement. [90016]

Clare Short: I have not had any discussions with King Mswati of Swaziland on *(a)* the provision of antiviral drugs or on *(b)* the food shortages, but my Department and the British High Commission is in regular touch with the Government of Swaziland.

Swaziland has benefited from our support to the World Food programme's regional humanitarian programmes covering also Mozambique, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Lesotho, and Angola.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH

Bangladesh

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his policy is on the resolution passed in November 2002 by the European Parliament on the present situation in Bangladesh; and if he will make a statement. [89771]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The European Parliament's resolution raised a number of important issues on the situation in Bangladesh, which we ourselves have raised with the Bangladeshi authorities. The Bangladesh government has argued that the resolution does not give a fully representational view of the situation in Bangladesh. We continue to work closely with our European partners in raising human rights and other concerns with the Bangladesh authorities.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what discussions he has had with the Bangladeshi government on the reported deaths that have taken place in police custody in recent months in that country; [89773]

(2) what discussions he has had on recent reports concerning custodial deaths in Bangladesh in recent months; [89775]

(3) what discussions he has had with the Bangladeshi government on their policy known as Operation Clean Heart; and if he will make a statement. [89772]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: While the countermeasures being taken under "Operation Clean Heart" may have had some impact in combating the law and order problem in Bangladesh, we are concerned by reports of mistreatment of detainees, including deaths in custody. During her visit to Bangladesh in December, my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for International Development (Sally Keeble), raised our concerns with the Bangladesh Home Minister. Our High Commission also regularly discusses human rights with the Bangladesh government. We look for the due process of law to be followed in all cases, and for the action of security forces and for the treatment of detainees to comply with internationally agreed minimum standards.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Bangladeshi Government on *(a)* the development of democracy and human rights, *(b)* the setting up of Parliamentary committees, and *(c)* the protection of minorities in that country. [89774]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Our High Commission in Dhaka regularly raises with the Bangladesh authorities the need for Parliamentary reform and advocates the benefits of Parliamentary committees. We welcome the contact between our two parliaments, including last year's visits to London by Bangladeshi parliamentarians and to Bangladesh by members of the UK Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. We continue to urge the Bangladesh government and opposition parties to work together in the interests of democracy. We also continue to encourage respect for human rights, including for the rights of minorities.

Equatorial Guinea (Presidential Elections)

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the fairness of the presidential elections held in Equatorial Guinea on 15 December. [88682]

Mr. Rammell: We are concerned at reports of election irregularities. These concerns were reflected in the EU's Declaration of 18 December which focused on the lack of opposition representation, the fact that opposition leaders are either in prison or in exile, and that the recommendations on human rights observance and governance of the UN Special Representatives had not been followed through. The EU statement also urged the government of Equatorial Guinea to extend a political amnesty for the opposition, and, with the opposition, to hold an all-inclusive political dialogue on advancing democratisation and establishing guarantees for the respect of human rights.

Iraq

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the Government have provided the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission with background intelligence briefings on the material within its dossier on Iraq and weapons of mass destruction published on 24 September 2002. [90178]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Yes.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many copies of the Government's dossier on Iraq and weapons of mass destruction published on 24 September 2002 have been provided to the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission. [90180]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: A copy of the Government's dossier on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction was passed to UNMOVIC in New York on the day of its publication. The dossier is also available on the Internet.

It is up to UNMOVIC to decide on how further to disseminate the information contained in it.

TRANSPORT

Air Proximity Incidents (Newcastle Airport)

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what arrangements are in place to reduce the risk of air proximity incidents involving civilian and RAF aircraft in the approaches of Newcastle Airport; and whether these include a corridor of controlled airspace. [90554]

Mr. Spellar: Aircraft on approach or departure to Newcastle Airport are protected by a Controlled Zone (CTZ) and the Northern Off-Route Co-ordination Area (NORCA) which links Newcastle and controlled airspace near Leeds Bradford Airport (LBA). NORCA is permanently active and military aircraft requiring to enter it need to obtain an Air Traffic Control (ATC) service from nominated Military ATC Units. On 20 March 2003, NORCA is to be replaced by a corridor of Class A controlled airspace. This will afford extra protection, and further measures to enhance air safety may be introduced next year.

The MOD and CAA have also: mandated the use of a secondary radar transponder on military aircraft; instructed military pilots to make an information call to Newcastle when operating near the CTZ; improved the arrangements during military exercises near Newcastle; and arranged better co-ordination between RAF Spadeadam and Newcastle ATC.

Carbon Emissions

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the Government's policy is on reducing carbon emissions from aircraft. [90631]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government's policy is to work with the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) to limit or reduce all emissions from aircraft, including carbon. This work is essentially aimed at developing cleaner technology and operating practices, and market-based measures to incentivise the sector to use them.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of *(a)* the amount in tonnes of carbon emissions and *(b)* the proportion of total United Kindom carbon emissions represented by emissions from aircraft (i) using United Kingdom airports and (ii) overflying the United Kingdom in each of the last five years. [90632]

Mr. Jamieson: Data on carbon emissions from aircraft and the proportion of total carbon emissions are published annually in 'Transport Statistics Great Britain' (in Tables 2.8 and 2.9 on pages 40 and 41 respectively in the 2002 Edition). The information requested on overflying aircraft is not available.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Business Links

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many chief executives of Business Links are *(a)* men and *(b)* women. [90149]

Nigel Griffiths: The 45 Business Link Operators areas in England are covered by 42 Business Link Operator Chief Executives of which 30 are men and 12 are women.

Company Insolvencies (Scotland)

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her assessment is of the trend in company insolvencies in Scotland. [82431]

Mrs. Liddell: I have been asked to reply.

Official data indicates that company insolvencies in Scotland have generally been on an upward trend since 1995. The latest figures released show there were 184 company liquidations in the third quarter of 2002, bringing the cumulative total for the year thus far to 599. The estimated number of company insolvencies for the full year is 800, indicating an increase of around a third on the previous year. New company formation has also increased over the same period.

The number of companies becoming insolvent in Scotland represents less than 1 per cent. of those registered and this proportion has remained fairly constant over recent years.

European Trans-Sonic Wind Tunnel

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what support her Department is giving to the European Trans-Sonic Wind Tunnel. [88617]

Alan Johnson: The Department's financial contribution for operation of the ETW business is paid from the DTI's civil aeronautics research programme budget.

The Department's share of the UK contribution is forecast at £281k for the calendar year 2002. The Ministry of Defence pays the remainder of the UK contribution, forecast at £186k, in 2002. The DTI contribution is likely to increase to £400k in 2003 when the Ministry of Defence is forecast to pay £85k, reflecting their reduced level of contribution.

Public-private Partnerships

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many departmental minutes issued by her Department were outstanding on 30 November, that referred to public private partnerships as included in Table B14 of the Consolidated Fund and National Loans Fund Accounts; and what their value was. [89416]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 13 January 2003]*: There were no departmental minutes, as included in Table B14 of the Consolidated Fund and National Loans Fund Accounts, outstanding on 30th November that referred to public private partnerships.

Project Guarantees (Qatar)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in respect of which projects guarantees were issued with respect to Qatar in 1995. [90031]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 13 January 2003]:* The guarantees issued were in respect of spares for naval vessels.

Small Business Council

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the work being carried out by the Small Business Council to lessen the impact of regulations on small businesses; and if she will make a statement. [89829]

Nigel Griffiths: I am encouraged by the work the Small Business Council does at an early stage of policy development to inform Ministers and officials of the needs and concerns of small businesses, and by the effect this will have on the productivity and profitability of this important segment of the economy.

The SBC has been involved in or is currently working on:

The strengthened guidance on the Small Firms Impact Test;

The Pensions Green Paper

The Inland Revenue's Construction Industry Scheme (CIS);

Flexible Working Hours and Temporary Workers (a European Directive);

A number of the consultation documents e.g. that on commencement dates for changes to employment law on the review of Employment Status;

The simplification of Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme;

Other business support schemes e.g. the "time off for training" issue, suggesting possible alternatives to legislation.

In addition the SBC has submitted evidence to the Parliamentary Select Committee with regard to Planning and the Chair of the Council attends the Ministerial Panel on Regulatory Accountability.

Staffordshire Business Link

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the performance of Staffordshire Business Link since April 2001. [90148]

Nigel Griffiths: Business Link Staffordshire has performed well since April 2001. During the 2001–02 financial year the Business Link Operator had an average quarterly usage rate[1] above the England average. Working with over 5,000 individual businesses they achieved an annual penetration rate of 15.8 per cent. Overall satisfaction with the service provided was 85.5 per cent. compared to the England average of 81.1 per cent.

In 2002–03 at the six-month stage they had a penetration rate of 17.1 per cent. compared to the England average of 13.5 per cent., with overall satisfaction running at 81 per cent.

The Business Link Operator generally performs well as part of the regional network taking its share of responsibility on regional initiatives and working with the SBS regional team and Advantage West Midlands. They also made a significant contribution with their partners in Staffordshire in response to the foot and mouth outbreak and its resultant effects on farms and businesses.

[1] Usage Rate—Number of businesses/individuals using Business Link services counted on a quarterly basis. Different from penetration rate as includes the possibility of counting a business in more than one quarter. England penetration rate not available for 2001–02.

Theft/Fraud

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her estimate is of the cost of theft and fraud to *(a)* her Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in 2002. [89865]

Ms Hewitt:

Fraud

In the financial year 2001–02 the cost of fraud to the Department was £6k. The Department's NDPBs and Agencies are included in this figure.

Theft

The cost of theft for 2002 was £65,131. Items lost from non-DTI HQ premises may not have been included in this figure. The Department's NDPBs and Agencies are not included in this figure.

The DTI does not hold information on thefts within NDPBs.

The information on theft is being sought from Agencies and will be provided as soon as possible.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Sports Colleges

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has *(a)* to increase the number of specialist sports colleges and *(b)* to speed up the process of accreditation; and if she will make a statement. [90000]

Mr. Miliband: There are currently 992 specialist schools in England of which 161 are specialist sports colleges. On 2 October 2002, the Prime Minister announced that there would be 240 new Specialist Sports Colleges by the end of 2005.

On 28 November 2002, Charles Clarke announced that the cap on funding for the expansion of the Specialist Schools Programme has been lifted. This means that any school which meets the required standard will be able to become a specialist school. A new partnership fund will be set up to help schools which have experienced genuine difficulty in raising sponsorship.

The Youth Sport Trust is part funded by the Department for Education and Skills to work with schools seeking to become specialist sports colleges to secure that sufficient high quality applications come forward.

Union Learning Representatives

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many Union Learning Representatives there are in his Department; and if he will make a statement. [88807]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 7 January 2003]:* There is currently one Union Learning Representative in the Department. My officials are working with the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS), the main Civil Service union, on how best to promote the development of Union Learning Representatives within the Department.

Accreditation

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what his Department is doing to support the Government's policy on accreditation. [88091]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) is recognised by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, as the sole national body for the accreditation, against international standards, of certification and inspection bodies, testing and calibration laboratories. The Department for Education and Skills will use UKAS accreditation services whenever it is appropriate to do so. For example, we are exploring with the Guidance Accreditation Board, which is sponsored by the Department, the appropriateness of the UKAS accreditation process to its work.

Admissions Consultation Paper

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills for what reason the consultation paper on admissions did not meet the Government's code of practice on good government recommendations on minimum consultation periods. [89590]

Mr. Miliband: The new Regulations and Codes of Practice were finished later than planned because the Education Act 2002 did not receive Royal Assent until late July. The consultation schedule had to be compressed, to have the Regulations and Codes ready to come into effect from January 2003, so that admission authorities could have regard to them when consulting on their admission arrangements for September 2004. But much of the content was similar to that of September 2001's "Consultation on School Admissions", which had a longer consultation period; and we supported the latest written consultation with a number of meetings around the country, at which over 400 local authority representatives and head teachers were able to give their views on the Regulations and Codes.

Social Work Students (Bursary Scheme)

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will cancel all debts incurred by social work students in the two years leading to the introduction of the Bursary Scheme; and if he will make a statement. [90578]

Margaret Hodge: The DfES scheme of remitting student loan debt is restricted to certain teachers for whose recruitment and retention this Department has responsibility. Social work students are in the same position as any other higher education students in repaying student loans. Policy on social work training is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health.

Capita Group

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the contracts that have been awarded to the Capita Group by his Department. [89966]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: My Department has awarded a number of contracts with Capita for a range of different services. These are as follows:

Teachers' Pensions:

Administration of the Teachers' Pensions Scheme.

Connexions Card:

Development of the Connexions Card.

Consultancy Framework Contracts:

Framework contract to provide general management consultancy support and consultancy support for LEA interventions.

Executive Recruitment and Search:

Framework contract to provide executive recruitment services.

The above are all existing contracts within my Department.

Class Sizes

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will include a question concerning pupil turnover in future Form 7 measures of class size and composition. [88853]

Mr. Miliband: There are no plans to analyse routinely class size statistics by pupil turnover.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many infant classes had 31 or more pupils as a result of a statement of special educational needs specifying that a child should attend a particular school in September 2002. [88890]

Mr. Miliband: Provisional figures show that in September 2002 there were 47 infant classes taught by one teacher which had 31 or more pupils as a result of a statement of special educational needs specifying that a child should attend a particular school.

Provisional infant class size information for September 2002 was published on 20 November 2002 in the statistical first release entitled, "Infant Class Sizes in England: September 2002". This showed that nationally there were 307 classes of 31 or more pupils of which 288 were recorded as acceptable under the Education (Infant Class Sizes) Regulations 1998.

Classroom Assistants

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he has estimated what impact the introduction of classroom assistants has made on teacher workload; and if he will make a statement. [89304]

Mr. Miliband: This will depend on exactly how the support staff are deployed and managed but we have estimated that every additional 10,000 support staff could save every teacher on average at least 50 minutes per week.

We shortly expect to conclude a Workforce Reform Agreement with virtually all the teacher unions and support staff unions and employers, who agree with us that extra support staff are critical to tackling excessive teacher workload.

Connexions Service

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which Connexions Partnerships *(a)* are operational, *(b)* are still to take effect, *(c)* offer a one-stop shop service and *(d)* offer Connexions Direct. [89571]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The information is as follows:

(a) There are currently 46 out of 47 Connexions Partnerships operating in England.

(b) Just one remaining Partnership, Northumberland, has yet to start and is aiming to commence operation from April 2003.

(c) All Connexions Partnerships are developing one-stop services where a range of multi-agency services can easily be accessed in a single location, with flexible opening hours to suit the needs of young people.

(d) The Connexions Partnerships currently operating in the Connexions Direct pilot are Durham, Tyne and Wear, Tees Valley, Cheshire and Warrington, Greater Merseyside, Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Suffolk and Hertfordshire.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* young people of the relevant age group and *(b)* personal advisors there are in the area of each Connexions Partnership; and what the ratio of *(a)* to *(b)* is in each case. [89572]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The information requested is given in the following table.

The majority of Connexions Partnerships are currently in the process of recruiting Personal Advisers and securing support from other agencies working with young people. In most case the figures in the table do not therefore reflect the final complement of Personal Advisers in Partnerships. In addition to the 6,952 Personal Advisers in post in Partnerships in November 2002, Connexions services are being delivered by a further 1,652 front line delivery staff whose main role is client/customer contact making a total of 8,604 Connexions delivery staff available to help young people.

	(a) Connexions partnerships (000s) personal advisers (Pas)	*(b) 13–19 Cohort: PA*	*(c) Ratio*
Bedfordshire	56	101	554
Birmingham and Solihull	120	195	616
Black Country	115	168	683
Bournemouth Dorset and Poole	49	80	610
Cambs and Peterbro	63	82	770
Central London	77	235	326
Cheshire and Warrington	85	183	468
Cornwall and Devon	137	201	682
County Durham	45	67	664
Coventry and Warwick	68	152	446
Cumbria	48	103	471
Derbyshire	79	157	501
East London	186	285	652
Essex Southend and Thurrock	153	144	1,059
Gloucestershire	45	51	881
Greater Manchester	261	406	643
Greater Merseyside	140	342	408
Hereford and Worcester	65	110	590
Hertfordshire	84	95	880
Humber	84	227	370
Kent	124	150	823
Lancashire	124	201	617
Leicestershire	76	110	691
Lincolnshire and Rutland	57	68	827
Milton Keynes Ox and Bucks	106	199	530
North London	74	149	498
North Yorkshire	66	128	518
Northamptonshire	55	57	978

	(a) Connexions partnerships (000s) personal advisers (Pas)	(b) 13–19 Cohort: PA	(c) Ratio
Nottinghamshire	96	135	705
Shropshire Telford and Wrekin	32	69	458
Somerset	37	80	455
South Central	147	168	874
South London	96	152	630
South Yorkshire	120	261	460
Staffordshire	92	149	618
Suffolk	66	78	845
Surrey	68	72	939
Sussex	103	173	595
Tees Valley	75	117	643
Tyne and Wear	100	193	518
West London	94	113	831
West Yorkshire	79	282	706
West of England	199	409	192
Wiltshire and Swindon	45	55	812
England	4,088	6,952	588

Notes:

1. Data relates to November 2002—the latest period for which information is available and is taken from NEXUS, the Connexions Service National Unit management information system.
2. No data is included for Norfolk and Berkshire Partnerships which started in January 2003 and Northumberland which will start in April 2003.
3. Personal Adviser numbers include those funded through the Connexions Services Grant and those seconded and supported by other organisations in the Partnership.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what his target maximum wait is for an appointment with *(a)* a Connexions personal adviser and *(b)* a careers adviser. [89573]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Connexions service has a broad remit: to offer to all young people between 13 and 19 information, advice and guidance (including on careers) to improve participation and achievement in learning, and to signpost personal development opportunities. Since type and level of need is a key determinant of the kind of personal adviser support made available, it is not appropriate to set maximum waiting times. Rather, the Connexions service has developed access to personal adviser support via a wide range of traditional and modern-day channels. In addition to conventional appointment systems, personal advisers are available on a "drop-in" basis in schools or colleges as well as in High Street Connexions centres, that are open at times young people want. Instant access is a key feature of Connexions Direct, a telephone and web-based service currently being trialled in several areas of England. Here, support is available from 8 am to 2 am seven days per week and 365 days per year. This is in fulfilment of one of the key Connexions principles: to design and deliver the service around the needs of young people and to listen to their views.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what criteria he will use to judge the effectiveness of Connexions Partnerships in *(a)* providing a vibrant high quality youth service, *(b)* making many more young people active citizens, *(c)* engaging many more young people in developmental activities and *(d)* ensuring that parents, carers and teachers are supportive of Connexions, as set out in Youth Support Services for 13 to 19-year-olds: A Vision for 2006. [89574]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Government set out its future vision for the Connexions Service in "Youth Support Services for 13 to 19-year-olds: A vision for 2006". This is a forward-looking document, which shows how Connexions will bring together a range of existing agencies to deliver seamless support for 13 to 19-year-olds, and reduce the number of 16 to 18-year-olds who are not in learning or work. We will use the following criteria to judge progress towards meeting the vision:

Youth Services

The Department has published a clear statement of what is expected of local education authorities who are responsible for delivering youth services. In December 2002 the Government launched the document "Transforming Youth Work Resourcing Excellent Youth Services" which provides a cross-Government view of the key elements of a high quality, well managed and properly resourced youth service. The document underpins the Transforming Youth Work programme and the Government's commitment to work with local authorities to ensure the delivery of a high quality youth service for young people which is at the heart of the Connexions Service.

Making more young people active citizens and engaging them in developmental activities

This aspect will be assessed by the extent to which Connexions Partnerships provide access to opportunities for young people to broaden their horizons, develop their talents and become actively engaged in their communities, through for example Millennium Volunteers and other volunteering initiatives, sports, arts and recreational activities; and through specific programmes such as the Neighbourhood Support Fund.

Support for Connexions from parents, carers and teachers

The views of young people and a range of key stakeholders involved in Partnerships will be sought on a regular basis through a comprehensive programme of opinion surveys starting in December 2002. In addition, the findings of national and local evaluations, the self-assessments undertaken by Partnerships and the outcome of Ofsted inspections will be used to assess progress and inform the development of Connexions Partnerships.

One of the key criteria for judging the overall effectiveness of Connexions Partnerships will be the progress they make towards meeting their target of reducing the proportion of 16 to 18-year-olds not in learning and work. With the exception of recently established Partnerships, all Partnerships have been set a target of reducing by 10 per cent. the proportion of young people who are not in education, employment and training by November 2004.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of 16 to 18 year-olds are not in education, training or employment in each of the Connexions Partnership areas. [89575]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The information requested is given in the table.

Connexions Partnerships	Percentage NEET
Bedfordshire	11
Birmingham and Solihull	14
Black Country	13
Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole	7
Cambridge and Peterborough	10
Central London	15
Cheshire and Warrington	7
Cornwall and Devon	7
County Durham	18
Coventry and Warwick	10
Cumbria	8
Derbyshire	10
East London	12
Essex, Southend and Thurrock	8
Gloucestershire	4
Greater Manchester	10
Greater Merseyside	12
Hereford and Worcester	7
Hertfordshire	5
Humber	10
Kent	5
Lancashire	10
Leicestershire	9
Lincolnshire and Rutland	6
Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire	6
North London	10
North Yorkshire	6
Northamptonshire	7
Nottinghamshire	8
Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin	6
Somerset	5
South Central	5
South London	8
South Yorkshire	12
Staffordshire	11
Suffolk	8
Surrey	2
Sussex	6
Tees Valley	14
Tyne and Wear	17
West London	10
West of England	7
West Yorkshire	10
Wiltshire and Swindon	6
England	9

Notes:

1. Data relate to November 2002—the latest period for which information is available and is taken from NEXUS, the Connexions Service National Unit management information system.

2. No data are included for Norfolk and Berkshire Partnerships which started in January 2003, and Northumberland which will start in April 2003.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what outcome-driven performance targets he has set for *(a)* the Connexions service and *(b)* each Connexions Partnership. [89576]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Connexions Partnerships have been set a target of reducing by 10 per cent. the proportion of 16 to 18-year-olds that are not participating in employment, education and training between November 2002 and 2004.

Connexions Partnerships are also working in support of a range of other local and nationally based targets covering young people aged 13–19, with a particular focus on those young people who require intensive support.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the annual budget is of *(a)* the Connexions Service National Unit and *(b)* each Connexions Partnership. [89578]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The total running costs budget for the Connexions Service National Unit (CSNU) in 2002–03 is £5.791 million (budgets are not yet agreed for 2003–04).

CSNU is responsible for a range of programme budgets including the main Connexions Service budget, which totals £449 million in 2002–03. Of that total, £337 million is allocated directly to Connexions Partnerships through the Connexions grant, while roughly one half of the remainder (c. £52 million) is used to maintain careers services in those areas where Connexions Partnerships are not yet operational. A further third (c. £35 million) goes to Partnerships to fund the pre-launch development costs of those starting during the year and to support Summer Plus activity in response to the Government's street crime agenda. The remaining funds are used centrally to support the Partnership network, for example, through the training of Personal Advisers and the development of tracking systems.

In 2003–04, the total Connexions Service budget will be £475 million, of which £439 million will be allocated directly to Partnerships through the Connexions grant. Of the remainder, £17 million will go to Partnerships to continue supporting Summer Plus while £20 million will, as this year, fund work centrally in support of the Partnership network.

The table shows the funding allocated via the grant to each Connexions Partnership in both 2002–03 and 2003–04. In addition to the main Connexions budget, CSNU is responsible for a range of other initiatives such as the Neighbourhood Support Fund, the Millennium Volunteers programme and a number of Youth Service funds. The total programme funding available for these other initiatives is £77.4 million in 2002–03 and £62.9 million in 2003–04.

Connexions Partnership grant allocations (2002–03 and 2003–04)

£

Connexions Partnership	Total grant allocation (2002–03)	Total grant allocation (2003–04)
South East		
Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire	10,588,239	10,293,332
Berkshire	1,541,001	6,233,298
Surrey	3,137,474	7,866,666
Kent and Medway	5,095,843	12,940,734
Sussex	6,026,723	11,075,372
South Central	7,686,156	14,244,717
London		
West London	6,488,117	12,056,005
Central London	11,423,073	15,335,249
North London	9,750,365	9,774,835
East London	20,397,939	21,649,094
South London	10,032,454	10,330,508
East of England		
Norfolk	1,538,022	6,270,498
Cambridgeshire and Peterborough	5,621,638	5,839,068
Suffolk	5,054,563	5,157,784
Bedfordshire and Luton	2,647,824	4,738,377
Hertfordshire	7,187,852	7,584,278

Connexions Partnership grant allocations (2002–03 and 2003–04)

£

Connexions Partnership	*Total grant allocation (2002–03)*	*Total grant allocation (2003–04)*
Essex, Southend and Thurrock	7,013,929	12,621,280
South West		
Gloucestershire	4,340,416	4,386,413
Wiltshire and Swindon	2,608,196	4,778,769
West of England	7,633,433	7,889,859
Somerset	3,669,999	3,719,593
Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole	4,691,357	5,005,025
Cornwall and Devon	11,901,551	12,511,182
West Midlands		
Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin	3,676,722	3,628,394
Staffordshire	8,825,967	9,234,154
Black Country	12,534,131	11,471,386
Birmingham and Solihull	7,399,741	13,035,551
Coventry and Warwickshire	7,011,770	6,959,745
Hereford and Worcester	5,410,214	5,495,746
East Midlands		
Derbyshire	4,752,302	7,817,476
Nottinghamshire	9,372,847	9,642,650
Lincolnshire and Rutland	5,290,596	5,392,320
Leicestershire	4,522,509	8,188,625
Northamptonshire	2,952,352	5,563,219
Yorkshire and The Humber		
York and North Yorkshire	3,042,748	5,391,600
West Yorkshire	9,904,637	20,541,868
Humber	8,737,279	8,531,852
South Yorkshire	12,941,348	12,356,833
North West		
Cumbria	4,270,474	4,211,678
Lancashire	12,234,170	12,709,953
Greater Manchester	13,511,486	26,251,106
Greater Merseyside	17,098,257	17,407,792
Cheshire and Warrington	6,979,313	6,849,066
North East		
Northumberland	0	2,875,134
Tyne and Wear	11,318,694	11,664,903
County Durham	4,651,170	4,691,191
Tees Valley	4,314,803	7,142,333
Total England	336,629,693	439,356,511

Notes:

1. The allocations for 2002–03 reflect the fact that several Partnerships were launched during the year so, in some cases, represent only a proportion of the hypothetical full-year cost (e.g. the South Central Partnership was launched on 1 September so its 2002–03 allocation is 7/12 of what it would have been had the Partnership operated for the full year).
2. Those Partnerships starting during the current year received additional development funding to help them prepare for full operation. Those same areas have also received funding to maintain careers service operation prior to the launch of their Connexions Partnerships.
3. Some Partnerships have received further funding during 2002–03 for Summer Plus activities, Personal Adviser Drugs Education, etc.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what *(a)* qualifications and *(b)* professional standards are required of Connexions personal advisers. [89579]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Connexions personal advisers are drawn from a range of professional backgrounds. To be fully qualified they must possess an NVQ level 4 or equivalent in a relevant professional discipline (e.g. careers, youth work, social work) and have attended a bespoke training programme, either Understanding Connexions or the Diploma for Connexions Personal Advisers. Training is delivered at higher education institutions approved by the Connexions Service National Unit. A guide to professional practice for Connexions personal advisers is currently in draft and has been the subject of wide consultation.

Construction Industry Training Board

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much was raised via the Construction Industry Training Board Levy in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* Northern Ireland in each of the last three financial years. [89429]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 13 January 2003]:* The Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) raised the following amounts from employers paying Levy in the last three financial years in Scotland, England and Wales. The CITB has no authority in Northern Ireland, which has its own body, the CITB Northern Ireland.

£

	2002	*2001*	*2000*
Scotland	6,363,352	6,571,868	6,700,813
England	70,755,226	70,781,703	71,518,909
Wales	2,214,494	2,544,784	2,770,784

The Construction Industry Training Board's financial year runs from 1 January to 31 December and the above information is prepared on that basis.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* organisations and *(b)* plant hire organisations in Scotland have paid into the Construction Industry Training Board Levy in each of the past five financial years. [89431]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 13 January 2003]:* The Construction Industry Training Board have received levy from registered construction employers in Scotland as shown in the table.

	Registered construction employers paying levy	*Registered construction employers declaring their main activity to be plant hire or repair paying levy*
1998	2,109	97
1999	2,173	103
2000	1,670	76
2001	2,007	95
2002	2,257	116

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* organisations and *(b)* plant hire organisations in Scotland have claimed the training grants from the Construction Industry Training Board Levy in each of the past five financial years. [89432]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 13 January 2003]:* The Construction Industry Training Board received claims for Training Grants from registered construction employers in Scotland as shown in the table.

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Registered construction employers claiming grants	2,780	2,672	2,846	2,771	2,488
Registered construction employers declaring their main activity to be plant hire of repair claiming grants	95	94	76	65	64

The CITB's "grant year" is aligned with the academic year and runs therefore from August to July, the figures shown in the table are prepared on that basis.

Education Funding

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the local education authority areas for which the proposed rise in the schools' block of their education formula spending share exceeds total increase in formula grant for the local authority, giving the amount of the excess in each case. [90140]

Mr. Miliband: There are two local education authorities for which the proposed rise in the schools' block of the education formula spending share exceeds the total increase in formula grant for the local authority; Barnet where the excess is £1.2 million, and Essex with an excess of £0.3 million. There are a further 10 authorities where the proposed rise in the schools' block would exceed the total increase in formula grant after taking into account burdens faced by other services. These are:

Bromley
Devon
Dorset
East Sussex
Hampshire
Kent
Richmond upon Thames
Surrey
West Sussex
Wokingham

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much funding has increased per pupil in real terms for *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in Leicestershire since 1996–97. [88624]

Mr. Miliband: The following information details funding per pupil in primary and secondary education in Leicestershire from 1997–98 to 2002–03. The information for 1996–97 is not available as Leicestershire LEA did not come into being until 1997–98 as a result of the local government reorganisation.

£

	SSA	Grants	Total
Primary			
1997–98	2,090	40	2,130
1998–99	2,150	50	2,190
1999–2000	2,210	110	2,320
2000–01	2,250	250	2,500
2001–02	2,290	370	2,660
2002–03	2,350	380	2,730
Change[1]	260	340	600
Secondary			
1997–98	2,750	30	2,780
1998–99	2,800	40	2,840
1999–2000	2,840	70	2,920
2000–01	2,910	210	3,120
2001–02	2,960	290	3,250
2002–03	3,020	290	3,310
Change[1]	270	260	530

[1] Change since 1997–98.

Notes:

1. Coverage: figures reflect education SSA settlement figures (primary and secondary sub-blocks), plus all relevant grants in DfES's Departmental Expenditure Limits relevant to pupils aged 5 to 10 and 11 to 15 (excluding EMA and a handful of others where it is not possible to get figures on a comparables basis overtime).
2. Expenditure data are taken from the Leicestershire LEA's section 52 Budget statements submitted to the DfES.
3. The pupil numbers used to convert £ million figures to £ per pupil are the maintained pupils underlying the SSA settlement calculations.
4. 1997–98 figures for LEAs subject to local government reorganisation in that year have been estimated, pro-rata, to their post LGR figures.
5. 2002–03 figures are provisional.
6. Real terms 2001–02 prices, based on GDP deflators as at September 2002.
7. Figures are rounded to the nearest £10. Totals may not sum due to rounding.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what proposals he plans to make in the EMAG distribution formula; and if he will make a statement; [89596]

(2) what responses he received on the consultation on EMAG distribution; and if he will make a statement. [89597]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Plans to consult last year on the arrangements for distributing EMAG were deferred pending the outcome of the Spending Review and the Local Government Finance Review. The Department is currently developing for consultation in spring 2003 proposals for a new strategy on raising the achievement of minority ethnic pupils. This will include proposals for the future distribution and use of EMAG.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what has been the comparative EMAG funding at a constant value basis for each of the last five years for which figures are available. [89599]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The Ethnic Minority Achievement Element of the Standards Fund (EMAG) was introduced by the DfES (then the DfEE) in April 1999. The breakdown of EMAG funding from April 1999 to March 2003 by financial year is provided in the table. It shows that the EMAG programme (including the LEA contribution) has increased by over £6.2 million in real terms over the last 4 years. To facilitate comparison at a constant value the allocations have been calculated using the GDP deflator formula

based on the current standard base year of 2001–02. The 2002–03 calculation is based on GDP working assumptions for 2002–03.

	Total allocations	*Comparison of total allocations in real terms using standard GDP deflator formula with cash figure value of 2001–02 prices as the base year*
1999–2000	139.2	145.8
2000–01	147.2[1]	150.7[1]
2001–02	153.9	153.9
2002–03	155.8	152.0[2]

[1] For 2000–01 the traveller achievement grant was combined with EMAG. The total allocation of the traveller element for 2000–01 was £15.7 million and is not shown in this table.
[2] Based on 2002–03 GDP working assumptions.

School Exclusions

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pupils have been *(a)* permanently and *(b)* temporarily excluded from maintained schools in relation to drugs offences in each of the last five years. [88884]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested is not available centrally.

Information on permanent exclusions is derived from Annual Schools' Census returns made by schools to the Department in January each year. This includes characteristics of the excluded pupil such as the pupil's age, gender and ethnicity. However, the reason for exclusion is not collected.

However, on 20 January 2003 the Education (Pupil Exclusions and Appeals) (Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2002 will come into force, which require schools to report all fixed term exclusions to their local education authority.

We are planning to collect information from local education authorities on both fixed term and permanent exclusions on a termly basis from this summer. This will capture the reason for the exclusion.

Further Education

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of *(a)* 16-year-olds, *(b)* 17-year-olds, *(c)* 18-year-olds, *(d)* 19-year-olds, *(e)* 20-year-olds, *(f)* 21-year-olds, *(g)* 22-year-olds and *(h)* 23-year-olds were in (i) full-time and (ii) part-time education in each year since 1992. [89293]

Mr. Miliband: The percentages of 16, 17 and 18-year-olds participating in full-time and part-time education, end 1991 to end 2001, are set out in the table. These are taken from the annual statistical first release, "Participation in Education, Training and Employment by 16 to 18-Year-Olds in England". Figures for end 2001 are provisional.

Participation in Education in England

	16-year-olds		*17-year-olds*		*18-year-olds*	
End of year	*Full-time*	*Part-time*	*Full-time*	*Part-time*	*Full-time*	*Part-time*
1991	66.6	9.7	48.8	13.7	28.3	13.2
1992	70.0	8.0	54.1	11.0	33.1	11.6
1993	72.6	7.5	57.5	9.7	37.0	10.3
1994	71.0	8.1	58.7	9.9	38.4	10.0
1995	70.4	7.3	58.4	8.9	39.4	9.5
1996	69.7	7.8	57.9	9.2	38.4	10.1
1997	69.4	6.7	57.4	8.4	37.7	9.4
1998	69.8	6.6	57.8	8.5	37.2	9.6
1999	71.3	6.6	58.7	8.7	37.3	9.8
2000	71.4	6.5	59.0	8.2	37.1	9.3
2001	71.2	7.3	58.4	9.6	36.6	9.9

Equivalent overall participation rates are not produced by the Department for those aged 19 and over.

Language Teaching

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when he will introduce the new voluntary recognition system for language skills; which body will operate the system, including the setting and monitoring of standards; and what he expects the cost to be in each of the next five years. [89330]

Mr. Miliband: The voluntary recognition system will be formally introduced in 2005. Prior to that, the system will be trialled. The Department is working with a number of key partners, including the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), the Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research (CILT) and the Nuffield Languages Programme to develop the system. We will work with the QCA in inviting the national awarding bodies to tender for the opportunity to operate the system. The level of funding will depend on the pace of implementation and the number of languages covered by the system.

School Budgets

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list schools with sixth forms which will face a reduced budget in the next financial year as a result of decisions of the Learning and Skills Councils, giving the percentage reduction proposed in each case. [88891]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The effect of 2003–04 sixth form allocations by the Learning and Skills Council on schools' budgets cannot be calculated at present. These allocations are added into the budget share calculated

by the local education authority for the whole school using its own funding formula; and in doing so, the authority is permitted to make a range of adjustments, both up and down, before the total budget share for the school is finalised. Local education authorities are obliged to publish details of 2003–04 budget shares by 31 March 2003, and will be calculating them in the months leading up to that date.

The LSC allocations for 2003–04 were announced on 11 December 2002. The quantum distributed was £1.428 billion, which is 5.3 per cent. higher than the quantum for 2002–03. The allocations have not yet been finalised and are the subject of consultation with LEAs and schools. The allocations are primarily the responsibility of the LSC, and John Harwood, the Chief Executive of the LSC, will write to the hon. Member about them. A copy of his letter will be placed in the Libraries.

School Transport

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what school transport costs were for each local education authority in England in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [89367]

Mr. Miliband: The following information details the home to school/college transport expenditure returned by local education authorities for 2000–01 financial year:

LEA name:	*Pre-primary education*	*Primary education*	*Secondary education*	*Special Schools*
Barking and Dagenham	0	556,272	309,210	1,197,303
Barnet	0	195,264	436,260	1,887,871
Barnsley	0	0	0	0
Bath and North East Somerset	0	418,279	979,653	733,486
Bedfordshire	0	592,000	3,542,700	2,820,000
Bexley	0	333,000	106,000	1,572,000
Birmingham	5,483	1,235,734	889,667	9,315,605
Blackburn	0	141,666	441,754	833,239
Blackpool	0	24,508	19,773	521,914
Bolton	1	107,196	153,394	577,174
Bournemouth	0	76,144	[1]65,388	733,285
Bracknell Forest	0	37,565	497,273	968,638
Bradford	1,358	1,232,478	1,941,675	1,753,978
Brent	0	457,000	476,000	1,902,000
Brighton and Hove	0	0	0	0
Bromley	23,748	551,700	348,844	1,746,803
Buckinghamshire	19,466	1,846,286	6,380,213	2,571,587
Bury	0	232,041	226,207	912,407
Calderdale	0	186,768	675,040	962,587
Cambridgeshire	105,315	1,758,565	4,235,868	2,785,303
Camden	0	0	0	0
Cheshire	0	1,674,597	4,620,374	3,130,612
City of Bristol	51,599	96,139	389,568	731,654
City of Kingston-upon-Hull	0	0	0	0
City of London	17,764	248	8,615	27,006
Cornwall	88,067	1,188,855	3,771,242	1,346,783
Coventry	42,260	118,448	374,480	970,911
Croydon	32	0	0	2,624,743
Cumbria	17,027	2,215,052	4,405,232	1,322,707
Darlington	1,459	73,727	430,277	418,231
Derby	0	453,920	173,388	1,329,306
Derbyshire	0	979,000	3,626,000	2,621,000
Devon	19	3,076,798	7,519,964	2,571,980
Doncaster	0	12,743	26	0
Dorset	4,156	1,402,700	3,768,864	2,293,919
Dudley	0	174,462	121,237	1,408,805
Durham	33,607	973,003	4,488,932	2,488,208
Ealing	0	377,776	258,043	2,814,569
East Riding of Yorkshire	0	1,089,303	2,830,130	1,899,254
East Sussex	0	368,889	2,090,370	2,459,259
Enfield	1,327	409,252	541,205	2,605,101
Essex	0	5,059,519	7,783,730	7,271,403
Gateshead	0	111,858	98,321	898,896
Gloucestershire	100,387	1,288,224	3,222,346	2,416,953
Greenwich	0	0	0	2,299,550
Hackney	1,333	0	0	0
Halton	0	421	182,418	1,108,493
Hammersmith and Fulham	0	42,605	170,421	1,485,939
Hampshire	0	2,424,000	4,470,000	5,778,000
Haringey	0	312,822	261,834	1,541,271
Harrow	0	64,742	17,504	1,960
Hartlepool	0	21,523	180,162	396,942
Havering	0	72,829	235,198	641,142
Herefordshire	78	1,409,106	1,966,239	1,031,053
Hertfordshire	0	1,991,053	4,850,372	5,995,644
Hillingdon	1,601	381,667	277,025	2,009,241
Hounslow	0	311,062	116,124	1,430,000
Isle of Wight Council	0	67,213	980,664	179,824

LEA name:	Pre-primary education	Primary education	Secondary education	Special Schools
Isles of Scilly	0	11,076	8,462	0
Islington	0	11,250	7,224	15,239
Kensington and Chelsea	3,774	61,635	45,283	15,094
Kent	0	3,854,782	11,987,257	5,611,489
Kingston upon Thames	0	43,973	69,915	1,162,444
Kirklees	0	462,900	280,000	1,803,600
Knowsley	0	5,010	207,295	1,272,842
Lambeth	0	234,808	234,808	2,113,844
Lancashire	0	1,119,824	6,524,843	7,286,324
Leeds	0	157,465	10,138	3,949,392
Leicester	0	0	0	0
Leicestershire	0	759,261	4,315,277	4,252,856
Lewisham	47,637	37,209	54,566	2,172,244
Lincolnshire	0	2,339,989	5,917,882	4,068,068
Liverpool	0	1,319	585,579	3,274,923
Luton	67,808	121,140	33,750	1,024,430
Manchester	0	0	192,497	5,467,276
Merton	0	0	0	1,042,949
Middlesbrough	39,693	186,022	169,598	396,979
Milton Keynes	47,474	431,528	574,060	958,588
Newcastle upon Tyne	0	0	0	806,981
Newham	0	866,350	538,602	789,327
Norfolk	0	2,531,792	7,595,377	3,533,812
North East Lincolnshire	0	139,483	286,715	760,754
North Lincolnshire	0	487,060	1,073,780	839,979
North Somerset	0	615,261	1,090,804	625,292
North Tyneside	0	94,766	59,154	970,753
North Yorkshire	372,151	2,991,141	5,080,018	2,020,754
Northamptonshire	0	2,126,191	2,052,429	3,098,523
Northumberland	0	1,809,426	857,618	3,930,583
Nottingham City	0	138,216	277,021	1,374,234
Nottinghamshire	22,474	2,023,816	3,008,785	2,273,379
Oldham	17,939	113,014	109,522	1,262,509
Oxfordshire	113	3,284,713	2,895,945	3,727,772
Peterborough	0	345,015	427,518	1,107,438
Plymouth	0	288,065	835,992	1,156,850
Poole	0	109,458	444,040	671,789
Portsmouth	0	148,353	420,050	449,704
Reading	0	0	0	33,724
Redbridge	0	266,461	576,305	1,655,378
Redcar and Cleveland	8,335	56,192	77,635	2,712
Richmond upon Thames	0	0	0	0
Rochdale	100,318	1,942	224,345	1,201,082
Rochester and Gillingham	0	1,198,200	958,500	723,500
Rotherham	69,224	140,088	248,801	1,118,730
Rutland	0	178,231	503,295	167,913
Salford	0	82,739	94,559	1,073,968
Sandwell	0	271,970	427,692	1,302,821
Sefton	0	101,463	262,945	1,637,520
Sheffield	0	5,227	3,795	2,735,746
Shropshire	0	1,718,677	1,988,957	1,700,132
Slough	0	250,042	187,532	801,588
Solihull	0	516,000	601,000	562,000
Somerset	0	3,128,172	3,295,276	260,681
South Gloucestershire	0	1,348,792	541,955	428,044
South Tyneside	0	193,212	124,902	388,349
Southampton	67,718	55,825	56,838	822,903
Southend	0	23,028	137,011	1,054,754
Southwark	158,250	0	0	0
St. Helens	32,722	18,647	401,547	1,192,292
Staffordshire	0	537,456	4,710,974	3,760,251
Stockport	0	10,791	117,483	1,747,441
Stockton-on-Tees	759	393,681	393,945	680,367
Stoke on Trent	132	410,881	262,829	885,927
Suffolk	0	5,539,700	3,416,149	276,984
Sunderland	89	416	75,476	1,507,243
Surrey	147,894	2,708,624	5,476,770	6,483,764
Sutton	0	233,344	122,889	910,898
Swindon	0	367,969	367,969	1,259,761
Tameside	0	69,902	205,450	888,882
The Wrekin	0	0	5,075	0
Thurrock	0	171,626	463,070	408,451
Torbay	0	123,732	526,707	549,948
Tower Hamlets	0	12,048	108,428	2,357,473
Trafford	0	238,945	342,326	1,466,249
Wakefield	0	191,673	346,735	833,715

LEA name:	Pre-primary education	Primary education	Secondary education	Special Schools
Walsall	136	107,069	228,402	1,148,377
Waltham Forest	1,460	1,618,318	393,881	173,305
Wandsworth	0	34,457	208,028	1,887,246
Warrington	0	182,610	635,171	823,705
Warwickshire	4,782	2,870,428	4,190,863	2,814,722
West Berkshire	6	303,410	803,145	1,420,492
West Sussex	0	433,940	2,894,622	4,299,504
Westminster	0	19,972	15,692	2,410,074
Wigan	0	33,260	282,621	1,487,741
Wiltshire	0	1,237,410	3,556,142	1,454
Windsor and Maidenhead	105	114,441	448,558	1,279,029
Wirral	0	320,236	658,174	1,314,616
Wokingham	0	43,660	679,587	999,626
Wolverhampton	0	277,966	281,431	1,304,636
Worcestershire	0	1,151,413	3,492,660	3,546,787
York	0	93,985	632,929	746,429

Source:
School Budget data for 2000–01 is taken from section 52 budget statements completed by Local Education Authorities and returned to the DfES

Schools (Departmental Documents)

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the documents issued between 1 January and 19 December by his Department to schools that deal with *(a)* discipline, *(b)* truancy, *(c)* bureaucracy and *(d)* teacher workload; and how many pages were in each document. [89298]

Mr. Miliband: The following documents issued between 1 January and 19 December to schools that deal with *(a)* discipline, *(b)* truancy, *(c)* bureaucracy and *(d)* teacher workload:

1. Revised Guidance on Exclusion from School—Draft for Consultation

   Nursery, Sample Primary, Sample Secondary

   Sent: 21 January 2002—Pages: 17

2. Workload pack—letter from Secretary of State and guidance

   All maintained schools, schools with sixth form and sixth form colleges

   Sent: 11 March 2002—Pages: 6

3. Survey of absences in schools

   All schools

   Sent: 01 May 2002—Pages: 5

Schools' Budgets

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if it is his intention to use reserve powers under the Education Act 2002 to determine a minimum level of schools' budgets for the coming year. [90126]

Mr. Miliband: The Education Act 2002 requires local education authorities to notify the Secretary of State of their proposed schools budget by 31 January 2003. My right hon. Friend will decide in the light of the proposed budgets whether it is necessary to use the reserve power.

SSA Allocation (Newcastle)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what SSA allocation the City of Newcastle received in *(a)* 2001–02, *(b)* 2002–03 and *(c)* 2003–04; and what was (i) the LEA spend and (ii) the size of the schools budget in (A) 2001–02 and (B) 2002–03. [89106]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 9 January 2003]:* The following table contains the information requested. The Department is in the process of collecting spend data for the 2001–02 financial year and I will write to my hon. friend when it is available. The Department is not due to collect data for 2002–03 until September 2003.

£ million

Financial Year	SSA	Budget
2001–02	117.95	111.11
2002–03	115.33	104.78
2003–04	126.74 (provisional)	

Notes:
The SSA figure for 2003–04 is provisional and not comparable with 2002–03. The figures for 2002–03 and 2003–04 exclude provision transferred to the LSC from 2002–03. The figure for 2003–04 includes grant and pension funding transferred into EFS in 2003–04.
In 2003–04 Newcastle's Education Formula Spending Share rose by 6 per cent. per pupil or 5.7 per cent. in cash terms. The overall cash increase does not compare with last year's Education SSA because of the transfers mentioned above.
The education budgets for 2001–02 and 2002–03 are derived from Newcastle's S52 Budget Statements for those years—as submitted to the Department.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many statutory instruments have been issued by his Department in each calendar year since 1979. [89838]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The number of statutory instruments issued by my Department, and its predecessor Departments, since 1979 is as follows:

Year	Number of statutory instruments issued
1979	81
1980	105
1981	101
1982	90
1983	79
1984	61
1985	72
1986	53
1987	71
1988	79

Year	Number of statutory instruments issued
1989	94
1990	78
1991	92
1992	107
1993	74
1994	103
1995	84
1996	88
1997	70
1998	144
1999	206
2000	148
2001	167
2002	165

Teaching Regulations

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make it a policy of the Government to limit relevant employment under the Education (Teachers' Qualifications and Health Standards) (England) Regulations 1999 to teaching; and if he will make a statement. [90435]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 13 January 2003]:* Teachers and those who work with children and young persons, in effect, act in loco parents for those in their charge, and they require a high standard of physical and mental fitness to undertake the demands involved. The provisions of the Education (Teachers' Qualifications and Health Standards) (England) Regulations 1999 ensure that such workers are fit for the job, and are essential in adding to the safeguards aimed at protecting the health, welfare and education of children.

It is vital that people who work on a regular basis with children and young persons (for example, home tutors, support staff, and welfare officers) are fit to do so. It would not, therefore, be appropriate to limit this requirement to teachers.

Visual Needs

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what recent programmes have been initiated by his Department to *(a)* promote early detection of specific ophthalmic conditions in children and *(b)* monitor their visual development; and what evaluation has been carried out as to the benefits of such programmes; [88369]

(2) what proportion of schools in England conduct vision screening for children *(a)* at school entry, *(b)* at age seven and *(c)* at age 11; [88370]

(3) if he will make it his policy to gather data on the number of children with undiagnosed visual needs in *(a)* mainstream and *(b)* special school provision; [88371]

(4) what assessment he has made of the impact of undetected sight problems on the educational achievement and inclusion of children in *(a)* mainstream and *(b)* special schools; [88372]

(5) what assessment he has made of current arrangements for eye health education in schools; [88373]

(6) what guidance his Department provides to teachers on the identification of sight problems among children in *(a)* early years provision, *(b)* primary schools and *(c)* secondary schools; [88374]

(7) whether it is his Department's policy that children with *(a)* suspected reading difficulties, *(b)* behavioural problems and *(c)* other forms of special educational needs should be offered a full visual assessment. [88375]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) has provided £1 million to support an Early Support Pilot Programme, which is a pan-disability national initiative aimed at identifying and developing good service provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities and their families. The Programme includes a number of projects looking at services for children with visual impairment. It will support development in a number of areas, including: initial assessment of need; co-ordination/multi-agency support for families; better information and access for families; improved professional knowledge and skills; service review and development; and improved partnership across agencies and geographical boundaries.

The Programme is being evaluated by a team from the National Children's' Bureau on an ongoing basis. The evaluation will inform the future development of the Programme.

The Department of Health is responsible for the provision of eye checks undertaken by local primary health care teams in accordance with professional advice. The principal threats to eye health and impaired vision development should be detected at or before school age is reached and be identified during a visual screening on school entry. Consideration is currently being given to the introduction of a universal test for all children when they start school at four or five. Older children may develop myopia (short sight) which is usually recognised when they complain of difficulty seeing clearly at distance. Since the onset of myopia commonly occurs between the ages of nine and 16 it is not possible to identify optimum ages for screening. Children may "pass" a routine screening examination only to find problems within the next few months. There is then a possibility that some children might not receive advice to attend an optometrist until after their next routine screening appointment. All children up to the age of 15 are entitled to a free sight test as are children aged 16–18 if they are in full-time education. Whenever parents or carers suspect that there is a problem with their child's sight they should take them to the optician's.

There are no plans to collect data on children in school, whose visual needs have not been diagnosed. However, from January 2004 the DfES will be collecting data by type of SEN as part of the Pupil Level Annual Schools Census. Information will be collected on pupils with statements of special educational need and those receiving additional or different help to support their SEN—School Action and School Action Plus. One of the categories will be visual impairment and schools will be able to record it as either a primary need or a secondary need. It is hoped that this will provide more detailed data on pupils with a range of SEN, including visual impairment.

No assessment has been made of the impact of undetected sight problems on the educational attainment and inclusion of children in school. Nor has an assessment been made of current arrangements for eye health education in schools.

Students undertaking initial teacher training are required to understand their responsibilities under the DfES's SEN Code of Practice and to know where to go to seek advice. They are also required to be able to demonstrate that they can differentiate their teaching to meet the individual needs of pupils with SEN, including those with visual impairment.

Support for training and development in relation to SEN and disabilities is available to local education authorities (LEAs) and schools through the SEN component of the DfES's Standards Fund. The funding is designed to be used flexibly to support developmental opportunities ranging from basic awareness-raising to more in-depth studies, possibly leading to formal qualifications. It is for individual LEAs and schools to determine expenditure priorities according to local needs and circumstances, but it would certainly be possible to use the funding to support training for teachers in the area of visual impairment.

The SEN Code of Practice provides practical advice to LEAs, maintained schools and others on carrying out their statutory duties to identify, assess and make provision for children's SEN, including for children with visual impairment. The Code aims to promote consistency of approach, but, within its guidelines, it is for individual schools and LEAs to determine appropriate intervention based on an assessment of each child's individual needs and circumstances.

It would be for schools and LEAs to decide whether it was appropriate to carry out a specific visual assessment, if it was thought that visual impairment was contributing to a child's other educational difficulties.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Asbestos Leaks

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many asbestos leaks occurred in buildings owned or leased by *(a)* the Department of Education in Northern Ireland and *(b)* South Eastern Education and Library Board since 1973; where these leaks occurred; and how many people were exposed in each case. [89457]

Jane Kennedy: *(a)* The Department of Education does not own or lease any buildings. Departmental staff occupy buildings at two locations, Rathgael House in Bangor and Waterside House in Londonderry. Both sites are owned or leased by the Department of Finance and Personnel, Office Accommodation Branch (OAB).

(b) I have been advised by the South Eastern Education and Library Board that it does not retain records on this issue dating back to 1973. Neither is it aware of any instances of asbestos leakage at any of its schools. In addition to the leak at the board headquarters in September 2002, the details of which you are aware from my recent replies to you, the SEELB has advised that there have been three occasions involving disturbances of asbestos during the carrying out of maintenance work. These were at:

Killyleagh Outdoor Education Centre in December 1999;

Board Headquarters in September 2000; and

Castlewellan Library in November 2001.

On none of these occasions were any staff or members of the public affected by asbestos.

Department for Regional Development (Funding)

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland why £48 million allocated to the Department for Regional Development for the financial 2002–03 year had to be handed back to the Northern Ireland central administration in autumn 2002; and if he will make a statement. [89822]

Mr. Pearson: Clarification of the nature of stage payments to Northern Ireland Railways (NIR) to purchase new trains confirmed that they did not create an asset, and hence those payments were not a charge on the Department's departmental expenditure limit (DEL). Although the Department for Regional Development made substantial grant payments to NIR in 2001–02 and 2002–03 in respect of trains, none of this scores in the budget under the resource budgeting rules that apply for those two financial years. As soon as this technicality was clarified, in August 2002, £49 million was made available for re-allocation, under the normal rules that apply to all Departments. This funding, together with other funds identified by Departments, has been allocated to good effect across Departments and is profiled to be spent in the current financial year. The revised budget for 2003–04 to 2005–06 published on 11 December 2002 includes the required provision for the purchase of the new trains and delivery in 2004 is on schedule.

Departmental Underspend

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the five most significant individual projects which contributed to departmental underspends in Northern Ireland during the past five years; and what the value was of each project. [90021]

Mr. Pearson: The introduction of Devolution in 1999 involved the restructuring of NI Departments, and an increase in number from six to 11. This factor, combined with the introduction of resource accounting and budgeting in the 2001–02 financial year, means it is not possible to make meaningful comparisons between outturn information across the span of five years requested. However, the table shows the five most significant capital projects which contributed to departmental underspends in Northern Ireland in 2001–02, the latest year for which information is available.

2001–02 most significant capital project underspends

Department	*Project*	*£ million*
DEL	Research Institute for Electronics, Communications and IT Technologies	3.0
DETI	Telecommunications Initiative	7.2
DHSSPS	Trusts Capital Programme	9.2
	Centralised IT Projects	4.5
DRD	NITHCo: Purchase of Rolling Stock[1]	13.0

[1] This arose due to technical issues associated with the transition to RAB, rather than project management issues.

Model Primary School

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to ensure the completion of renovation work at the Model Primary School in Newtownards. [89450]

Jane Kennedy: A scheme for the extension and refurbishment of the Model Primary School in Newtownards is on my Department's school capital priority list.

In May 2002 a draft economic appraisal on the options for meeting the school's needs was submitted to the Department by the South-Eastern Education and Library Board. The board is currently revising the draft and the updated version is expected to be with the Department in the near future.

Subject to agreement on the conclusions and recommendations of the economic appraisal, and bearing in mind the constraints in relation to the listed building status of the school, planning of the scheme may then commence.

South Eastern Education Library Board

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will take steps to institute a public inquiry into *(a)* the asbestos leak at the Headquarters of the South Eastern Education Library Board in September 2002 and *(b)* steps taken to address the consequences. [89533]

Jane Kennedy: No. The Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland has carried out an investigation into this issue and I do not consider that there is need for a further investigation.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Retail Industry Crime

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on crime in the retail industry. [R] [88647]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 7 January 2003]:* My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and I recognise the detrimental impact that crime has on the retail industry and other business sectors. That is why I launched a consultation process in December to seek the views of business organisations and other stakeholders on the best means of creating and maintaining effective partnerships to reduce the opportunities for crime against business and enhance the contribution that business can make to crime reduction.

It is our intention to build on the good work already done by organisations like the British Retail Consortium in the development of retail crime reduction partnerships in main town and shopping centres. We will continue to support such partnerships.

The Home Secretary announced in April last year a new survey of crime affecting retail and manufacturing business. This will give a range of information about the types of crime which most impact on these business sectors and provide insights into the most effective interventions to address them. Results of the survey should be available in the summer.

The Government have allocated £15 million over the years 2001–02 to 2003–04 to improve the security of small retail businesses in deprived areas. Nearly 3,000 shops benefited from the first year's funding and a further 4,500 individual shops and businesses will benefit directly from the £6 million made available under the second year of the scheme. A further £6 million will be available in the third year to enable more shopkeepers to benefit from extra security.

Many of the Government's crime reduction initiatives, such as the closed circuit television initiative with nearly 700 schemes approved, also have a beneficial impact on retail crime.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what estimate he has made of the cost of crime in the retail industry in *(a)* Lancashire, *(b)* the north-west of England and *(c)* Wales; [R] [88653]

(2) what estimates he has made of the financial cost of petty crime on small retail businesses in the UK. [R] [88648]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 7 January 2003]:* The total cost of all commercial and public sector victimisation in England and Wales was estimated to be £9.1 billion in 1999–2000, of which around £3.1 billion was due to theft from shops. Figures are not available regionally nor by the size of establishment.

The 1994 Commercial Victimisation Survey gives average yearly costs of crime in 1993 across all small employers (1–10 employees) in the retail sector in England and Wales. These are shown in the table by product sold.

Average yearly costs (1993) of crime for all small employers in the retailing sector, whether victimised or not

Product sold	*Average cost (£)*
Food	2,040
Alcohol/tobacco	2,730
High value electrical/patented goods	2,250
Furniture/clothing	2,040
Jewellery/precious metal	1,880
None of the above	1,500
All	1,850

A new survey of crime affecting retail and manufacturing business is currently being carried out and the results should be available later in the year.

Terrorism

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what command and control measures will be introduced in the event of a major terrorist incident; and how long this would take to set up in the event of such an emergency. [88387]

Mr. Blunkett: The police have the primary role in responding to a terrorist incident and the force in whose area the incident takes place would take operational control and command of the incident at the scene. The Government response is co-ordinated at ministerial level through the Cabinet Office Briefing Room (COBR) in London. COBR is responsible for determining the overall political strategy in relation to the incident including responding to any political demands made by a terrorist group. COBR would also arrange for the provision of any necessary assistance requested by the police incident commander. In the event of a terrorist incident, the police and Government level response would be deployed as a matter of urgency.

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce a central directive instructing each of the Government agencies in what to do in the event of a terrorist incident. [88487]

Mr. Blunkett: The Home Office takes lead responsibility for co-ordinating the response to a terrorist incident within the UK. A set of classified contingency plans exist for responding to a wide range of terrorist threats. The response to any terrorist incident relies upon a co-ordinated approach and the Government draws upon the resources of other Departments, the security and intelligence agencies, the police, the military, scientific and other specialist advice, local authorities and the emergency services.

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had, and with which local authorities, on the protection of people living in Dudley from terrorist attack; and if he will make a statement. [87376]

Mr. Blunkett: At the local level, counter terrorism is the responsibility of the police. This work is carried out in close conjunction with the Home Office, which has lead responsibility for this issue. Police forces will issue advice as necessary, as well as taking the lead as and when a terrorist incident arises. Local authorities do not have a direct involvement in counter terrorism.

Local authorities have a general role in emergency planning, dealing with the consequences of all emergencies, including those arising from terrorist attack. My right hon. Friend the Lord Macdonald of Tradeston and Cabinet Office officials have regular contact with local authorities on this issue, through the provision of formal guidance, funding and co-ordination of local arrangements with national policy.

Terrorist Threats

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the dates on which arrests were made in connection with recent terrorist threats in the United Kingdom. [90146]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 13 January 2003]:* Since 1 December 2002 and to date, a total of 50 arrests have been made under the Terrorism Act 2000. 29 of those were released without charge and 20 were charged with a range of offences under the Terrorism Act. A further one still remains in custody.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions his Department has had with other Departments about the timing of announcements relating to the discovery of terrorist threats in Britain. [90147]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 13 January 2003]:* There are regular discussions on the whole range of counter terrorist issues through a number of committees. Where intelligence exists about specific threats we seek to thwart them and take whatever response we believe necessary to ensure the protection of the public. If the Government or the police thought it was necessary to give the public a specific warning we would do it without hesitation. Our prime consideration is their safety.

Asylum Seekers

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultation was carried out with voluntary organisations in receipt of funding for the training and education of asylum seekers before the decision was made to end the concession enabling asylum seekers to work if no decision had been made on their case after six months. [R] [89778]

Beverley Hughes: Wherever possible we consult publicly on proposed changes in policy. But on this occasion the need to act quickly meant that there was no time for public consultation.

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the European Council of Ministers recommendation concerning minimum standards for the reception conditions of asylum-seekers. [R] [89783]

Beverley Hughes: The UK will participate in the Directive on Reception Conditions, which forms part of the first stage of a Common European Asylum System, which the council committed to in the Treaty of Amsterdam 1997. The Reception Conditions Directive is expected to be adopted shortly.

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if asylum seekers who do not have a decision after one year will be allowed access to the labour market, as recommended by the Council of Ministers report on minimum standards for the reception of asylum seekers. [R] [89784]

Beverley Hughes: In accordance with the Directive of Minimum Reception Conditions for asylum seekers, which is expected to enter into force in 2005, access to the labour market will be granted to any applicant who has not received an initial decision within 12 months.

However, given that around 80 per cent. of initial asylum decisions are made well within half this time, this provision is unlikely to have any practical significance.

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has received the report on the Landmark Co. in Liverpool concerning housing and support services for asylum seekers; and if he will make a statement. [90627]

Beverley Hughes: I have received the report into the Inquiry into Landmark. I am currently considering the contents of the report.

Children's Internet Sites

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to make Criminal Records Bureau checks mandatory for moderators of children's internet sites. [86423]

Hilary Benn: There is no provision in Part 5 of the Police Act 1997, which established the Criminal Records Bureau, by which checks can be made mandatory.

We introduced in the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) (Amendment) Order 2002 (2002 No. 441), an exception for "Any employment which is concerned with the monitoring, for the purposes of child protection, of communications by means of the internet". This makes checks on moderators of chat rooms, and other forms of internet communication, used by children, possible. We are encouraging this in good practice models and guidance for the internet industry, which will be published by the task force on child protection on the internet early in the new year and are confident that operators in this country will take advantage of this possibility.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 4 November from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. Rizgar Ghalib Ali. [89235]

Mr. Blunkett: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 13 January 2003.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 14 November from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to the Nawab International Restaurant Group. [89240]

Beverley Hughes: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 2 January 2003.

David Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Walsall, North of 26 November 2002, regarding a constituent, ref 24367/2. [90259]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 13 January 2003]:* A reply to the letter was sent on 10 January.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letters from the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East of *(a)* 18 July 2002, *(b)* 20 September 2002, *(c)* 4 November 2002 and *(d)* 4 December 2002 regarding the case of Miss Zakiya Motala. [90285]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 13 January 2003]:* I wrote to my hon. Friend on 9 January 2003.

Criminal Records Bureau

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average time between receipt of a communication by the Criminal Records Bureau and an answer being sent has been in *(a)* each week and *(b)* each month of the last 12 months [87945]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* The Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) offers three different ways to contact the bureau—by telephone, by post or by e-mail. The CRB aims to deal with all inquiries quickly and efficiently. Its target is to answer 90 per cent. of all telephone calls within 20 seconds. The call centre has consistently exceeded this service standard.

The CRB aims to reply to all e-mails that are sent to the CRB website address within 24 hours of receipt and indications are that this target is currently being met.

The CRB aims to provide a response to written correspondence within one week of receipt. At present there is no information available to confirm to what extent this target is being met, as the details are not collated centrally, but the target is not yet being fully achieved.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much money is owed within the Criminal Records Bureau; and *(a)* by and *(b)* to whom it is owed. [87946]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* As at 31 October 2002 the Passport and Records Agency owed £350,902 to Capita in unpaid invoices. In addition to this £5,033,514.07 was accrued for charges incurred in the month that had yet to be invoiced by Capita.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what penalties have been incurred by Capita on the Criminal Records Bureau contract. [87947]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* There is provision under the terms of the contract between Capita and the Home Office for penalties for delay or poor performance. Capita has incurred liquidated damages, although, as is normal in such contracts the details remain commercial in confidence. The main priority is for the Criminal Records Bureau and Capita to collaborate in order to achieve further improvement in the quality of service.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which staff get priority treatment for their Criminal Record Bureau checks; and how this is assessed. [87948]

Hilary Benn: There is no priority treatment given to any staff from any sector for their Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks. The CRB did take on extra resources in August/September 2002 to process those applications from teachers and classroom assistants.

The CRB does, where possible, seek to expedite individual applications from any sector, which are exceptionally delayed.

Cultural Integration and Co-operation

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to combat terrorism through cultural integration and co-operation. [88728]

Mr. Blunkett: The Government are committed to ensuring the fair treatment and inclusion of all communities within our society. We are actively working to ensure that where there are divisions along lines of race, religion, class—or any other cultural factor—barriers are broken down, discrimination is eradicated and positive relationships are encouraged.

In addition, we attach great importance to helping those who settle here—and existing British citizens—gain a fuller appreciation of the civic and political dimensions of British citizenship and, in particular, to understand the rights and responsibilities that come with British citizenship. This will help to strengthen active participation in our democracy and a sense of community belonging. This is why we introduced the citizenship curriculum in schools in September and why we have appointed an independent group under the chairmanship of Professor Sir Bernard Crick to make recommendations on the standard of language skills it might be reasonable to expect of someone seeking naturalisation. The group will also be advising on the content and delivery of a "Living in the United Kingdom" programme.

Taken together these measures will help to reduce the risk of disaffection that can lead, in some extreme cases, to support for terrorism.

Domestic Violence

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many incidents of domestic violence were reported in the *(a)* Twickenham constituency, *(b)* London borough of Richmond upon Thames and *(c)* London in each year since 1992; how many people died in these incidents in each area; and if he will make a statement. [88816]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 9 January 2003]:* Domestic violence is not separately identified in recorded crime statistics collected by the Home Office. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary collects figures from police forces on best value performance indicators (BVPIs) broken down by force and basic command unit (BCU) area.

BVPI 153a records the number of domestic violence incidents where there was a power of arrest. Domestic violence is defined as an incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or who have been intimate partners (defined as more than just friends or acquaintances) of family members, regardless of gender. Family members are defined as mother, father, son, daughter, brother, sister, grandparents, in-laws and step family.

Richmond BCU is co-terminus with the London borough and figures can be provided for that area but the data does not enable the number of incidents in Twickenham to be identified. This information has been collected only for the last two years. Previous records were compiled on a different basis and not to BCU level.

There were 329 domestic violence incidents (as defined above) in Richmond BCU in 2000–01 and 384 in 2001–02. In the Metropolitan police area there were 27,681 incidents in 2000–01 and 28,794 in 2001–02.

It is not possible to say how many of these figures were homicides.

The Government are committed to tackling domestic violence at all levels. It is a serious and abhorrent crime that accounts for one quarter of all violent crime and claims the lives of two women a week. Nearly half of all female murder victims are killed by a partner or an ex-partner. The Government will do everything it can to tackle it and ensure that victims receive the highest levels of support and protection.

My right hon. Friend Home Secretary recently announced a consultation paper setting out proposals to prevent domestic violence, which will be published by spring 2003. This consultation will build on the initial consultation on domestic violence in the White Paper, "Justice for All", and the on-going work of the inter-departmental Ministerial Group on Domestic Violence.

The inter-departmental Ministerial Group on Domestic Violence brings together eight Ministers to progress five priority areas for action.

Increasing safe accommodation choices for women and children;

Developing early and effective health care interventions;

Improving the interface between the criminal and civil law;

Ensuring a consistent and appropriate response from the police and Crown Prosecution Service; and

Promoting Education and Awareness Raising.

Tackling the problem means more than just providing initial support for victims. We want to ensure that offenders are prosecuted, help the police to prevent repeat victimisation, and protect the lives of the vulnerable.

Estonian Baltic Dancers

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether an official of the Immigration Service visited the residence in Northern Ireland of the Estonian Baltic Dancers; whether the dancers overstayed their 12 week group permit; and what attempt was made to verify their ages and the travel documents they were using. [90044]

Beverley Hughes: The residence of foreign nationals believed to be employed at the Movie Star Cafe was visited by the United Kingdom Immigration Service (UKIS) on 18 December 2002. Four female foreign nationals were encountered (one Latvian, one Estonian, one Russian and one Colombian) who all declared they were employed at the club.

The Latvian and Estonian females confirmed they were part of a group of 17 dancers who were granted a 12 week work permit on 1 July 2002. These two

individuals advised that they had entered the UK (Northern Ireland) overland via the Irish Republic on a number of occasions since 1 July and had not seen an immigration officer on arrival. A provision of The Variation of Leave (Entry through Ireland) Order 1981 is that persons arriving in the United Kingdom by this route are deemed to have leave for a specific period as a visitor. They have, however, not been granted leave to work by an immigration officer and without doing so are not allowed to take employment. The individuals and the club owner were advised of this and that the deemed leave was due to expire the following day. The Immigration Service has confirmed that the two women departed the UK in order to avoid overstaying their leave.

The Russian and Colombian females were both visa nationals but neither held valid UK visas. The Immigration Service therefore served illegal entry papers on them and the Russian national made a voluntary departure on 20 December. The Colombian national has submitted an application to remain in the United Kingdom and has been granted temporary release pending consideration of her case.

An immigration officer examined the passports of the four foreign nationals encountered at the club and noted that all four were of adult age.

Somali Groups (Financial Support)

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what financial support has been given to Somali groups in each of the past five years. [89374]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 9 January 2003]:* The financial support that the Home Department has directly paid to Somali groups between 1998–99 and 2002–03 were as follows.

Recipient	*Amount (£)*
2002–03	
From Community Champions to Mohammed Wali for running activities and establishing services for the Somalian Refugee Community in Handsworth Bham.	2,000
Community Cohesion Summer Activity Scheme paid to Regent College, Leicester for a sport and leisure programme for local Somali and Montserrat young people. Somali young people were also encouraged to go to other summer schemes but this was the only one funded specifically for the Somali new comer communities in this region.	33,780
Purposeful Activity for Asylum Seekers	
Somali Advice and Information Centre, Leicester	2,170
Bariimo Somali Youth Project, Harrow	2,100
2001–02	
Refugee Community Development Fund	
Somali Physical Disabled Support Group, Sheffield	4,930
Somali Youth Association, Milton Keynes	4,150
Somaliland Health and Education Project, London SE19	3,650
Stonebridge Somali Centre, London	4,789
Somali Community Support Centre, London W14	4,861
Horn Stars Sports Club, London NW10	5,000
East London Somali Association	5,000
European Refugee Fund	
(The accounting periods are calendar years)	
2002	
East London Somali Association	28,847
Somali Advisory Bureau, London W2	9,230
2001	
East London Somali Association	21,318
Somali Advisory Bureau, London W2	9,730
Somali Cultural Centre, London NW6	18,650
2000	
Somali Advisory Bureau, London W2	4,865

Football Hooligans

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures have been introduced *(a)* to assist the police in combating football hooliganism in the UK and *(b)* to ensure that people who organise fights are prosecuted. [88726]

Mr. Denham: Government works closely with the Association of Chief Police Officers, individual forces and the National Criminal Intelligence Service in tackling football disorder. The police and courts in England and Wales have been provided with extensive legislative powers for combating football hooliganism. This includes empowering the police to seek football banning orders against individuals who pose a risk of violence or disorder in connection with football matches. The orders prevent attendance at domestic matches and travel to matches played overseas. There are currently over 1,400 people subject to banning orders. There is no comparable legislation in Scotland or Northern Ireland.

Gloucester Prison

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what discussions he has had with the governor of HMP Gloucester regarding *(a)* the removal of young adults from the prison in June 2001 and *(b)* the reintroduction of young adults to the prison in June 2002; [89044]

(2) what recent discussions he has had with the governor of HMP Gloucester regarding conditions for young adults at the prison. [89043]

Hilary Benn: Minor and temporary changes to the population of a prison for operational reasons are a matter for the Director General of the Prison Service.

The young offender population was removed from Gloucester prison in 2001 as there was sufficient accommodation available at other establishments, including Ashfield prison. In June 2002, the rapid growth in the prison population as a whole resulted in Gloucester prison again being used to accommodate young offenders. I am assured by the area manager and the governing governor responsible for Gloucester prison that conditions for young offenders at Gloucester are satisfactory.

Oakington

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to establish a removal centre alongside the immigration reception centre at Oakington in Cambridgeshire. [89801]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 13 January 2003]:* No decision has been made to alter the current status of Oakington. I am currently looking at this matter and will write to the hon. Member once a decision has been made.

Refugee Integration

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what assessment he has made of the impact upon refugee integration of the reduced entitlement to guidance and language training due to the withdrawal of the work concession for asylum-seekers who do not have an initial decision after six months; [R] [89782]

(2) what assessment he has made of the impact of the withdrawal of the work concession for asylum-seekers who will eventually receive permission to remain in the UK upon their ability to develop their English language and other skills. [R] [89780]

Beverley Hughes: By the time the concession was abolished about 80 per cent. of new applications were receiving an initial decision within the initial six months. The number of new asylum seekers able to benefit from the concession was therefore falling and will continue to do so. Asylum seekers who had permission to work or who had sought permission to do so before the concession was abolished continue to be able to work and receive work based training.

Asylum seekers remain eligible to attend a range of courses to assist in the development of English for speaker of other languages (ESOL) and other basic skills in the short period before a decision is taken on their claim.

Settlement Visa Applications

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average length of time for the Home Office immigration department to process a settlement visa application for the spouse of a British citizen was over the last 12 months; and what the expected length of time is, as outlined in the Home Office guidelines, for the Department to process a settlement visa application for the spouse of a British citizen. [90120]

Beverley Hughes: There is no published data on decision times specifically to determine applications for settlement of spouses of British citizens. We aim to screen all postal applications within three weeks and decide those that are straightforward at that point. However, because of the high number of applications in the latter part of 2002 this is currently taking around 10 weeks on average. Some that need further inquiries or more detailed consideration can take around 12 months to decide subject to how easy it is to obtain the information and how quickly applicants respond to such requests. We are taking measures to improve this situation and expect to make significant progress towards our three week target for initial screening over the next two to three months, and to reduce the turnaround time for deciding more complex cases. There are no guidelines on average processing times for specific types of application.

Statutory Instruments

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Statutory Instruments subject to negative procedure made by his Department *(a)* came into force and *(b)* were considered by a delegated legislation committee in each of the last three sessions. [88028]

Hilary Benn: Details of the Statutory Instruments (SIs) made each session by Home Office Ministers, which came into force, are not held and such information could not be made available other than at disproportionate cost. However, statistics on the number of negative instruments made by Home Office Ministers each year, are kept. The numbers for negative instruments for each of the past three years are as follows, none have been annulled.

Negative instruments

Year	*Number of SIs made*
2000	73
2001	61
2002[1]	60

[1] Provisional figure

The Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments considers all negative Statutory Instruments once they have been made.

Sussex Traffic Police

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on changes to traffic policing within Sussex; [89347]

(2) if he will make a statement on changes in shift patterns for Sussex traffic police; [89350]

(3) what police traffic operations will be based within *(a)* Adur and *(b)* Worthing following current reorganisation proposals. [89348]

Mr. Denham: These are matters for the Chief Constable of Sussex. I understand that the changes in question stem from a force operational review that the chief constable established with the aim of getting more capacity at the front line of policing. The review acknowledged the important role the traffic division played in the policing of Sussex and concluded that the best way forward was the establishment of a smaller road policing unit (RPU) and a dedicated force wide unit taking advantage of automatic number plate recognition technology. The RPU will concentrate on the investigation of road death, potential road death and serious injury collisions, on patrolling and dealing with incidents on the strategic road network, and on assisting district commanders by providing specialist expertise.

These changes reflect the priorities contained within the National Policing Plan 2003–06. They will enable officers to concentrate on core police business and ensure a high level of service to the community, while also allowing the effective use of specialist skills.

I understand from the chief constable that within the new arrangements the established RPU base at Chichester will remain, with an enhanced staffing and vehicle level. Adur and Worthing, with Chichester, are within the West Downs division. Deployment profiles are in the process of being established to provide a response across the division. Road policing lends itself to a flexible approach and support will also be provided from other base areas such as North Downs and Brighton and Hove.

The chief constable and force operational review identified the number of differing shift and rest day patterns across the force area as adversely affecting the force's ability to mobilise resources quickly and effectively. A force working pattern was therefore proposed. In line with Police Regulations this pattern was put to the workforce, who voted overwhelmingly for its adoption. A shift pattern has now been developed by the RPU, which maximises resourcing levels at times of operational need such as the morning and evening traffic peaks.

CABINET OFFICE

Contingency Planning

Tom Brake: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what assessment the Department has made of the effect of devolution on comprehensive contingency provision in the United Kingdom. [86601]

Mr. Blunkett: I have been asked to reply.

The Government are satisfied that arrangements for contingency planning between the constituent parts of the United Kingdom have not suffered any detriment due to devolution. Every effort has been made to ensure consistency and proper co-ordination.

The devolved Administrations participate in the Civil Contingencies Committee and its sub-committees. Cabinet Office officials work closely with the devolved Administrations to facilitate the provision of comprehensive contingency arrangements in the United Kingdom.

Tom Brake: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what arrangements are made to ensure that contingency provision exists to safeguard the public in the event of a major civil disaster; when such arrangements were last updated; and what changes were made. [86596]

Mr. Blunkett: I have been asked to reply.

There are well established arrangements for civil protection at national and regional level, involving Government Ministers, Government Departments, emergency services, local authorities and others. The Government support these arrangements by providing funding and guidance, as appropriate.

The Government reviewed general emergency planning arrangements in 2001. It also reviewed and updated its management in light of the fuel protests, the foot and mouth outbreak, recent flooding and the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. As a result, measures have been taken by Government Departments, the emergency services and local authorities to improve assessment, detection, protection, planning and response to a wide range of threats. This work continues to develop according to risks and capabilities.

The Government recognise that the current legislative framework for civil protection needs updating to meet the challenges of the 21st century. It plans to introduce new legislation as soon as parliamentary time allows. Work involving a wide range of stakeholders is well under way to develop this legislation.

Tom Brake: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what common standards are set across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in order to ensure good and proper contingency provision; and what arrangements exist for their inspection. [86598]

Mr. Blunkett: I have been asked to reply.

Consistency between the guidance documents is ensured by liaison between the Cabinet Office and the devolved Administrations, who work together to deliver co-ordinated contingency planning across the United Kingdom.

The core guidance documents for contingency planning arrangements for England and Wales are: "Dealing With Disaster" (3rd Edition) and "Standards for Civil Protection in England and Wales" produced by the Home Office in October 1999. A revised version of "Dealing With Disaster" is scheduled for publication in the first half of 2003. The arrangements are under the oversight of the Cabinet Committee on Civil Contingencies and Resilience which I chair.

Emergency planning in Scotland is a devolved responsibility. In Scotland and Northern Ireland the guidance reflects the principles and methodology of the above documents but is adapted to take account of local circumstances.

The main guidance document in Scotland is: "Dealing With Disaster Together" produced by the Scottish Executive Justice Department.

In Northern Ireland, the key documents are: "A Guide to Emergency Planning in Northern Ireland", which is currently under review, and "Northern Ireland Standards in Civil Protection".

Auditing is carried out by a range of bodies. For example, the emergency services are monitored by service inspectorates, and the National Audit Office monitors the work of central Government Departments.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Decontamination

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) how many firefighters have been trained in decontamination techniques to help the general public; how many protective suits are available in each fire authority area; and what expenditure has been incurred; [89904]

(2) whether the funds made available in February 2002 for mass decontamination service have been drawn upon. [89903]

Mr. Raynsford: Individual records of fire fighter training are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. In December 2001 the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister issued guidance on the provision of interim mass decontamination facilities using existing equipment. All fire authorities have trained their personnel who need to use this equipment and approximately 120 of the service's senior commanders have received multi agency training, which will continue. Currently the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister estimates that there are 3,900 protective suits available throughout the UK Fire Service.

Under the new dimension mass decontamination programme announced last year the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will, by the end of 2002–03, have spent over £8 million on new equipment as well as the costs of training and the regional implementation teams. A further £27.7 million expenditure on equipment costs is already committed in 2003–04. The full programme will provide an extra 4,000 protective suits.

Environmental Protective and Cultural Services

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which local government services are funded via the environmental protective and cultural services standard spending assessment. [90658]

Mr. Raynsford: The environmental protective and cultural services covers corporate and democratic core costs and all local government services not included under the education, personal social services, police, fire, highways and capital financing blocks.

Fire Safety Legislation

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister in relation to the Government's consultation, when consultation on changes to fire safety legislation through a regulatory reform order under the Regulatory Reform Act 2001 will be completed; when the final version of the regulatory reform order will be published; and how many responses to the consultation expressed concerns relating to fires in very large single storey buildings. [89759]

Mr. Raynsford: Consultation on the Government's proposals for reform of fire safety legislation closed on 22 November 2002. A number of responses were received after the closing date and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is considering the detail of all comments received. Of the consultation responses assessed so far, four have mentioned concerns about fire in large single storey buildings.

The order will be published, in accordance with normal practice for Statutory Instruments, when it is laid before the House. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister anticipates this being later this year.

Housing Standards

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to develop a housing poverty indicator to enable the development of more accurate evidence-based policies. [88541]

Mrs. Roche: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister Department is currently involved in a project to consider options for strengthening and updating the Indices of Deprivation 2000 (ID 2000), including the way housing deprivation is measured. Preliminary proposals for improving the housing domain were published in the Stage One Consultation report, which is out to consultation until 15 January 2003. These proposals include:

- Using the most up-to-date information including data from the 2001 Census and the 2001 English House Condition Survey to update current indicators;
- Investigating the possibility of adding new indicators to measure children living in unsuitable accommodation, households lacking amenities and houses without central heating; and
- Considering how the 2002 English House Condition Survey might be used to model further indicators on housing quality.

Once the consultation is over, the next step would be to draft a blue print setting out actual plans for updating the ID 2000, taking on board consultation responses. This blue print will then be subject to an independent peer review and a further period of consultation before the ID 2000 is updated.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his housing decency standard relating heat loss to energy input is; and what temperature that standard is designed to maintain. [89570]

Mr. McNulty: The decent home standard does not include a measure of energy efficiency. There are two measures in the standard that will impact on the energy efficiency of homes. The standard requires dwellings to achieve a reasonable degree of thermal comfort through provision of efficient heating and effective insulation.

Guidance on implementing the standard encourages landlords to maximise energy efficiency where feasible when installing new heating systems.

Under the fitness standard, which is another component of the decent home standard, a property must have adequate provision for heating. This is defined as sufficient to achieve a temperature of 18°C in the main living room and 16°C in other habitable rooms when the outside temperature is minus 1°C.

Planning Law (Enforcement)

Mr. Wood: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what steps he intends to take to encourage planning authorities into the appropriate enforcement action when planning law is breached. [89556]

Mr. McNulty: Local planning authorities have a wide range of enforcement powers to enable them to deal with unauthorised development that is harming amenity in the neighbourhood. If they consider that unauthorised development is unacceptable on planning grounds, they have the power to take enforcement action. It is however a matter for the council to decide in each case whether to take enforcement action and, if so, the most appropriate course of action, taking account of local circumstances.

The Government have already set out policy and procedural good practice guidance for local authorities on enforcing planning control. A consultation paper on the effectiveness of planning enforcement was published last September. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is currently considering the responses to that exercise.

Public Conveniences

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make it his policy to require local authorities to respond annually to him on the number of public conveniences they operate and maintain; and if he will make a statement. [90700]

Mr. Leslie: Local authorities have a power, but are under no duty, to provide public conveniences under section 87 of the Public Health Act 1936. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has no plans to introduce additional reporting requirements in respect of provision of public conveniences.

Regional Assemblies

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the cost is of the soundings exercise on the level of interest in holding a referendum about an elective assembly in each English region. [90345]

Mr. Raynsford: The soundings document has been produced in-house, from the design and printing to its dissemination through the Government's distribution centre at Wetherby. It is also available on-line and respondents have been able to e-mail their views if they so wish. Production and distribution (including postage) has cost less than £700 to date.

Additional costs may be incurred if it is necessary to print extra copies in the future. There will be some staff costs in recording and considering responses to the soundings exercise.

Statutory Instruments

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many Statutory Instruments subject to negative procedure made by his Department *(a)* came into force and *(b)* were considered by a delegated legislation committee in each of the last three sessions. [88037]

Mr. Leslie: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister came into existence at the end of May 2002. Since then 22 statutory instruments subject to the negative resolution procedure for which the office is responsible have come into force. In the same period, four statutory instruments subject to that procedure for which the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is responsible have been the subject of a motion to revoke debated in standing committee.

Mobile Telecommunications Masts

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what progress has been made by his Department in implementing each of the recommendations of the Stewart report into mobile telecommunications masts. [89786]

Mr. McNulty: On 22 August 2001, following public consultation, and taking into account the recommendations in the Stewart report, published in May 2000, we introduced changes to the planning procedures and guidance (PPG8) for telecommunications mast development which significantly improved the planning procedures and guidance for telecommunications mast development. Our changes included:

- strengthened public consultation requirements on mast proposals of 15 metres and below so that they are the same as for planning applications;
- increased the time for an authority to deal with prior approval applications to 56 days;
- underlined that school governors must be consulted on all proposals for new masts on or near a school or college; and
- increased fees to enable authorities to carry out full public consultation

In November 2000, we published a revised Code of Best Practice on Mobile Phone Network Development. This is a tripartite document between central and local Government and the telecommunications industry and builds on the advice in PPG8 "Telecommunications" and the operators' 10 commitments to improve consultation on mast proposals with local communities and local planning authorities.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has no plans to amend further the planning arrangements for telecommunications development.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Documents (King Edward VIII)

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when she will make a decision on the release of documents relating to King Edward VIII. [90626]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I refer the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside to the written statement I made on 18 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 64WS.

EU Applicant Countries

Keith Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many visits to EU applicant countries he made in 2002. [90104]

Ms Rosie Winterton: My right hon. Friends the Lord Chancellor and Baroness Scotland both visited a number of EU applicant countries during 2002. The dates are provided in the table.

Minister	*Country visited*	*Date*
Baroness Scotland	Poland	24–25 January 2002
Baroness Scotland	Bulgaria	29–31 May 2002
Lord Chancellor	Czech Republic	9–10 September 2002
Lord Chancellor	Hungary	10–13 September 2002
Lord Chancellor	Poland	13–17 September 2002
Lord Chancellor	Slovenia	17–18 September 2002
Baroness Scotland	Poland	7–8 November 2002

Fly-tipping

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what guidance the Department gives to magistrates about sentences for fly-tipping and other breaches of waste legislation; if she plans to review that guidance; and if she will make a statement. [89619]

Yvette Cooper: No specific guidance is provided by the Lord Chancellor's Department to magistrates on sentences for fly-tipping and other breaches of waste legislation, but an Information Toolkit for Magistrates on Environmental Crime was produced jointly by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Magistrates' Association in November 2002.

The Magistrates Court Sentencing Guidelines, produced by the Magistrates' Association, provide a sentencing structure for magistrates including an indication of levels of seriousness and aggravating and mitigating features for offences that are most commonly presented before magistrates. For offences that appear in the magistrates courts less frequently magistrates will seek the advice of their legal adviser, who has access to up to date information on the relevant case law.

WORK AND PENSIONS

New Deal (Personal Adviser Discretion Fund)

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the levels are of *(a)* payments in error and *(b)* fraud in respect of the Adviser Discretion Fund; and if he will make a statement. [88473]

Malcolm Wicks: The Adviser Discretion Fund was introduced to give personal advisers more flexibility in the help they can offer their new deal clients. Advisers have the discretion to make awards from the fund, normally up to a maximum of £300, to pay for any goods and services needed to help an individual overcome the barriers preventing them applying for or taking up a job.

The Adviser Discretion Fund cannot be used: as a cash inducement to take up a job; to pay for things funded in other ways under the new deal; to pay for Criminal Records Bureau disclosure certificates; or once a client has taken up a job. Payments can be made in error if an adviser mistakenly makes awards for these purposes, or in cases where the total monetary value of the awards made to an individual exceeds £300 (without prior authorisation from the Jobcentre Plus business manager). Information on the level of such erroneous payments is not available.

Since the launch of the Adviser Discretion Fund in July 2001, 56 allegations of fraud have been or are currently being investigated, involving a total of £10,921. This represents 0.03 per cent. of awards made and 0.07 per cent. of their total monetary value.

Benefit Applicants (Hardship Cases)

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many *(a)* discretionary payments on account and *(b)* Crisis Loan alignment payments were made to applicants for benefit who faced hardship while their benefit application was being considered in the last four years for which figures are available; and what the total expenditure was on these payments. [85152]

Malcolm Wicks: We recognise that many people making a claim to benefit will be in need of immediate financial support. To avoid unnecessary hardship, discretionary payments on account of benefit (interim payments) can be made where a claim has not been determined but the Decision Maker is satisfied that the basic conditions of entitlement for the benefit are likely to be met. The amount of any interim payment is automatically recoverable from the main benefit when it is awarded. No record is kept of the number or value of interim payments made.

Crisis Loan alignment payments can be made to people awaiting their first payment of benefit which is paid in arrears, or their first payment of wages. Crisis Loans made to people awaiting benefit payments will cover their needs until their first benefit pay-day, following which full or interim payments of benefit can be made. In the main, these payments are made to people of working age (as pensioners are generally paid in advance). Information is not collected separately on the number or value of alignment payments made to people awaiting a first payment of benefit.

The available information is in the table. The figures show the total number and value of Crisis Loan alignment payments made, including those made to people awaiting payment of their first wage.

Social Fund Crisis Loan alignment payments

Year	Number of payments	Expenditure (£ million)
1998–99	433,851	20
1999–2000	474,076	23
2000–01	476,936	24
2001–02	486,031	27

Notes:
1. Expenditure figures are rounded to the nearest £ million.
2. Awards including alignment payments may include other items.
3. Technical problems with the Social Fund Policy, Budget and Management Information System mean that figures for 1998–99 may be subject to a margin of error of 5 per cent. to 10 per cent. and should therefore be treated as a guide only.

Sources:
Annual Reports by the Secretary of State on the Social Fund 1998–99 to 2001–02; and the Social Fund Policy, Budget and Management Information System.

Divorcees

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) whether a divorced woman can claim a full category A retirement pension on the basis of her ex-husband's contributions when she reaches the age of 60; [90498]

(2) whether a divorced woman who previously paid national insurance contributions at the reduced rate for married women can substitute her ex-husband's contributions record in respect of any year in which she paid contributions at the reduced rate. [90499]

Mr. McCartney: The following women whose marriages ended by divorce or annulment, may use the record of qualifying years of their former husband instead of their own, if their category A state pension does not reach the full rate:

Women who have not reached state pension age when their marriage ended and who have not remarried by the time they reach state pension age; and

Women over state pension age when their marriage ended.

The above conditions can apply irrespective of whether the woman was paying the married womens' reduced contributions, or full rate contributions as they are entitlements which accrue as a consequence of marriage.

However, this may not necessarily mean a woman will get a full category A state pension. The amount of state pension she gets will depend on her former husband's and her own national insurance records.

Ethical Banking

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what contracts have been concluded as a result of the Government's commitment to support ethical banking. [89921]

Mr. McCartney: The Department has not concluded any contracts as a result of a Government commitment to support ethical banking. There is nothing currently within the Department's procurement policy that would prevent such contracts from being let. The Government believe it is important for consumers to have choice in financial products, including the availability of "ethical" products. However, it would not be appropriate for the Government exclusively to support the development of one specific group of financial service providers. It is for individual consumers to decide the attributes they most value from their financial services and for financial services firms to be transparent about their use of funds and investments.

Maternity Pay

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to increase maternity pay to parents of premature babies. [87151]

Maria Eagle: We are improving maternity benefits as part of our drive to help pregnant women and parents financially and to achieve a better balance between their work and home lives.

Statutory Maternity Pay and Maternity Allowance were raised to £75 a week from April 2002. From April 2003, the standard rate for both payments will be increased further; a woman will receive the lesser of £100 a week or 90 per cent. of her average earnings. This is the largest increase since maternity benefits were introduced. We are also extending the payment period from 18 to 26 weeks for women expecting their babies on or after 6 April 2003—this will apply regardless of when the baby is actually born.

Women can choose to receive these benefits from up to 11 weeks before their baby is due. However, when a baby is born earlier than the date the mother has nominated or before the start of the 11-week period, benefit is automatically paid.

We have no plans to make separate provision for women who have their babies prematurely, as the current rules ensure that they receive their full entitlement to maternity benefits.

Pensioner Incomes (Mitcham and Morden)

Siobhain McDonagh: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what impact Government policy is having on the income of pensioners in Mitcham and Morden. [89834]

Mr. McCartney: This Government have done much to assist pensioners. The Government want all pensioners to have a decent and secure income in retirement and to share fairly in the rising prosperity of the country. The first priority has been to help the poorest pensioners.

From April 2002, the Government are spending an extra £6 billion a year in real terms on pensioners as a result of policies introduced since 1997. This includes £2½ billion more on the poorest third of pensioners. Three times more than an earnings link since 1998 would have given them.

The basic state pension is the foundation of income in retirement. The Government increased rates in April 2002 by £3 a week for single pensioners, to £75.50, and for couples by £4.80 a week, to £120.70. From April 2003, there will be further above inflation increases of £1.95 a week, to £77.45, and for couples by £3.10 a week to £123.80.

As at March 2002, around 13,100 people in Mitcham and Morden were in receipt of state pension.

From April 2003, no pensioner will have to get by on less than £102.10 (£155.80 for married couples). Mitcham and Morden has approximately 2,500 people claiming the minimum income guarantee receiving on average approximately £57 per week compared to £32 per week in 1997.

Around half of all pensioner households will benefit from the new groundbreaking pension credit being introduced in October.

In addition, other initiatives have significantly helped pensioners. These include winter fuel payments (WFPs), which will continue to be paid to qualifying households at £200 a year throughout this Parliament. In winter 2001–02, there were approximately 14,300 recipients of a winter fuel payment in Mitcham and Morden.

Free TV licences are available for the over 75s, worth £104 a year. The WFPs and TV licences are non income-related and are tax free.

Post Office Card Account

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what action he is taking to encourage the take-up of post office card accounts; [90756]

(2) what action he is taking to encourage benefit recipients to opt for post office card accounts when order books are replaced. [90757]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Tony Cunningham), on 17 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 604W.

Postcodes

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what use his Department and its agencies make of postcode areas for *(a)* the collection and publication of data, *(b)* devising formulae for the distribution of grants and awards and *(c)* the delivery of services; and when such usages were last reviewed. [87741]

Mr. McCartney: The Department makes limited use of postcodes to assist policy development and the delivery of services to our customers.

We do not publish any statistical information by postcode areas in their own right. However, it does use information based on postcodes as a building block to publish statistics on administrative or electoral districts, such as Government Office Regions or Parliamentary Constituencies. All of the department's National Statistics outputs are published on a regular basis and copies are placed in the Libraries of the Houses of Parliament.

Most of the grants and awards made by the Department are distributed on criteria devised at a national level. However, the award Cold Weather Payments is based on local conditions and does use postcodes to define eligible areas.

The delivery of services to our customers has been re-organised following the creation of the Department in 2001. In most cases, the departmental agencies are organised into regions and districts whose boundaries are aligned with Government Office Regions and one or more Local/Unitary Authorities.

Jobcentre Plus customers can access services through their nearest or most convenient Jobcentre Plus Office, Jobcentre or Social Security Office, regardless of their postcode. Postcodes are used to identify customers required to attend a work- focused meeting as the new integrated Jobcentre Plus service is introduced, in areas where ONE pilots operate and in some other parts of the office network.

The Pension Service will comprise of a network of 26 pension centres, supported by a national local service, dedicated to the needs of today's and tomorrow's pensioners. Customers can access services through an 0845 local rate telephone number. Each pension centre handles the work of a defined geographical area aligned to Government Office Regions.

Postcode listings used within the Department are updated each quarter. The use of postcodes to produce information, distribute grants and awards and deliver services in the most efficient manner possible is reviewed on a regular basis.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 15 January 2003

CABINET OFFICE

Departmental Staff

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the distribution of his Department's whole-time equivalent staff was, including the staff in agencies and other bodies reporting to him, in each Government office region and nation of the UK *(a)* in 1996 and *(b)* at the most recent available period. [90467]

Mr. Alexander: The numbers of staff in each Department (including its agencies) are shown in tables, copies of which have been placed in the Libraries of the House. The figures show the data at the 1 April each year, and are based on the full-time equivalent figures for the number of permanent staff in each Department, rounded to the nearest 10. Data are shown by Government Office Region, with columns giving the total number of staff in England and the UK.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Westminster Hall

Janet Anderson: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission if he will make a statement on his plans for Westminster Hall. [89869]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: The Commission has no plans for Westminster Hall. It has, however, been aware of growing pressure for the better welcome and reception of constituents and other visitors to the Palace of Westminster and to give them a better understanding of the work of Parliament. The Commission agrees with the Select Committee on the Modernisation of the House of Commons that a Visitor Centre would be desirable; such facilities are provided in many other Parliaments around the world. We therefore commissioned a feasibility study from the consultants Haley Sharpe and the conservation architects Purcell Miller Tritton. That study reviewed options for the siting of such a centre, and proposed a scheme consisting of a new security/reception building at the western end of the Jubilee Café and elements of a Visitor Centre in the accommodation outside the west wall of Westminster Hall, with the option of providing further facilities in Victoria Tower Gardens.

The Commission considered the consultants' report, recognised the sensitivity of the Westminster Hall location, and asked the consultants to carry out further studies of possible sites outside the Parliamentary Estate. In due course the Commission will consider the results of these studies, together with the views of the Modernisation and Finance and Services Committees, the Domestic Committees, the Speaker's Advisory Committee on Works of Art, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association United Kingdom Branch, the Inter-Parliamentary Union British Group and individual hon. Members. Any final decision would need to be agreed with the authorities of the House of Lords.

Doorkeepers

Mr. Peter Pike: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, what the main differences are between the pay and conditions of employment of the newly recruited doorkeepers of the House and those employed under the previous system; and if he will make a statement. [90123]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: The main difference between the conditions of employment of doorkeepers recruited since March 1998 and those employed before that date is their substantive pay band. This followed the Staff Inspector's review of the doorkeepers (completed in April 1997). I have asked the Director of Finance and Administration to write to the hon. Member with more detail.

Line of Route

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, what estimate he has made of the number of hon. Members whose constituents could gain access to the line of route, including the House of Commons, on a Wednesday *(a)* in 2002, and *(b)* in 2003, having travelled by public transport (i) without and (ii) with the use, where eligible, of railway Network cards. [89777]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: In 2002, 42 Wednesday mornings were available for tours and approximately 600 visitors a day were accommodated. In 2003, it is estimated that 41 Wednesday mornings will be available for tours and that 740 constituents a day could have access to the Line of Route, with a further 1,200 on Wednesday afternoons during Adjournments. This greater throughput is possible due to a more efficient operation following the creation of the Central Tours Office.

It is not possible to forecast the impact of railway network cards, but for guidance, groups would need to arrive at the Palace by 9.15 am on Wednesdays to complete a tour which includes the Chamber. Access to the Line of Route is available on tours booked with the Central Tours Office until 1200 on Wednesdays, although these tours exclude the House of Commons Chamber.

Mr. Evans: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission how many hours per week the Line of Route *(a)* was open before the change in working hours of the Commons and *(b)* is open after the change in working hours of the Commons. [90258]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: The Line of Route was open for the following hours per week before the change in sitting hours:

in a week with a non-sitting Friday: 17 hours 30 minutes,

in a week with a sitting Friday: 11 hours 30 minutes.

Following the change in sitting hours of this House, and the decision of the House of Lords to sit on Thursday mornings, the Line of Route is now open:

in a week with a non-sitting Friday: 10 hours 40 minutes plus 5 hours 20 minutes of Line of Route not including the Chamber.

in a week with a sitting Friday: 4 hours 40 minutes plus 5 hours 20 minutes of Line of Route not including the Chamber.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Water Charges

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what protection there is for consumers against overcharging by water companies. [89537]

Mr. Morley: The Director General of Water Services (Ofwat) regulates water and sewerage charges by setting a limit on the average increase in charges that a company can impose in any year. Companies may only charge households in accordance with charges schemes approved by Ofwat. In exercising his powers the Director General seeks to ensure that there is no undue preference or undue discrimination in the fixing of charges.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what requirements are placed on water companies on explaining charges to customers when compiling customer invoices. [89560]

Mr. Morley: Water companies must set out the basis on which they set their charges in charges schemes, which require annual approval by the Director General of Water Services (Ofwat). Charges schemes are available from companies free on request. Water companies have changed the presentation of customers' bills to meet comments from Ofwat and WaterVoice.

Carbon Emissions

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to measure carbon emissions from the *(a)* farming and *(b)* food industries. [87266]

Mr. Meacher: As a signatory to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol, the UK is required annually to compile an inventory of emissions by sources and removals by sinks of the greenhouse gases not controlled by the Montreal Protocol.

The main greenhouse gases emitted from farming are methane from enteric fermentation in livestock and agricultural waste disposal, and nitrous oxide from fertiliser use. There are also emissions of carbon dioxide from agricultural energy use and liming of soils. Emissions are calculated from agricultural data including animal numbers and fertiliser usage produced by DEFRA, energy statistics from DTI, plus factors to relate these data to actual emissions. The data are recorded in the UK greenhouse gas inventory and show that overall emissions from agriculture fell by about 11.5 per cent. between 1990 and 2000. Agriculture also contributes to emissions from land use change, which fell by about 20 per cent. over the same period.

Greenhouse gas emissions for the food industry are not identified separately in the inventory, although they are included with other industrial emissions. Separate studies undertaken by my Department suggest that end user carbon dioxide emissions from energy use in the food industry fell by about 25 per cent. over the period 1990 to 2000. This includes the food industry's share of emissions at power stations due to electricity generation, and it is the fall in power station emissions due to fuel switching that is main reason for the decrease in emissions from this sector.

Departmental Expenditure (Newsprint)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total expenditure of her Department was on newspapers, magazines and periodicals. [90524]

Alun Michael: The Department's expenditure on newspapers, periodicals and magazines in the financial year 2001–02 was £127,470. This figure covers central purchasing through Defra's library services. This excludes the costs of newspapers, periodicals and newspapers purchased in Defra local offices and in the Department's Executive Agencies. These figures could be compiled only at disproportionate cost.

Farm Business Advice Service

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many farmers were assisted by the Farm Business Advice Service in the last 12 months. [90395]

Mr. Morley: Between January and December 2002 the Farm Business Advice Service for farmers in England has received 3,011 requests. A total of 2,895 first visits have taken place and 2,739 action/whole farm recovery plans have been completed.

Flooding

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what effect the operations of the Environment Agency have had on the levels of flooding in the Medmenham area and Marlow. [89762]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 13 January 2003]:* Rainfall over the final days of December and the beginning of January was close to the average for the whole month of December. This fell on a saturated catchment in which rivers were already running bankfull. Under these circumstances, there is little that can be done by the Agency to alleviate flooding if defences are not already in place. Early indications are that this was the third most severe floods in this area since records began in 1882, being exceeded only by the floods of 1894 and 1947. In recent years, the Agency has conducted public awareness campaigns to make those at risk aware of that risk and to provide information and advice on how people can help themselves. In this instance, the Agency takes the view that their operations will have had no adverse effects on river levels either in Medmenham or Marlow.

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what effect the Jubilee River relief scheme has had on flooding in the Medmenham area and Marlow. [89763]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 13 January 2003]*: The Jubilee River provides flood relief for Maidenhead, Windsor and Eton and several smaller villages nearby. Extra flood defences in the form of flood banks were constructed in Cookham to reduce the risk to this village. Marlow is 5 km upstream of Cookham and Medmenham further upstream and, as such, the Environment Agency takes the view that the Jubilee River has no impact, adverse or otherwise, on either community.

Foot and Mouth

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list sites in Essex where there is storage of *(a)* materials that could be contaminated by foot and mouth and *(b)* the products of the cattle slaughtering exercise undertaken as part of the foot and mouth control strategies. [88533]

Mr. Morley: The answer is as follows:

(a) The Department is unaware of any sites in Essex where materials are stored that could be contaminated with the foot and mouth disease (FMD) virus. The last case of FMD in Essex was 20 months ago, in April 2001. The FMD virus survival period in environmental samples is believed to fall below infective levels well within this period and therefore the risk of FMD contamination in materials is negligible.

(b) The only residues from cattle slaughtered during the FMD outbreak remaining on sites in Essex is pyre ash. This has been buried in accordance with DEFRA/ Environment Agency guidance at four locations in Essex. These are sites on land at:

(1) East Donyland, Colchester

(2) Warley Street, Brentwood

(3) North Fambridge, Chelmsford

(4) Wethersfield, Braintree

Details of the groundwater authorisations and locations of these sites can be found on the Environment Agency website.

GM Crops

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many public meetings her officials have spoken at on the subject of genetically modified food and crops in each year since 1999; how many reports of such meetings have been written up by her officials; and if she will place copies of them in the Library. [86171]

Mr. Meacher: On the specific issue of the Farm Scale Evaluation GM Crop trials, officials have spoken at public meetings organised either by the Department, or by parish councils in parishes where the trials were to take place. There were 14 such meetings in 2000, 15 in 2001 and five in 2002; none were held in 1999. Notes were produced by officials for 11 of these meetings. Copies will be placed in the Library. Officials have also spoken on wider GM issues at a number of other public meetings since 1999, but official records on the number of, or reports of, the meetings are not kept.

Poultry Meat Export Ban

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action she will take to assist the UK hen processing industry in response to the Nigerian Government's ban on the import of frozen poultry meat; and what efforts are being made to ensure the speedy resumption of UK poultry meat exports to Nigeria. [88863]

Mr. Morley: Officials have pursued through the British High Commission the prospects of reopening the Nigerian market and an EU delegation has recently met Nigerian authorities. Our information is that there may be some scope for recommencing exports although officials here have asked the industry to check this through their trade contacts in Nigeria. Depending on the outcome of those inquiries, Defra officials are ready to make further inquiries through the British High Commission in Nigeria.

Officials are also liasing with industry contacts about alternative methods of disposing of hen carcasses.

Horse Passports

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether the proposed horse passports scheme will allow the horse owner to opt not to sell the carcase for human consumption; whether such a declaration would last for the life of the horse; what restrictions are planned with regard to such animals being slaughtered in a normal abattoir; and if she will make a statement about horse passports. [89758]

Mr. Morley: The horse passport includes a declaration to be signed by the owner about whether or not the horse is intended for human consumption.

If the owner declares that the horse is not intended for human consumption then the carcase cannot go for human consumption. Such a declaration, once made, cannot be changed during the lifetime of a horse. It is possible to change a declaration that a horse is intended for human consumption to say that the horse is not now intended for human consumption. Such a horse could not then be slaughtered for the human food chain.

The proposed changes in the legislation relating to horse passports contain no changes to the legislation governing where horses may be slaughtered.

Illegal Meat Imports

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much illegal meat imports in weight were seized by customs officials at United Kingdom ports of entry in each year from 1995 to 2001. [87327]

John Healey: I have been asked to reply.

Currently, the lead responsibility for detecting illegal imports of meat lies with Local and Port Health Authorities and Defra. Customs support and co-operate with these lead agencies both in joint exercises and by

seizing illegal meat when discovered in Customs checks. The Government has announced that all activity against smuggling of meat, animal products fish and plant matter will be brought together in Customs. Work on arrangements to effect this transfer has begun.

Central records of Customs seizures of meat are only available from 2000. Weights recorded as seized by Customs in years ending 31March are:

Year	*Metric Tons*
2000–01	2.655
2001–02	9.780

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to raise the awareness of restrictions she has enforced on meat imports. [87736]

Mr Morley: We have an ongoing campaign to highlight to travellers the risks posed by illegal imports. This has already used a variety of methods, including posters, leaflets, information videos, and interviews. Future publicity highlights include having a DEFRA presence at "Destinations 2003" and "The Holiday Show 2003". Our publicity campaign remains under constant review.

Specifically to highlight the new rules, the poster detailing the personal allowances for personal imports of plant and animal products is being updated to reflect the new stricter EU rules on personal imports. It will be displayed at ports of entry into the UK and aimed at travellers arriving from outside the EU.

We are continuing to work with our posts and embassies abroad to raise awareness of our import rules at points of departure.

Job Sharing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the extent of job sharing in her Department. [90873]

Alun Michael: There are currently 83 people employed in Defra on a job share contract. Although vacant positions are not generally advertised on such a specific basis, applications are always welcomed from those wishing to work on a part-time or job share basis. It is departmental policy, as an equal opportunity employer, to meet requests for all types of flexible working, including part-time working and job sharing, wherever the nature of the work allows.

Private Sewers

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions have taken place in the last six months between departmental officials and the Director General of OFWAT on the issue of the adoption of private sewers, with particular reference to the next price round. [89671]

Mr. Morley: OFWAT is involved in the steering group managing the work to establish the number, age, extent and condition of private sewers being undertaken by WS Atkins for my Department. This will contribute to a consultation exercise on private sewers due to commence in the spring of 2003. Once the steering group has considered the response to that consultation, WS Atkins will then produce a final report, with recommendations. OFWAT will consider any effect on water bills as part of its periodic review of water price limits.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what difficulties have been encountered by W. S. Atkins and her Department in identifying the location and the state of repair of private sewers; and what progress has been made. [89675]

Mr. Morley: W. S. Atkins have carried out a number of field studies at locations in England and Wales to validate the information contained in the postal surveys they undertook to try to establish the number, age, extent and condition of private sewers. A consultation paper will be issued by the Department in the spring which will contain the outcome of this work, including any difficulties they have discovered, and will seek views on possible solutions.

Pesticides

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what studies she has commissioned into the Voluntary Initiative programme to minimise the environmental impact of pesticides; what the terms of reference are; which body has been commissioned to undertake the studies; what the anticipated cost to the Department is; when she expects to receive the results; when they will be published; and if she will make a statement. [86748]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 December 2002]*: The Government are committed to minimising the adverse environmental impact of pesticide use, consistent with adequate crop protection. A voluntary agreement on measures to reduce the environmental damage caused by pesticides was entered into by the industry and other stakeholders in April 2001. Provided the Voluntary Initiative is fully implemented, it should reduce the environmental impacts of pesticides and the Government remain committed to this approach. However, the Government are carrying out further work and analysis on a possible tax or other economic instrument, should the Voluntary Initiative fail to deliver its objectives within a reasonable timescale.

The study referred to in the question has not yet been commissioned. Officials are in the process of commissioning work to develop a framework to enable subsequent assessment of the Voluntary Initiative. This will complement the indicators and targets put together by the Voluntary Initiative Steering Group and will, in particular, enable a comparison of the environmental benefits of the Voluntary Initiative and of a possible pesticides tax. The study is intended to be completed by the summer and will subsequently be published.

Pollution (Bassenthwaite)

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she will instruct English Nature to prepare a report on the health, breeding and distribution of brown trout, sea

trout, salmon and other fish resident in Bassenthwaite Lake and the river system feeding the lake and flowing from it; [88350]

(2) which statutory bodies have responsibility for *(a)* protecting water quality, *(b)* protecting aquatic species, *(c)* dealing with pollution and *(d)* protecting flora and fauna in the environment of Bassenthwaite Lake in Workington constituency; where responsibility lies in each case; [88352]

(3) if she will seek a report from the Lake District National Park Authority on discharges of *(a)* untreated sewage and *(b)* other pollutants into Bassenthwaite Lake; what plans the Authority has to reduce discharge and remove phosphate deposits from the Lake; [88348]

(4) what recent reports she has received from English Nature on the health of Vendace and the numbers of that species in Bassenthwaite Lake; [88351]

(5) what reports she has received from the Environment Agency about levels of phosphate pollution and the incidence of algal blooms in Bassenthwaite Lake and the River Derwent; and if she will make a statement. [88349]

Mr. Morley: The statutory bodies that are principally responsible for water quality, species, pollution, and flora & fauna protection are the Environment Agency, English Nature and the Lake District National Park Authority.

The Environment Agency is responsible for enforcing statutory controls on the entry of pollutants to controlled waters, and has specific duties in relation to protecting aquatic species. It is also the co-ordinator for the Bassenthwaite Lake Restoration Project that was set up last year to ensure an integrated approach to tackling the complex, longstanding pressures on the lake.

All public bodies have a statutory duty to to take reasonable steps, consistent with the exercise of their functions, to further the conservation and enhancement of the features for which the lake has been designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Since the lake forms part of the River Derwent and Bassenthwaite Lake candidate Specal Area of Conservation, further duties on all statutory authorities in exercising their functions must have due regard to the requirements of the Habitats Directive.

Given its central role in the restoration programme and its duties in relation to fisheries, the Environment Agency is best placed to report on the health, breeding and distribution of fish species. The Derwent Salmon Action Plan consultation document contains information on the salmon population status in the Derwent catchment for the period 1990 to 2000. For most years the population achieved a considerable surplus over its conservation target. The most recent reliable data (for 2000) shows that the population level was almost double the conservation limit, indicating the population to be in very good health.

There is less information on the status of species in the lake but available evidence suggests that the Vendace population is low. This is thought to be due to siltation of their spawning grounds and competition and predation from alien species, probably introduced by anglers. Recent bye-laws regulating the use of dead and live bait will control further introductions. The Environment Agency will be pleased to supply further information.

The Agency can also supply details of permitted discharges. The condition of the lake is considered stable owing to improvements to Keswick sewage treatment works. Planned investment should deliver further improvements. The Environment Agency will consider what further improvements may be necessary for the investment period 2005–2010 and is carrying out a study to assess the potential for removal of phosphorus in the lakebed sediment. Discharges of untreated sewage are very dilute and not thought to add significantly to the overall nutrient load.

Diffuse sources of phosphorus and sediment pollution need to be addressed. Action under the restoration programme will need to include research to identify sources and causes of erosion and siltation; physical improvements to infrastructure including sewerage systems, farmsteads and highways; and improvements to agricultural practice through education and awareness campaigns.

Occurrences of blue green algal blooms have been recorded on: 4 December 1998; 1 May 2000; 19 September 2000; and 20 September 2002. Controlling the total amount of phosphorus entering the lake will help to limit loads overall may reduce the frequency and extent of all types of algal bloom but will not eliminate them entirely sicne they are a natural feature of this type of lake and form as a result of the interaction of a number of variables including climatic conditions, lake chemistry, wind speed and hours of sunlight.

Flood and Coastal Defence Funding Review

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what decision has been made on reviewing the project appraisal guidance to ensure that social and environmental issues are addressed following the Flood and Coastal Defence Funding Review; [90813]

(2) what conclusions have been reached concerning the establishment of a minimum standard of flood defence, following the Flood and Coastal Defence Funding Review; [90814]

(3) when the Government's response to the Flood and Coastal Defence Funding Review will be published. [90815]

Mr. Morley: I expect to announce conclusions on the Flood and Coastal Defence Funding Review as soon as possible.

However, the arrangements for prioritising Defra's funding of flood and coastal defence capital works have already been revised to take more specific account of "people" and environmental issues. For schemes considered for approval from April 2003, the priority scores will be based on economics, "people" issues and environmental protection and enhancement.

With regard to a minimum standard of flood defence, we currently operate on the basis of permissive powers, which allows the Environment Agency and other operating authorities to take action where it is

considered justifiable against a range of criteria. This allows taxpayers' money to be spent where it is most needed, an approach overwhelmingly supported by respondents to our consultation on the review.

Radioactive Waste Management

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what participation her Department plans to have in the European Commission's Net.excel network of EU-based organisations responsible for radioactive waste management. [86139]

Mr. Meacher: Net.excel is an existing thematic network of excellence in nuclear waste management and disposal set up under the Euratom fifth framework programme for nuclear research and training. The consortium consists of eight radioactive waste management organisations from across Europe—Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and Nirex from the UK. This Department has no direct participation, but we will be kept informed of the work leading to the report to the Commission towards the end of 2003.

Timber

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether the ERM consultations on Government timber procurement has been completed; and if she will place a copy in the Library. [89672]

Mr. Meacher: The consultants have completed the timber scoping study that was commissioned by my officials in October 2001. Summaries of the open discussions held with stakeholders on 25 March and 2 September 2002 can be found at the Tropical Forest Forum website at: http://www.forestforum.org.uk/tradeb.htm. It also holds a copy of the consultant's report of the study giving their recommendations for implementing more fully our commitment on timber procurement. A copy of the various documents will be placed in the House of Commons Library.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures have been taken by her Department since April 2002 to ensure full implementation of Government policy on timber; and if she will make a statement. [89673]

Mr. Meacher: Since April 2002 the Government have concentrated on raising awareness of its timber procurement policy among central departments and the wider public sector and has begun to take action following completion of the scoping study undertaken by consultants. Some of the key measures taken are:

promotion of the policy to devolved administrations and local authorities;

evidence given to the Environmental Audit Committee;

further consultation with stakeholders undertaken;

reminders given to central departments;

communication with the European Commission via the Office of Government Commerce to further clarify European Directives;

commencement of procurement process for creation of a central point of expertise on timber procurement;

collaboration with NGOs in sourcing timber for office building;

contribution to briefing for international work including preparation for

the World Summit on Sustainable Development

Waste Recycling

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how (1) much his Department has allocated for waste recycling projects undertaken by *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* non-profit making organisations and *(c)* industry in financial years (i) 2002–03 and (ii) 2003–04; [90450]

(2) how much her Department has allocated for waste recycling projects undertaken by *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* non-profit making organisations and *(c)* industry in financial years (i) 2002–03 and (ii) 2003–04. [90449]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 13 January 2003]:* I have been asked to reply.

The main source of funding for local authority waste services is through the Environmental, Protective and Cultural Services (EPCS) Standard Spending Assessment (SSA).

The EPCS SSA provides for a wide range of local authority services including libraries, local transport and flood defence, as well as waste. In total, the provision for the block is:

2002–03: £8,961 million

2003–04: £9,435 million

Provision for waste services is not separately identified within the total.

We have provided £50 million additional funding for 2002–03 and £90 million for 2003–04 through a £140 million Waste Minimisation and Recycling Fund to encourage local authorities to expand recycling operations in their area.

A high proportion of our PFI funding supports recycling as set out in the criteria of September 2000. £220 million was allocated to PFI in Spending Review 2000 for the three years up to 2003–04. £70 million was allocated in the financial year 2002–03 and £100 million in 2003–04. These represent capital sums and not the revenue payments associated with them.

We have provided funding for two projects from the Environmental Action Fund (EAF) in 2002–03 under the 'Understanding and Awareness' heading. £200,000 has been awarded to the Community Recycling

Network and £30,750 to the Recycling Consortium in 2002–03. The funding allocation through the EAF for 2003–04 has not yet been announced.

Environmental Campaigns (ENCAMS), a non-profit making organisation funded by DEFRA, spent £210,000 in 2002–03 on waste recycling projects: (£150,000 on textile recycling and £60,000 through its Pathfinder programme). ENCAMS do not have any waste recycling projects scheduled for 2003–04.

DEFRA contribute £10,225 million for each of the years 2002–03 and 2003–04 to the Waste and Resources Action Programme to work with the commercial and industrial sectors to create stable and efficient markets for recycled materials and products and removing the barriers to waste minimisation, re-use and recycling.

TRANSPORT

Industry Haulage

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent discussions he has had with European colleagues regarding European road and rail haulage and drivers. [90370]

Mr. Jamieson: Discussions have taken place on the Commission's proposed Second Railway Package of legislative measures published in January 2002. This package aims to complete the liberalisation of the rail freight market, and to progress technical harmonisation of the EU rail network—including the processes to be followed to ensure the safety competence of train operators' staff.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals there are to reform the EU Working Time Directive for drivers on long distance haulage to cut out dead time and to recast drivers' duties; and if he will make a statement. [90369]

Mr. Jamieson: There are two directives that will affect the working time of long distance haulage drivers. The most important is called the "organisation of the working time of persons performing mobile road transport activities" (2002/15/EC). This is due to be implemented into UK law by 23 March 2005. It will introduce an average 48 hour working week, a limit of 60 hours for a single week and a 10 hour daily limit for night workers. Both sides of industry are being consulted on how this directive should be implemented into UK law and we plan to launch a wider consultation exercise later this year.

The Department of Trade and Industry plan to implement an amending directive (2000/34/EC) to the original working time directive (93/104/EC) later this year. This will extend working time legislation into previously excluded sectors, including transport. Under this directive, all drivers will be entitled to four weeks paid annual leave and night workers will get regular health assessments.

Avia Solutions

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to his answer of 7 January, ref 88280, (1) what payments have been made to Avia Solutions in connection with work undertaken in relation to his consultation on the future development of air transport in the United Kingdom; and what future payments to Avia Solutions his Department has contracted for; [90481]

(2) what work Avia Solutions has undertaken for his Department in respect of the possible development of Redhill Aerodrome; and what payments have been made, or are contracted to be made, in relation to such work. [90482]

Mr. Jamieson: Avia Solutions are contracted to manage the analysis of the consultation responses received in respect of all areas of the United Kingdom, including that from Redhill Aerodrome Limited, as part of the ongoing air transport consultation. The analysis will be carried out by a team comprising civil servants and retained consultants with expertise in a range of relevant areas. The contract value is around £550,000.

To date Avia Solutions have been paid about £700,000 for earlier work in support of the air transport consultation.

The Department has not contracted Avia Solutions to undertake any other work in respect of possible development of Redhill Aerodrome.

Capita Group

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the contracts that have been awarded to the Capita Group by his Department. [89975]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department currently has the following contract with the Capita Group:

External Recruitment Service for the recruitment of staff at all grades below the senior civil service.

In addition to the above the following contracts have been placed with Capita by DfT Agencies:

Agency	*Title/Purpose*
Driving Standards Agency	Design, build, installation and operation of a computer system for the booking of the Practical Driving Test and associated services, and the supply and maintenance of the Agency's IT/IS infrastructure.
Highways Agency	Consultancy Services Framework for the provision of Human Resources advice and professional services. Consultancy Framework for the provision of construction and design services. Provision of safety engineering professional services. Traffic monitoring services. Framework Agreement for audit and measurement services. Design and supervision of A66 Stainburn to Great Clifton Bypass trunk road contract.

Airport (Rugby and Coventry)

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will produce a summary of letters regarding the proposal for a new airport between Rugby and Coventry. [90493]

Mr. Jamieson: We will publish a summary of all the responses we receive to the consultation, after the consultation period has ended. As our first priority will be to produce the Air Transport White Paper as quickly as practicable, it is likely that this summary will follow the White Paper's publication.

Cross Rail/Thameslink

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the *(a)* Cross Rail project and *(b)* Thameslink project to be completed. [90614]

Mr. Jamieson: This will depend on securing the planning and other powers necessary to take the projects forward.

Departmental Expenditure (Newsprint)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the total expenditure of his Department was on newspapers, magazines and periodicals in 2002. [90517]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department for Transport was established as a separate Department on 29 May 2002. Prior to that date, DfT was part of the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions, and separate expenditure figures for DfT are not available. From its formation until 31 December 2002, DfT expenditure on newspapers, magazines and periodicals was £50,000. This figure is rounded to the nearest £1,000, and excludes expenditure by DfT Agencies and other non-DfT *(c)* bodies.

Drivers (Eye Tests)

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has for *(a)* compulsory eye tests and *(b)* random eye tests for drivers; and if he will make a statement. [90679]

Mr. Jamieson: There are currently no plans to introduce compulsory eye tests. However, given the importance of eyesight in safe driving it is an issue which is kept under constant review. The number plate eyesight test for checking that drivers' vision is adequate for driving has served its purpose well since its introduction. It is equivalent to minimum standard laid down in the EC second Directive on Driving Licences (91/439/EEC).

The police already have the power to conduct random checks of motorists' eyesight at the roadside. They notify DVLA of any drivers who do not meet the required standard. Such reports are always investigated.

Driving Licences

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the fee for obtaining a replacement driving licence has been in each of the past five years. [90023]

Mr. Jamieson: There is currently no charge, nor has there been in the last five years, for the issue of a replacement driving licence when a person notifies a change of name and/or address. In addition, there is an optional over the counter service available at selected post offices at a charge of £4.00.

DVLA Clamping Teams

Siobhain McDonagh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 12 December 2002, *Official Report*, columns 407–08W, how many of the DVLA clamping teams operating in London are mobile. [90027]

Mr. Jamieson: There are four clamping teams dedicated to the London area. They are all mobile in the sense they can operate in any of the 33 London boroughs. However, the DVLA also has two mobile clamping teams that operate throughout the UK in areas where there are no permanent clamping facilities.

Ethical Banking

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what contracts have been concluded as a result of the Government's commitment to support ethical banking. [89943]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government believe it is important for consumers to have choice in financial products, including the availability of 'ethical' products. However, it would not be appropriate for the Government to exclusively support the development of one specific group of financial service providers. It is for individual consumers to decide the attributes they most value from their financial services, and for financial services firms to be transparent about their use of funds and investments.

Fair Trade

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what fair trade criteria he sets when deciding upon what suppliers to use. [89909]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my right. hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 9 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 92W.

My Department is fully committed to supporting fair trade principles, and our headquarters catering contracts require contractors to supply a choice of Fairtrade beverages.

Road Congestion (Freight)

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps have been taken to relieve points on Britain's roads where freight transport is frequently held up. [90319]

Mr. Jamieson: My responsibilities extend only to the trunk road and motorway network in England. Issues on the rest of Britain's roads are for the National Assemblies of Scotland and Wales, or for the local highway authorities in the case of local roads.

"Transport 2010: The Ten Year Plan" sets out the Government's vision for a fairer and more effective transport system.

Pilot studies into the active management of road traffic and making better use of the existing road space are being undertaken by the Highways Agency. To help deliver the reduction in congestion, the Highways Agency is also developing its role as a traffic manager to help road users deal with congestion on motorways and other strategic routes. Actions to date include the delivery of more electronic Variable Message Signs, automatic hold up warning systems, website and public information improvements and the first stages of a new national Traffic Control Centre due to begin operating in 2004. The Traffic Control Centre will provide advice to road users about travel conditions on the trunk road network allowing them to plan their journeys more effectively to avoid congestion. In conjunction with the Police and other emergency services, the Agency is improving the way it deals with accidents and incidents on the network so that they are dealt with more effectively, reducing the time roads are disrupted to minimise congestion.

Where necessary, programmes of works such as the Targeted Programme of Improvements, currently comprising 71 schemes, and the recently announced 92 priority junction schemes will be delivered. Both will provide increased capacity and improve conditions on the network. In 2002–03 we will deliver 10 major schemes from our Targeted Programme of Improvements and in 2003–04 we expect to deliver a further nine schemes.

Gatwick Airport (Birdstrikes)

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the risk of birdstrike to planes landing at and taking off from Gatwick Airport. [90432]

Mr. Jamieson: All licensed aerodromes in the UK are required, as a condition of their operating licence, to take reasonable steps to secure that the aerodrome and its immediately surrounding airspace is safe at all times for use by aircraft. Aerodrome operating manuals are also required to contain information and instructions about the procedures for the control of bird hazards.

Light Railways

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to fund experimental *(a)* single route and twin route light railways and *(b)* tram systems in towns with populations of over 100,000. [90359]

Mr. Jamieson: We use the terms tram and light rail synonymously. It is for the local authority to consider in the first instance whether light rail might offer the most appropriate and cost-effective response to particular transport needs in its area and, if so, what form it might best take. Thereafter, any light rail scheme—experimental or otherwise—would need to undergo rigorous appraisal, and examination under any relevant statutory procedures, before funding approval could be considered.

Birmingham Northern Relief Road (Low-noise Tarmac)

Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether low-noise tarmac is being used in the construction of the Birmingham Northern Relief Road. [89449]

Mr. Jamieson: Yes. Responsibility for deciding on the surfacing treatment for the M6 Toll rests with Midlands Expressway Ltd. (MEL) the commissioning contractor. Their intention is to use low noise surfacing along the entire length of the route.

Marine Pollution

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to increase the liability of tankers that cause marine pollution incidents; and if he will make a statement. [89902]

Mr. Jamieson: Liability for pollution from cargo oil from tankers is governed by the 1992 Protocols to the 1969 Civil Liability Convention and the 1971 Convention on the Establishment of an International Fund for Compensation for Oil Pollution Damage, to which the UK is a contracting party. The current limit under this regime is equivalent to £117 million.

As a result of action initiated by the UK, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) agreed in 2000 to increase the limits of liability and compensation under the 1992 CLC/Fund regime by 50.37 per cent. The revised overall limits will enter into force on 1 November this year, and will increase the maximum available amount of compensation to approximately £176 million.

In addition, a Diplomatic Conference has been convened at the IMO in May this year to negotiate a proposed Supplementary Fund to the present regime. It is expected that, once it comes into force, this Supplementary Fund will further increase the amount of liability and compensation significantly so as to cover all likely costs directly arising from the most serious of tanker oil spills.

The UK is also playing a prominent role in promoting the implementation of other maritime liability conventions which will increase liability for third party damages arising from shipping.

Merchant Ships

Mr. Prosser: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many merchant ships have been chartered by the MOD in the past five years; what their names were; and what their flag states were. [88901]

Mr. Ingram: I have been asked to reply.

Some 367 merchant ships have been chartered by the Ministry of Defence over the period April 1997 to December 2002. I am placing a list containing the relevant information in the Library of the House.

Ministerial Meetings

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what dates Ministers in his Department and his predecessor's Department have held meetings

with members and officials of the United States Administration since 8 June 2001; where each meeting took place; which Ministers were involved in each meeting; which United States Administration departments attended each meeting; and which members and officials from the United States Administration attended each of these meetings. [89466]

Mr. Jamieson: Ministers have held meetings with representatives of the United States Administration on a variety of transport issues since June 2001.

Pedestrians (Romford)

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to ensure the delivery of the accelerated town centre improvements to re-route traffic and enhance the pedestrian environment in Romford. [90796]

Mr. Jamieson: This is a matter for Transport for London and the London Borough of Havering.

For further information please contact:

Ben Plowden
Transport for London
Director of Borough Partnerships
Windsor House
42–50 Victoria Street
London SW1H OTL
Telephone: 020 7941 4079

Road Deaths

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the progress in assessing the work in the Netherlands where traffic lights have been removed in an attempt to reduce road deaths; and if he will make a statement. [90765]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department is aware of work in the Netherlands. We understand there have been accident reductions but we have seen no figures to quantify these claims or any details of the effects on traffic flows and the behaviour of road users generally. We will continue to monitor the experiments and will work with UK local authorities who wish to trial some of the techniques that have been applied and which involve more than just the removal of traffic signals.

Seaports and Airports

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action the Government has taken since 1997 to ensure that UK seaports and airports have the necessary capacity to satisfy demand. [90320]

Mr. Jamieson: We have undertaken a comprehensive assessment of existing airport capacity across the UK and possible options for expansion in the light of forecast demand. This formed the basis of our public consultation last summer, which is now being extended to include Gatwick options. Our conclusions will be set out in the air transport White Paper later this year. Approval has also been given to the construction of a fifth terminal at Heathrow airport which will substantially increase its passenger handling capacity.

A number of port operators are preparing major projects to increase port capacity which are at various stages in the planning approval process. One (at Felixstowe) has so far been approved, the public inquiry on another (at Dibden Bay Southampton) finished in December and the Inspector plans to submit his report by October 2003. A public inquiry into a third (at London Gateway) is scheduled to begin in February, and there are plans for development at Bathside Bay, Harwich and further expansion at Felixstowe.

West Coast Mainline

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the age of the rolling stock on the West Coast Mainline. [90724]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority provides information on the average age of rolling stock in their publication, "National Rail Trends", which is placed in the Library of the House. The information is not available by particular routes.

WALES

Accreditation

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what his Department is doing to support the Government's policy on accreditation. [88086]

Peter Hain: The United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) is recognised by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry as the sole national body for the accreditation, against international standards, of certification and inspection bodies, testing and calibration laboratories.

Cardiff (Lord Mayoralty)

Kevin Brennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received regarding the Lord Mayoralty of Cardiff. [89737]

Peter Hain: None.

Pension Credit

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with his ministerial colleagues about the impact of the Pension Credit in Wales. [89732]

Peter Hain: Regular ones. The introduction of the Pension Credit from October 2003 will benefit 250,000 pensioner households in Wales, with those on £150 per week benefiting from an extra £1,100 each year.

Rail Services

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with rail passenger groups in Wales on adequacy of rail services. [89738]

Peter Hain: A meeting of representatives from the Rail Passenger Committee in Wales is planned.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Cricket World Cup

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations his Department has made in the last six months to *(a)* the International Cricket Council and *(b)* the English Cricket Board with regard to (i) World Cup matches being rescheduled outside Zimbabwe and (ii) the England Cricket Team not playing in that country. [90644]

Mr. Straw: FCO officials have been in contact with the ICC and ECB since July 2002. They have provided briefing on the internal political, economic and humanitarian situation in Zimbabwe and advice on how this might impact on security. Ministers have repeatedly made clear that decisions on England's participation in the match it is scheduled to play in Harare on 13 February rest with the ECB and the ICC, but that in the Government's view, it would be better if the team did not go.

EU Accession States

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his answer of 7 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 136W, whether the Government plans to give *(a)* indirect financial support to campaigning groups within the 10 EU accession states and *(b)* other support to such groups and individuals; and if he will make a statement. [90738]

Mr. MacShane: The Government does not plan to give indirect financial support to campaigning groups within the 10 EU accession states.

I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 7 January 2003, *Official Report*, col.136W.

Hungary (Religious Discrimination)

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of current levels of religious discrimination in Hungary. [90561]

Mr. MacShane: We believe there is no major religious discrimination in Hungary. Religious freedom is anyway enshrined in the Hungarian Constitution.

Hungary has also been assessed as meeting the Copenhagen criteria, which includes human rights for all citizens as part of the process of accession to the EU.

Iraq

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the United States on US plans for a post-Saddam Hussein government in Iraq. [90236]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We regularly discuss all aspects of Iraq policy with our US colleagues. As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary explained in his Written Ministerial Statement of 7 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 4WS, our policy remains to ensure that Iraq complies with its obligations under relevant Security Council resolutions, including by giving up its weapons of mass destruction.

Lebanon

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has received from the Government of Lebanon regarding the reported admission by Yusef Shaban that he had responsibility for the Lockerbie disaster. [90931]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We have received no specific information from the Lebanese government on this matter, although we are aware of the case.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his meeting with the Lockerbie relatives on 17 December 2002. [88605]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement on Lockerbie made by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary on 17 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 41WS.

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the result of his meeting with the Lockerbie relatives on 17th December. [88606]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I refer the hon. Member to the statement on Lockerbie made by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary on 17 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 41WS.

PRIME MINISTER

United Nations

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Prime Minister if he intends to visit New York before 27 January to discuss with other world leaders business likely to come before the UN. [90591]

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to do so.

Drug Treatment

John Mann: To ask the Prime Minister what validation there is of statistics on waiting times for drug treatment held by the national treatment agency. [90592]

The Prime Minister: Information on waiting times for drug treatment is collected annually through the Drug Action Team treatment planning process. The data, which is provided by the service providers, is subject to scrutiny by the DATs. The figures are further scrutinised by the National Treatment Agency, the Government Offices and other local partners.

Cricket World Cup

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has made in the last six months to *(a)* the International Cricket Council and *(b)* the English Cricket Board with regard to (i) World Cup matches being rescheduled outside Zimbabwe and (ii) the England Cricket Team not playing in that country. [90642]

The Prime Minister: The Government's position on this remains as I set out in the House on 8 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 162. My right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and the Minister for Sport, and my noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office met the ECB on 9 January. This was the culmination of dialogue between the ECB and government that began on 5 July last year at official level. The ECB nominate the England and Wales representative to the ICC. They are well aware of the situation in Zimbabwe and the Government's views on their participation.

Honours

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Prime Minister how many honours have been awarded in each constituency since 1 May 1997. [90954]

The Prime Minister: This information is not held in the format requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

House of Lords Reform

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister if it is his policy that the political balance of the House of Lords should be maintained prior to the implementation of legislation completing the second stage of reform. [89812]

The Prime Minister: While the way forward on reform of the House of Lords is still under consideration, arrangements for identifying new members of the House remain unchanged. Membership of the House is kept under ongoing review.

Job Sharing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the extent of job sharing in his office. [90865]

The Prime Minister: At 31 December 2002, my office had a total of three job-share arrangements involving six members of staff.

My office is committed to supporting part-time working, job-sharing and other forms of alternative working patterns. Cabinet Office policies apply in my office and all advertised posts will normally be open to anyone wishing to work an alternative working pattern, including part-timers and job-sharers although there will be some instances where this is not possible due to the nature of the work. The flexibility of any alternative working pattern is decided in conjunction with the local management to suit an individual's needs and the needs of their work.

Michael Barber

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Prime Minister to whom Mr. Michael Barber is responsible. [91168]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor) on 13 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 461W.

DEFENCE

Air Defence

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has held with the United States on measures to fill the Royal Navy's air defence gap between the withdrawal of the Sea Harriers and the advent of the Joint Strikefighter; and what assessment he has made of the risk of aerial attack against Royal Navy ships between 2006 and 2012. [89886]

Mr. Ingram: It is our current assessment that the main threat to the Fleet in future would come from sea-skimming missiles. The Sea Harrier FA2 lacks utility in countering this threat. There have been no discussions with the United States of America on the Royal Navy's air defence capability for the period following the withdrawal of the Sea Harrier FA2 aircraft, although they were advised of the decision as part of the United Kingdom's annual submission to the NATO Defence Planning Questionnaire. Following the withdrawal of the Sea Harrier FA2, Royal Navy Task Groups will

typically include Type 42 Anti-Air Warfare Destroyers and Type 22 and 23 Frigates also equipped with air defence capability. The Type 42 Destroyers systems are being enhanced to ensure that they remain effective in the air defence role.

The first upgraded Airborne Early Warning Sea King Flight has recently entered service providing a marked improvement in capability to detect airborne threats to the Task Group over both sea and land, and the introduction of the Type 45 Destroyers, equipped with the highly capable Principal Anti-Air Missile System (PAAMS) will represent further improvement in our air defence capability. It is also highly unlikely that the Royal Navy will operate alone, but instead is more likely to be part of a coalition force with other Allied defence assets, as well as our own.

Army (Joiners and Leavers)

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people joined the Army in the last year for which figures are available. [90355]

Dr. Moonie: The number of people joining the Army in the latest calendar year for which information is available is as follows:

2001 (1 January-31 December): 15,380

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people left the Army in each of the last six calendar years. [90354]

Dr. Moonie: The number of people leaving the Army in the last six calendar years for which information is available is as follows:

Year	*Number of personnel leaving the army*
2001	14,400
2000	15,710
1999	16,090
1998	17,140
1997	14,560
1996	16,280

Castle Class Patrol Ships

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence where the Castle class patrol ships will be deployed in 2003. [90336]

Mr. Ingram: There are two Castle class patrol ships, one of whom is always allocated to the Falkland Islands as the FI Patrol Vessel. This is currently Leeds Castle. She deployed from the United Kingdom in January 2001 and will remain in the Falklands until June 2004.

Dumbarton Castle is acting as Flagship for Commander Mine Countermeasures Force (North) until May 2003—a role she took up in May 2002. When she leaves the NATO Squadron she is programmed to enter Refit, in Rosyth, in June 2003 until February 2004.

Catering Staff (Combat Training)

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many chefs and catering staff, broken down by regiment, have undergone combat training in the last six months in addition to any routine training that they may receive; and if he will make a statement. [90773]

Dr. Moonie: This information is not held centrally and can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Chemical Detectors

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the LCD-S palm sized chemical detectors have been delivered to service personnel; and if he will make a statement. [90170]

Mr. Ingram: Deliveries of the Lightweight Chemical Agent Detector have not yet been made but are scheduled to commence shortly.

Defence Logistics Organisation

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures of efficiency are used within the Defence Logistics Organisation; and on which occasions these measures have not been met in the last three years. [88409]

Mr. Ingram: The Defence Logistic Organisation has since its formation on 1 April 2000 continued to contribute to the overall Year on Year Departmental Efficiency Target set as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review of 1998 and reported annually via the Departmental Performance report. Prior to 1 April 2000 Efficiency reports against the Departmental Target were the responsibility of the individual logistic Commands, Naval Support Command, Quartermaster General and Air Member Logistics.

The individual DLO efficiency measures that contributed to the overall Departmental efficiency target for these years also contribute to the DLO's strategic goal, a 20 per cent. reduction in DLO output costs (as at March 2000) by 31 March 2006. Examples of the types of measure are contained within the latest Ministry of Defence Departmental Performance Report 2001–02 paragraphs 75 and 110 (available at the MOD website at www.mod.uk). From March 2000 to March 2002 the DLO has made a 5.6 per cent. efficiency saving in resource terms against its strategic goal. We have now agreed with the Treasury how the efficiency achievement in financial year 2002–03 will be measured, and we are currently discussing with them how performance against the remainder of the strategic goal (from 2003–04 onwards) will be measured.

Defence Intelligence and Security Centre

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* people were trained by DISC and *(b)* training places were made available in DISC, in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [90775]

Mr. Ingram: The information requested is set out in the following table.

Training year[1]	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Personnel trained by Defence Intelligence and Security Centre[2]	3,294	3,373	3,222	3,105	[3]3,777
Training places made available[4]	4,231	4,499	4,644	4,612	4,684

[1] In common with all military training establishments, DISC records statistics in training years which run from 1 April to 31 March. Hence the figures for TY 2002–03 are a forecast and include personnel still to complete training.
[2] Figures given for personnel trained by DISC includes those who may have been withdrawn from course before its completion.
[3] Forecast.
[4] Training places made available are those agreed with the course sponsors, taking into account the sponsors' requirements and the resources available at DISC.

Field Medical Units

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* field hospital units and *(b)* field ambulance units are currently deployed; and how many are ready to be deployed. [90341]

Dr. Moonie: There is one field hospital unit currently deployed, which is in the Balkans. Three further field hospital units (two Regular units and one Territorial Army) could be deployed within 30 days. Regular Field Ambulance units no longer exist and now form part of the five medical regiments, each of which have a High Readiness Squadron that could be deployed within 30 days. There are four Territorial Army Field Ambulance units, none of which are currently deployed or being prepared to deploy.

Fire Appliances (Training)

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of HM armed forces have been trained to use modern fire appliances; what plans he has for more to be trained; and if he will make a statement. [90353]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 21 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 220W to the hon. Member for the Isle of White (Mr. Turner). Since that time, the total number of personnel held contingent to provide emergency fire fighting cover has not changed significantly, nor have the numbers trained in specialist roles.

A total of 1,062 personnel have, however, now been trained in the use of Red Goddesses and 177 Red Goddesses are now available for use during strike action. Personnel operating them form part of the overall numbers deployed.

There are currently no plans to increase the numbers of armed forces personnel deployed on this operation. While our capability is subject to constant improvement as time goes by, both the numbers deployed and the operational concept have proved sufficient to ensure an adequate level of emergency cover during strike periods.

General Dynamics UK

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the Ministry of Defence is pursuing legal redress from General Dynamics UK Ltd. for the suspension of the Defence Stores Management System programme. [90177]

Mr. Ingram: General Dynamics UK Ltd. were not contracted to the Ministry of Defence for provision of the Defence Stores Management System, and the question of legal redress does not, therefore, arise.

Gracemoor Consultants

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the meetings he, his Ministers and his officials have had with representatives of Gracemoor Consultants since 1997. [82153]

Mr. Ingram: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Iraq

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with his *(a)* European and *(b)* US colleagues regarding military co-operation in the Gulf. [90329]

Mr. Hoon: The statement by NATO heads of state and government issued on 21 November 2002 at the Prague summit affirmed that "NATO allies stand united in their commitment to take effective action and support the efforts of the UN to ensure full and immediate compliance by Iraq with UNSCR 1441". It is in this context that I have regular contacts with my European and American colleagues. These discussions have covered a wide range of topics, including military co-operation in the Gulf should that be required.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the troops referred to in his oral statement of 7 January 2003, *Official Report*, columns 23–39, will arrive in the Gulf; and what training they will undertake. [90327]

Mr. Hoon: In my oral statement of 7 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 25, I announced that we plan to deploy amphibious forces including HQ 3 Commando Brigade, 40 Commando Royal Marines and 42 Commando Royal Marines, with all supporting elements, to the Mediterranean with a view to proceeding to the Gulf region if and as required. In accordance with Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information it would be inappropriate for me to discuss details of military planning, including timings.

The group will conduct training in the Mediterranean, including force integration and combat enhancement training.

HMS Invincible

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if HMS Invincible will complete her refit at Rosyth on schedule. [90338]

Mr. Ingram: Work on HMS Invincible's refit is nearing completion and on schedule. It is planned to return the ship to the Fleet in May 2003.

Nuclear Missiles (USA)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with his counterpart in the USA regarding its further development of nuclear missile capabilities. [90316]

Dr. Moonie: I have had no such discussions with my United States counterpart, but Ministry of Defence officials have regular contacts with various US authorities on matters relating to nuclear weapons.

QinetiQ

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to the written ministerial statement of 5 December 2002, Official Report, column 85WS, on QinetiQ, what proportion of the company's assets is reflected in the £50 million already received by his Department from QinetiQ as part of the purchase price paid by Carlyle Group for those assets; and what the total estimated value is of QinetiQ's assets divided into *(a)* tangible and *(b)* intangible assets. [90736]

Dr. Moonie: When QinetiQ was vested as a plc on 1 July 2001 the Ministry of Defence required it to purchase its assets from MOD with a combination of equity and an obligation in the form of interest-bearing loan notes to pay a further £150 million. The £50 million has been paid as part settlement of the outstanding loan notes.

QinetiQ Group plc's Annual Report and Financial Statement 2002 shows a net book value for tangible assets of £534.6 million, the majority of which comprises land and buildings. This figure takes no account of the company's liabilities. The value for disposal of the property on the open market is estimated by QinetiQ's management to be at least £113 million less than the net book value. QinetiQ's Annual Report 2002 also values the intangible assets at £1.0 million.

Search and Rescue

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost in each of the last five years of his Department's search and rescue capability in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [90157]

Mr. Ingram: Air and sea rescue is undertaken by a number of organisations within the Ministry of Defence and is conducted from a wide variety of locations utilising many different assets. The information requested is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

SSNs

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which SSNs are in refit; and when they will rejoin the fleet. [90332]

Mr. Ingram: There are three SSNs currently in refit. HMS Sceptre and Spartan are planned to rejoin the fleet by summer 2003 and HMS Trenchant towards the end of 2003.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which SSNs will be going into refit in each of the next three years; and for how long they will be non-operational. [90333]

Mr. Ingram: The next planned SSN refit is that of HMS Talent which is expected to start in spring 2003 and take approximately $2\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 years to complete, including post refit trials and training. I am withholding details of SSN refits planned to start beyond 2003 in accordance with Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, which relates to defence, security and international relations.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which Tomahawk-capable SSNs are operational; and of these how many are at sea. [90334]

Mr. Ingram: Currently the Royal Navy has three Tomahawk-capable submarines operationally available, however, the specific operational status and tasking of each submarine is classified for security reasons and is being withheld under Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Statutory Instruments

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Statutory Instruments subject to negative procedure made by his Department *(a)* came into force and *(b)* were considered by a delegated legislation committee in each of the last three sessions. [88024]

Mr. Ingram: The information requested is held in calendar years and not by parliamentary session. The number of Statutory Instruments laid by the Ministry of Defence that were subject to the negative procedure and that came into force in the last three years is:

	Number
2000	15
2001	3
2002	8

None of these statutory instruments were considered by a delegated legislation committee.

War Veterans (Support)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps his Department is taking to support *(a)* Falklands War and *(b)* Gulf War veterans. [86983]

Dr. Moonie: Since my appointment as the Government's Minister for Veterans in March 2001, I have been taking steps to provide all veterans from Her Majesty's armed forces with a co-ordinated focus for dealing with their concerns. I have set out three main priorities for this work. Firstly to pull together the Government's response to issues that cut across Government Departments, such as veterans' homelessness or ill-health; secondly to ensure that lessons learnt are absorbed into MOD's policies for service personnel; and thirdly, to improve communication by publicising the assistance offered to veterans by central, devolved and local government as well as giving veterans' organisations the opportunity to represent their collective and individual concerns to Government at ministerial level.

In terms of financial support, all injured service personnel who are deemed to have sustained a disability due to their work in the armed forces are eligible for a

tax-free 'War Disablement Pension' from the Veterans Agency. They may also qualify for an attributable pension under the Armed Forces Pension Scheme.

The Veterans Agency has always provided potential claimants with help and advice while they are completing their pension applications through a Freephone Helpline. That service was extended in April 2002 to provide all veterans and their dependents with a first point of contact and advice and information on where to access the support that is available to veterans from both the Government and the additional support provided by the veterans' charitable organisations. This support is provided to help ease the transition back into the civilian community in terms of employment and housing resettlement.

Many of those whose service included deployments during the Falklands and the Gulf Conflicts will have already left the armed forces and some of those have ongoing health concerns that are being treated through the support provided under the national health service.

In relation to the Gulf Conflict of 1990–91, we accept that some veterans are ill and that some have died. In our policy document: "Gulf Veterans Illnesses: A New Beginning" dated 14 July 1997, we set out how we would deal with this complex issue. We adopted three principles. First, that all Gulf veterans will have prompt access to medical advice from the MOD's Gulf Veterans' Medical Assessment. Second, that there will be appropriate research into veterans' illnesses and factors which might have a bearing on these. Third, the MOD will make available to the public any information it possesses which is of potential relevance to this issue. The policy document and information about what we have done in respect of Gulf veterans' illnesses can be found on the internet at: www.mod.ulc/issues/gulfwar.

At present I am not aware of any evidence that demonstrates that veterans from any particular campaign or conflict need additional support. But we remain open minded and one of the working groups established as part of the Government's current Veterans Initiative has placed a contract with King's College London for research to provide evidence to support policy decisions to improve the delivery of cross-departmental support to veterans and identify any areas of unmet need. The next stage of this research will include interviews with key stakeholder organisations, such as the South Atlantic Medal Association 82, The Royal British Legion and Combat Stress as well as individual veterans. The aim will be to gather information on the needs of ex-service personnel, particularly the more vulnerable who are struggling with financial or emotional problems.

Warships (Protection)

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement on changes in *(a)* training and *(b)* watch-keeping practices in the Royal Navy since the attack on the USS Cole; [89874]

(2) if he will make a statement on resources allocated to research into protection of warships from suicide attacks since the USS Cole incident. [89873]

Mr. Ingram: Detailed classified guidance on countering the Asymmetric threat has been issued to all Royal Navy and RFA vessels, and this guidance is reviewed regularly. In addition, Operational Sea Training has been improved to take into account new trends in Force Protection.

Ships in United Kingdom military ports are now protected by armed gangway personnel. Also, units deployed to high risk ports will, as required, put in place enhanced Force Protection methods in the form of booms and physical barriers, with the agreement of the host nation.

A team has been set up within the Fleet Headquarters specifically to deal with Force Protection issues.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

BBC (Independent Productions)

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when the Office of Fair Trading intends to report on whether the BBC has met its independent production quota for the period April 2001 to March 2002. [90283]

Dr. Howells: I understand that the Office of Fair Trading is in the process of finalising the Director's report on the BBC's independent production quota for the 2001–02 reporting period. The report is expected to be published by the spring.

Cricket World Cup

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations her Department has made in the last six months to *(a)* the International Cricket Council and *(b)* the English Cricket Board with regard to (i) World Cup matches being rescheduled outside Zimbabwe and (ii) the England Cricket Team not playing in that country. [90643]

Mr. Caborn: Officials in this Department contacted the England and Wales Cricket Board on 30 December 2002 and 2 January 2003 to discuss a possible meeting between the Board and Ministers. No representations have been made to the International Cricket Council by DCMS officials over the last six months.

Industrial Action

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many working days have been lost in her Department due to industrial action in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000, *(d)* 2000–01, *(e)* 2001–02, and *(f)* 2002–03; and if she will make a statement. [90484]

Dr. Howells: DCMS has not lost any working days due to industrial action in the years 1997–98 to 2002–03.

Licensing Bill

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to require churches to be licensed in order to stage concerts; what fees they will have to pay in order to hold such concerts; and if she will make a statement. [90574]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 14 January 2003]:* In the Regulatory Impact Assessment, published with the Licensing Bill, it has been estimated that an initial application for a premises licence would cost between £100 and £500, and that there would be an annual charge of between £50 and £150.

However, as I stated in the House of Commons on 16 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 517, the Government has made a commitment to reconsider its position on the licensing of public entertainments in churches and will announce its conclusions as soon as possible.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Child Care

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many new child care workers have been recruited as a consequence of the child care recruitment campaign; and how many are working in child care settings. [87968]

Maria Eagle: The 2001 Child Care Workforce Survey shows that there are 274,520 child care staff across the sector. This is a rise of 21 per cent. from the 1998 workforce survey figures, when the figure stood at 226,340.

There have been over 140,000 calls to the child care recruitment campaign national telephone order line. We do not keep track of the outcomes for all individuals who call, but a small sample survey in January 2002 showed that 86 per cent. of the callers surveyed had looked for job information and 10 per cent. had already found a job in the sector.

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent progress has been made against targets by early years development and child care partnerships. [87982]

Maria Eagle: Local authorities returns indicated that by summer 2002 free nursery education places were available for some 70 per cent. of 3-year-olds, towards the target of a free such place by 2004 for all 3-year-olds whose parents want one. They also indicated that by June 2002 new child care places had been created since 1997 for some 1 million children towards the target of new places for 1.6 million children by March 2004; and that taking account of turnover in existing places, the increase in child care places to June 2002 will have benefited some 0.6 million children towards the target of 1 million children by March 2004. Information on progress against a range of other targets will be included in local authorities 2003–04 early years development and child care plans, which are to be returned in February 2003.

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what his estimate is of the number of affordable child care places that will be needed if 70 per cent. of lone parents are to be in work by 2010. [88001]

Maria Eagle: The provision of affordable and flexible child care places for lone parents will be a key part of the strategy in meeting the 2010 70 per cent. employment rate target. However it is not possible to accurately estimate the number of child care places required to increase the lone parent employment rate to 70 per cent. due to the wide range of interrelated factors that will determine both the lone parent employment rate and the take up of child care places by working lone parents.

Education Maintenance Allowance

Mr. Denis Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students in the *(a)* Wansbeck constituency and *(b)* County of Northumberland have received the education maintenance allowance. [88157]

Margaret Hodge: The Department does not collect data on the number of students receiving the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) for areas smaller than LEA size. The number of students in Northumberland receiving the EMA in each academic year, since the pilot began, is set out in the table.

The figures from 2002–03 are to the 27 December 2002 instead of the end of the academic year as with the 2000–2001 and 2001–2002 figures. As a result, these figures inevitably seem low compared to the other academic years. However, the number of students receiving EMA in December 2002 is also lower than the figure at the same time in the previous academic year. This is primarily due to the key member of the EMA team at Northumberland going on long term sick leave. In fact, the number of applications received in Northumberland is slightly up on the previous year's figures.

Academic year	*Number receiving EMA*
2000–01	1,502
2001–02	[1]2,595
2002–03	[1]2,281

[1] Includes students who started courses in the previous year

Note:
2002–03 figures are to the 27 December 2002

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent representations he has received on EMAG policy and funding distribution. [89598]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The Department has received representations or enquiries from 10 Local Education Authorities and two schools about the current arrangements for distributing EMAG.

IT Support

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on progress in providing a laptop computer with internet access and ICT support to every teacher *(a)* in the UK and *(b)* in Leyton and Wanstead; and when he expects the policy to be fully implemented. [90457]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Laptops for Teachers initiative launched at the BETT show in January 2002 is open to all eligible teachers in England. To date LEAs have been given £60 million to purchase laptop computers on behalf of their schools and so far over 60,000 laptop computers have been bought.

I announced on 9 January 2003 a £195 million extension of this initiative to April 2006, making the total amount of funding £300 million. This will result in two thirds of all eligible teachers benefiting from personal access to a laptop computer over the four year period of this initiative.

In May 2002 Waltham Forest and Redbridge LEAs, who are responsible for Leyton and Wanstead were allocated a total of £597,156 and have to date spent a total of £463,801 purchasing 453 laptop computers.

School Standards

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate he has made of the cost of proposals contained within the document, 'Time for Standards'; and what discussions he has had with the Treasury on the document. [89365]

Mr. Miliband: Within the Government's agreed spending plans, we estimate that the cost of workforce reform will rise to some £1 billion per annum by 2005–06. This is well within the £6 billion planned increase in school budgets to be achieved by that year. These spending plans and the proposals in "Time for Standards" naturally carry the support of the Treasury.

Sure Start (Rural Areas)

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many applications there have been for the Sure Start scheme in rural areas since its launch; how many have been accepted; and what the average amount spent on each bid has been to date. [88143]

Maria Eagle: In rolling out Sure Start local programmes, we have invited local authority districts with large rural areas to establish a rural programme. Fifteen local authority districts have put forward an identifiably rural area as the location for their Sure Start local programme. These have all been accepted. The average level of revenue funding when programmes become fully operational—which is the third year of operation—is around £750,000 (this includes two programmes which are currently being developed as part of the 6th wave and their funding has not yet been finalised). Capital funding ranging from £750,000 to £900,000 has also been committed to each rural programme. This is based on the capital strategy submitted by each individual programme and is intended to fund major capital projects in the first three years of operation.

In addition, we are supporting a pilot project of 50 Mini Sure Start programmes in rural areas and areas with pockets of deprivation. These programmes cover areas where the number of disadvantaged children living in a defined area is considerably less than the 800 required for a typical full programme and so would not be covered by the traditional Sure Start model. The Mini Sure Start programmes are building on existing services like Neighbourhood Nurseries or other facilities delivering children's services and using Sure Start funding to deliver outreach and additional health work. Of the 50 Mini Sure Start pilots, 29 are specifically in rural areas. Average revenue grant for these programmes across the financial years 2002–03 and 2003–04 is £110,000. Capital funding of up to £250,000 has also been made available.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Embryo Research

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what action she will take to prevent a conflict between the Polkinghorne guidelines on separation and the MRC initiative to target IVF clinics to make more embryonic stem cells available via the donation of embryos; [89042]

(2) what criteria were used by the MRC to decide which clinics would be approached as part of the national stem cell initiative; [89038]

(3) what annual sums the MRC is proposing to make available as part of its targeted call for expressions of interest in developing consortia that foster two way collaborations between IVF clinics and researchers in the context of the national stem cell initiative; [89036]

(4) what incentives the MRC will use to increase the supply of human embryos for the national stem cell initiative; [89035]

(5) if she will estimate the number of human embryos the MRC are aiming to obtain as part of their seeking expressions of interest in the national stem cell initiative; [89033]

(6) if she will list the clinics that received the MRC letter seeking expressions of interest in developing consortia that foster two way collaboration between IVF clinics and researchers in the context of the national stem cell initiative. [89037]

Ms Hewitt: Regulations were introduced in January 2001 to extend the purposes for which human embryos may be used in research. The regulations enable the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) to issue a licence for research for the purposes of increasing knowledge about the development of embryos and serious disease and to enable such knowledge to be applied in developing treatments for serious disease.

The Medical Research Council (MRC) has taken the lead, in collaboration with the UK regulatory authorities (Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, Department of Health, Medicines Control Agency) and other funding agencies, in generating a co-ordinated national stem cell strategy. As part of this, MRC has appointed the National Institute for Biological Standards and Control to set up a UK Stem Cell Bank for the curation and distribution of ethically sourced, quality controlled human adult, foetal and embryonic stem (ES) cell lines.

MRC, HFEA, the Department of Health and the Medicines Control Agency are collaborating to generate a UK-wide framework that will include: provision for oversight of national activities in stem cell research, standard donor information and consent forms, and route maps for researchers wishing to develop, bank and use stem cell lines for research and therapeutic purposes.

The HFEA license will require that samples of all ES cell lines be deposited in the UK stem cell bank. This will reduce the number of embryos required as individual researchers will not need to generate their own stem cell lines.

In relation to the Call for Expressions of Interest in establishing consortia, applicants will be able to request pump priming support for up to three years. It is expected that more substantial support would be sought through conventional grant schemes. Examples for which funds might be sought through this call include:

a nurse co-ordinator post to aid consenting by potential donors and facilitate interactions between the clinics and researchers

travel expenses to assist liaison between researchers and clinics

essential small equipment (e.g. a dedicated incubator or insulated containers to transport samples between sites)

short-term secondments between collaborating centres for the purpose of training

The Polkinghorne guidelines refer to the use of foetal tissue. The House of Lords Select Committee report on Stem Cell Research (February 2002) recommends the separation of clinical and research roles to be standard practice for donation of eggs and embryos. MRC will adhere to this recommendation in funding stem cell research. The nurse co-ordinators mentioned in the Call will be employed by the IVF clinics and will ensure that the donor couple fully understands the aims of the research and that it might reveal information about their health. The nurse co-ordinators will never become engaged in the research, but will liaise with the researchers to inform them if embryos become available.

It is illegal in the UK for payment to be made for the donation of gametes (nominal expenses are provided however). MRC will not under any circumstances contribute to the costs of IVF treatment for those couples who choose to donate embryos for research. Donation will be entirely voluntary and by the free will of the couples involved. The decision to donate or not to donate will have no effect on their IVF treatment.

Additionally, as recommended by the Select Committee, a high level Oversight Body has been established, chaired by Lord Patel, that will be responsible for the custody of stem cell lines, ensuring their purity and provenance, monitoring their use, and for establishing codes of practice for the use of ES cells, whether obtained from the bank or imported from elsewhere. The committee will review on a case by case basis applications to deposit and access ES cell lines and will monitor the use of foetal and adult stem cell lines. The committee reports to MRC Council and will brief Ministers on request.

Clinics undertaking IVF treatment in the UK were asked whether they were interested in participating in the national stem cell initiative. A list of these clinics is available in the HFEA website (www.hfea.gov.uk). Those that expressed an interest were invited to attend a meeting at MRC Head Office and were subsequently sent an invitation to submit an expression of interest in establishing a consortium to develop collaborations. The process is ongoing, with the deadline for submissions of interest being 31 January 2003. It is not known yet how many applications will be submitted, nor the level of support requested or to be awarded. When awards are made, they will be published on the MRC website in the usual way.

Stem cell research will be conducted on embryos that are surplus to IVF treatment needs and would otherwise be discarded. The MRC does not know how many surplus embryos are discarded and cannot know how many surplus embryos will be donated for stem cell research.

Minimum Wage

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what plans there are to extend coverage of the national minimum wage to under 18s; [90639]

(2) what plans there are to abolish the development rate for the national minimum wage; [90638]

(3) if she will estimate the impact of increasing the minimum wage *(a)* in line with average earnings, *(b)* to £4.17 per hour, *(c)* to £4.87 per hour, *(d)* to £5.00 per hour and *(e)* to £5.30 per hour, on the cost of salaries of departmental employees (i) in total and (ii) for each nation of the United Kingdom in the next financial year; [90605]

(4) when the Low Pay Commission will produce its next report; [90637]

(5) what she estimates the cost to businesses would be of an increase in the national minimum wage from *(a)* £4.20 to £4.87 and *(b)* £3.60 to £4.17 in (i) Scotland, (ii) England, (iii) Wales, and (iv) Northern Ireland. [90636]

Alan Johnson: We have asked the Low Pay Commission to produce their Fourth Report on the national minimum wage by February 2003 and will carefully consider any recommendations that the Commission make on these issues in that report.

BAE Systems

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with BAe Systems regarding the sale of the aerostructures division. [90725]

Alan Johnson: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, has had no specific discussions with BAe Systems regarding the sale of the aerostructures division.

At a meeting in October last year at which a wide range of issues was discussed, representatives of BAe Systems informed me that the future ownership of the company's aerostructures business was under review. On 20 November, the BAe Systems' Board approved a recommendation to divest the aerostructures business and the company made an announcement to this effect on 25 November 2002.

Syd Rapson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what meetings her Department had with officials of Financial Dynamics since 1 December. [88855]

Ms Hewitt: DTI officials attended two meetings with officials of other Government Departments during the past few weeks at which Financial Dynamics representatives were present.

Electricity Trading and Transmission Arrangements

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when legislation will be introduced to enable the introduction of the BETTA system; and if she will make a statement. [88038]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* The Government are committed to bringing forward legislation on the British electricity transmission and trading arrangements (BETTA) as soon as parliamentary time allows. The Government intend to introduce legislation in order to have British Electricity Trading and Transmission Arrangements in place no later than April 2005.

Business Links

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what *(a)* rules, *(b)* guidance and *(c)* advice she has published on declarations of interest and withdrawal from meetings in respect of the members of boards of Business Links. [90150]

Nigel Griffiths: Clauses 7.1 to 7.3 of the Business Link Operator Appointment outlines the responsibilities of Business Link Operators under Corporate Governance and Management. I am sending a copy of these to my hon. Friend and place a copy in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many responses had been received from businesses as a result of the Business Link advertisement campaign before 31 December 2002. [90568]

Nigel Griffiths: The main objective of the current Business Link advertising campaign, which was launched in September 2002, is to raise awareness of the business advice service and improve understanding of the variety of professional help available through Business Link.

The campaign generated an increase of 61 per cent. in weekly calls to our national 0845 telephone number and a 63 per cent. increase in web sessions to businesslink.orgsite.

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the estimate is of the costs of the Business Link advertisement campaign by *(a)* news and print papers, *(b)* radio and *(c)* television in the calendar year 2003. [90569]

Nigel Griffiths: Costs committed to date for the continuation of the current Business Link advertising campaign are detailed as follows

	£
(a) News and print papers	491,533
(b) Radio	490,702
(c) TV	912,078
Total	1,894,313

The current campaign runs until March 2003. Plans for advertising from April have yet to be agreed.

Child Care Tax Credit

Mr Archy Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the advertising campaign on maternity and paternity leave rights will include information about financial support with child care costs. [90769]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The aim of the campaign is to raise awareness among both employers and employees about the new employment legislation which affects both expectant parents and parents with children under six or disabled children under 18.

The Inland Revenue is already advertising the two new tax credits in the national press and on national television, of which the child tax credit includes an element specifically to help parents with child care costs; and the Department for Work and Pensions produces a booklet, Babies and Children, covering all the benefits for expectant parents and those caring for children, which is freely available from Jobcentre Plus offices and post offices.

Company Directors (Disqualification)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on what grounds courts may disqualify a person from acting as an *(a)* executive and *(b)* non-executive company director; and what plans she has to extend them. [89251]

Miss Melanie Johnson: When it falls to a court to determine whether a person's conduct as a director makes him unfit to be concerned in the management of a company, the court will take into account the circumstances of the case and must have regard in particular to the matters for determining the unfitness of directors set out in Schedule 1 to the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986.

It is also possible for a court to make a disqualification order on conviction of a relevant indictable offence, for persistent breaches of companies legislation and for fraud discovered in the course of a winding up.

The effects of disqualification legislation extend to being a director or being concerned or taking part in, directly or indirectly, the promotion, formation or management of a company, except with the leave of the court.

We have no plans to extend the grounds on which a person may be disqualified.

Development Agencies

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the level of accountability of development agencies in respect of their use of public money; and if she will make a statement. [88588]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 14 January 2003]:* RDAs are non-departmental public bodies which operate under strict HM Treasury rules for all expenditure incurred. The annual accounts of the RDAs are audited by National Audit Office. The RDAs also have their own internal auditors and Government offices monitor payments made to the RDA.

The Department also receives monitoring reports from the RDAs on a regular basis to ensure that expenditure is properly incurred. The RDAs set out their broad spending plans in Corporate Plans which are submitted to Government for approval; these Corporate Plans are expected to deliver a number of targets which are set by the DTI in collaboration with other Government Departments to reflect the policy interest of those funding the agencies.

Nuclear Power

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will calculate the cost of generating one unit of electricity from a new-built *(a)* nuclear power station, *(b)* coal-fired power station, *(c)* gas-fired power station, *(d)* offshore wind facility and *(e)* onshore wind facility; assuming average size in each case, and the write-off of capital costs over a 30-year period. [89088]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 8 January 2003]:* The costs of generating electricity are a commercial matter for generators.

Costs can be estimated on a variety of bases, and will vary from plant to plant. For example, figures can include all cost items, including depreciation and return on capital, or can refer only to the additional costs associated with continued operation. The costs of plant using fossil fuel will vary as fuel prices change.

Estimates of the cost of generating electricity from new and existing coal and gas-fired power stations were published in chapter 5 of the 1998 White Paper, "Conclusions of the Review of Energy Sources for Power Generation" (http://www.dti.gov.uk/energy/publications/whitepapers/review_sources/chpt05.pdf)

This suggested that the cost of new gas-fired generation might be in the range 1.8 to 2.2p/kWh, and new coal stations between 2.6 and 3.25p/kWh.

More recent estimates of the cost of generation costs from different types of plant are contained in the PIU Energy Review and a report by an inter-departmental analysts group, both of which were published in February 2002.

The PIU estimated the costs of gas-fired generation, new nuclear build and onshore and offshore wind generation as follows:

	Estimated generation cost (p/kWh)
Gas	2 to 2.3
Nuclear	2.5 to 4
Onshore wind	1.5 to 2.5
Offshore wind	2 to 3

Note:
Estimate for onshore and offshore wind are for developments in 2020 and exclude additional costs occurring as a result of their intermittent nature.

Both reports are available in the Libraries of the House.

http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/innovation/2002/energy/report/index.htm

http://www.dti.gov.uk/energy/greenhousegas/index.shtml

Post Office

Linda Gilroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her Department is doing to promote the services of the post office network among other Departments who use its services. [88879]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 14 January 2003]:* The nationwide reach of the post office network represents a valuable channel for delivery of Government and other services. Post offices are traditionally the place where customers go to transact a range of Government business.

As recommended by the PIU report on the future of the post office network published in June 2000, Government provided the necessary support to enable Post Office Ltd. to test the concept of post offices as Government General Practitioners. DTI contributed £25 million to the cost of running the Your Guide pilot in Leicestershire and Rutland between July 2001 and March 2002. The outcomes of the pilot were thoroughly evaluated and a report was published last July. Although this indicated that a publicly funded national Your Guide service on the lines of that piloted would not provide value for money, and we have therefore decided not to roll it out, Your Guide has highlighted the potential for Government Departments to deliver services through post offices in future. The Department has been encouraging contact between other Departments and the Post Office concerning such services and has drawn the Departments' attention to a commercial kiosk service, based on kiosks in retail outlets—including some sub-post offices—which is expected to be piloted in Cornwall later this year.

Ultimately it is for individual Departments and Post Office Ltd. to decide whether or not to pursue these initiatives. But we will ensure that Post Office Ltd. continues to work closely with other Government Departments to develop and promote the services of the network as appropriate.

Post Office Card Account

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on her Department's role in approving Post Office Ltd's communications with customers concerning the new post office card account. [90687]

Mr. Timms: Communication with customers about the card account at the Post Office is an operational matter for Post Office Ltd. I understand from the company that one leaflet on child benefit has been distributed to post offices for issue to customers.

Postage Stamps

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make it illegal for retailers to sell postage stamps for less than the face value. [90686]

Mr. Timms: Retailers purchase books of stamps on a wholesale basis from the Royal Mail for resale in their outlets. As with other products acquired in quantity for resale purposes, it is for the retailer to decide whether they wish to sell the item for less than the face value. I have no plans to propose changes in this area.

Postal Services (Romford)

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to improve postal services in Romford. [90294]

Mr. Timms: These are matters that fall within the day to day responsibility of Royal Mail and I have therefore asked the Chairman to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on postal services in Romford. [90295]

Mr. Timms: These are matter that fall within the day to day responsibility of Royal Mail and I have therefore asked the Chairman to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Redundancy Payments Office

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the total sums *(a)* claimed and *(b)* paid out by the Redundancy Payments Office were in each month over the last two years in respect of *(a)* redundancy pay, *(b)* holiday pay, *(c)* notice pay and *(d)* unpaid wages. [90688]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 14 January 2003]:* The Redundancy Payments Service claim forms ask claimants for pay and other details of their former employment but not the amount of the claim, which is calculated by the service's computer system. The following table shows the total sums paid out for each of the months and categories specified.

Payments made by the Redundancy Payments Service

£000

	Arrears of pay[1]	*Compensatory notice pay*[1]	*Holiday*[1]	*Redundancy*[1]
2001				
January	2,221	8,497	1,809	9,946
February	2,142	6,569	1,481	8,995
March	3,442	8,762	1,925	11,334
April	2,692	7,405	1,416	8,408
May	2,513	7,865	1,777	9,057
June	2,217	10,235	2,076	10,097
July	2,015	8,632	1,667	7,761
August	2,490	7,507	2,140	10,551
September	2,454	7,211	1,831	11,156
October	3,198	11,197	2,018	11,650
November	2,932	7,854	1,933	8,627
December	2,117	6,317	1,596	9,241
2002				
January	2,749	10,898	2,366	10,144
February	3,396	12,298	2,242	10,817
March	2,625	9,672	1,472	10,186
April	3,070	10,619	1,857	12,039
May	2,494	10,108	2,019	11,263
June	2,158	8,908	1,708	7,499
July	3,328	10,969	2,206	9,864
August	1,963	8,459	1,781	8,119
September	3,112	9,847	2,667	12,885
October	2,974	10,477	2,163	11,539
November	2,972	11,116	2,075	11,917
December	2,178	8,187	1,730	9,567

[1] Gross payments before the deduction of tax and national insurance contributions.

Science Funding

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what metrics she uses to assess the economic benefits of Government expenditure on science *(a)* as a whole and *(b)* in respect of individual programmes. [87843]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 17 December 2002]:* The Government believes that investment in science research generates substantial benefits for society and the economy. The main vehicle for Government investment in basic and strategic research is the Science Budget. The metrics that are used to measure the performance of the UK Science and Engineering Base as a whole at present are:-

(a) Quality: measured by the UK's ranking in terms of citations.

(b) Relevance: the proportion of HEI funding from non governmental sources.

(c) Cost-effectiveness: measured by the UK's ranking in terms of the number of papers published per £1 million of public expenditure on science.

One mechanism through which investment in the Science Base is translated into economic benefit is through the knowledge transfer activities of the Science and Engineering Base. Metrics in this area include:

(a) Trends in numbers of patents applied for

(b) Trends in the number of licensing agreements

(c) Trends in income from licensing Intellectual property rights

(d) Metrics of spin-outs

(e) Trends in RC income from the UK private sector

(f) Trends in co-publication with industry

In addition Government Departments, including DTI, fund scientific research programmes in support of their objectives. This type of research will be evaluated primarily in terms of its contribution to the achievement of the relevant departmental policy or regulatory goals, rather than its overall economic impact as such. The Government is keen however to see that any economic benefits flowing from such research are properly exploited. To that end the Government's science, engineering and technology strategy, "Investing in Innovation" published in July 2002, made recommendations for strengthening departmental mechanisms for ensuring appropriate knowledge transfer.

Sickness Absence

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many days per employee have been lost through sickness in each year since 1997; and if she will make a statement. [88828]

Alan Johnson: Estimates of the number of days lost through sickness and injury per employee are available from the Labour Force Survey. However, figures are only available on a consistent basis from 2000 onwards and data for 2002 are not yet available.

In 2000, 4.4 working days were lost on average through sickness and injury per employee. In 2001, 4.3 working days were lost on average per employee.

Statutory Instruments

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many Statutory Instruments subject to negative procedure made by her Department *(a)* came into force and *(b)* were considered by a delegated legislation committee in each of the last three sessions. [88036]

Ms Hewitt: The information is as follows:

Session	Number of SIs (a) subject to negative procedure, coming into force	(b) considered by a designated legislation committee
1999–2000	173	3
2000–01	49	1
2001–02	109	0

Note:
All SIs were considered by the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments. However those in column *(b)* were also considered by a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many statutory instruments have been issued by her Department in each calendar year since 1979. [89839]

Ms Hewitt: The number of statutory instruments issued by my Department in each calendar year are as follows:

	Number of statutory instruments issued
1990	144
1991	150
1992	106
1993	87
1994	138
1995	112
1996	122
1997	128
1998	135
1999	176
2000	146
2001	126
2002	128

Note:
Figures between 1979 and 1989 are not available.

Veterinary Medicines

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what assessment she has made of the Competition Commission's provisional conclusions and hypothetical remedies contained in its inquiry into the pricing of prescription-only medicines; what assessment she has made of the effect of the inquiry's initial proposals on the *(a)* ability to dispense and *(b)* profitability of (i) small animal and (ii) large animal veterinary practices; and if she will make a statement; [88722]

(2) when the findings of the Competition Commission's inquiry into the pricing of prescription-only veterinary medicines will be published; and if she will make a statement. [88721]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Competition Commission's statement of provisional conclusions and hypothetical remedies was made public to inform interested parties in case they wished to make further representations to the Commission in the course of the inquiry. Therefore, it would not have been appropriate for DTI Ministers to make any assessment or statement until after receipt of the final report.

The Competition Commission's draft final report on the supply of prescription only veterinary medicines was sent to DTI on 8 January 2003. The administrative target is to publish within 10 weeks of receipt.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Register of Interests

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners if he will place in the Library a copy of the Register of Interests of the Church Commissioners; for what reason the Register of Interests of the Church Commissioners is not *(a)* available for inspection by the general public, *(b)* published and *(c)* available by photocopy on payment of a reasonable fee; and to what Government commitments to openness and freedom of information the Church of England is bound by reason if its establishment. [89655]

Mr. Bell: Although the Commissioners are not bound by the type of Government commitment to which the hon. Gentleman refers, the Board of Governors agreed in May 2000 to establish a members' Code of Conduct and Register of Interests in line with good practice.

This is freely available by appointment to any Member of Parliament, Government official or General Synod member, which reflects the Commissioners' accountability to both bodies.

I will arrange for a copy of it to be placed in the library.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Asylum Seekers

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the impact upon voluntary organisations in receipt of European Social Fund and other funding sources of the withdrawal of the work concession for asylum-seekers for whom no decision had been made in six months and the consequent loss of grant to voluntary organisations offering services to those groups. [R] [89779]

Beverley Hughes: Operation of the European Social Fund is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions who has said that there will be no impact on voluntary organisations that have ensured that their European Social Fund projects support only those people eligible to benefit from the fund.

Fast asylum decision making will mean that asylum seekers who receive positive decisions will be able to access the full range of projects very quickly and so the impact on projects aimed at asylum seekers who would previously have been granted permission to work will be minimal.

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the level of awareness of asylum-seekers and those

organisations working with them of the learning and volunteering opportunities which are no longer open to them. [R] [89781]

Beverley Hughes: We are keen to see asylum seekers make a positive use of their time while waiting for their claim for asylum to be assessed. A range of opportunities are available to all asylum seekers regardless of the state of their claim and asylum seekers are also able to contribute to their communities through voluntary work.

Faster decision making will ensure that asylum seekers receiving positive decisions will be able to access a full range of opportunities at a far earlier stage than previously was the case.

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the potential for *(a)* underspending on this year's European Social Fund allocation to organisations working with asylum-seekers, *(b)* capacity to meet agreed ESF targets, and *(c)* implications for future ESF allocations, following the withdrawal of the work concession for asylum-seekers who do not have a decision after six months. [R] [89785]

Beverley Hughes: The operation of the European Social Fund (ESF) is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions who has said that, where necessary, allocation to organisations working with asylum seekers will be absorbed by other beneficiaries, and there is not expected to be any change to capacity to meet ESF targets, and there are not expected to be implications for future ESF allocations.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 4 November from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. Imad Osman Ahmid. [89237]

Beverley Hughes: I wrote to my right hon. Friend about this case on 15 January 2003.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter to the Minister of State from the hon. Member for Colchester of 27th November 2002. [90280]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 13 January 2003]:* I wrote to the hon. Member on 13 January 2003.

Domestic Violence

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in how many cases power of arrest has been used in cases involving domestic violence in each UK region in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [88312]

Hilary Benn: Information from the Best Value Performance Indicators for the police service for April 2001—March 2002 on the number of people that have been arrested for domestic violence is as follows.

Police Force	*Domestic violence persons arrested*
Avon and Somerset	1,499
Bedfordshire	1,182
Cambridgeshire	N/A
Cheshire	844
City of London	17
Cleveland	1,207
Cumbria	812
Derbyshire	N/A
Devon and Cornwall	2,808
Dorset	615
Durham	1,971
Dyfed-Powys	879
Essex	972
Gloucestershire	N/A
Greater Manchester	4,205
Gwent	401
Hampshire	N/A
Hertfordshire	N/A
Humberside	746
Kent	2,438
Lancashire	2,376
Leicestershire	N/A
Lincolnshire	N/A
Merseyside	N/A
Metropolitan Police	6,265
Norfolk	1,326
Northamptonshire	398
Northumbria	5,663
North Wales	1,889
North Yorkshire	648
Nottinghamshire	N/A
South Wales	2,179
South Yorkshire	N/A
Staffordshire	3,636
Suffolk	19
Surrey	N/A
Sussex	3,313
Thames Valley	583
Warwickshire	N/A
West Mercia	N/A
West Midlands	7,025
West Yorkshire	76
Wiltshire	1,125
England and Wales	57,117

N/A—Figures not available.

Domestic violence itself is not a criminal offence and offenders are charged under a number of different offences (assault, GBH etc). Police forces have to examine individual crime reports in order to identify these crimes, and to identify which resulted in arrests. It is expected that rollout of new IT should enable all forces to produce this data in due course.

Drugs Crime

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of crime in the *(a)* Twickenham constituency, *(b)* London Borough of Richmond upon Thames and *(c)* London in 2001 was deemed to be drug related; and if he will make a statement. [88824]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 13 January 2003]:* Recorded crime figures include statistics on drugs offences, such as possession, and on acquisitive crimes, such as burglary, but do not record whether the latter are related to an offender's drug habits.

However, the New English and Welsh Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring (NEW-ADAM) research programme, which involves interviewing and drug testing those arrested by the police, confirms a link between drug misuse and crime. The conclusions do not

relate specifically to Twickenham or Richmond-upon-Thames, although two of the eight sites were in London (Bethnal Green and Hammersmith). Analysis of the data from the first eight sites in the survey, collected during 1999–2000, shows that 65 per cent. of arrestees provided a urine sample that tested positive for one or more illegal drug. The analysis also shows that up to 29 per cent. of arrestees tested positive for opiates (including heroin) and/or cocaine (including crack).

As a guide to the proportion of crime that is drug-related, analysis of the NEW-ADAM self-report data indicates that while only 21 per cent. of non-drug using arrestees reportedhaving previously offended in the past 12 months, this figure rises to 75 per cent. for those arrestees who use heroin and/or cocaine/crack. Moreover, while users of both heroin and cocaine/crack represented just under one quarter of all arrestees interviewed, they were responsible for more than three fifths of all the illegal income reported.

In support of this, 55 per cent. of arrestees who reported using one or more drugs in the last 12 months and committing one or more acquisitive crimes, acknowledged a link between their drug use and their offending behaviour. This proportion rose to 78 per cent. for arrestees who said they had used heroin and cocaine/crack.

Green Ministers

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which Minister in his Department is nominated Green Minister; how often he has attended meetings of the Green Ministers; and which official has responsibility for the Defra rural proofing checklist in his Department. [88462]

Beverley Hughes: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Lord Filkin) for Race Equality, Community Policy and European and International Policy represents the Home Office on the Ministers' Committee ENV(G). It is not the policy of Government Departments to disclose details of Ministers' attendance of meetings. Policy responsibility for rural proofing lies in the Home Office with the Public Order and Reassurance Unit.

Oakington

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the weekly cost of providing the facilities at the Immigration Reception Centre, Oakington. [89797]

Beverley Hughes: The estimated weekly cost of providing the facilities at Oakington in 2001–02, the last full year for which information was available, was £288,000. The comparable (provisional) figure for the first six months of 2002–03 was £294,000.

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the unit cost is of processing asylum applications at the Immigration Reception Centre, Oakington, Cambridgeshire. [89799]

Beverley Hughes: The unit cost of processing a principal asylum application at Oakington reception centre in 2001–02, the last full year for which figures are available, was £1,515. The comparable provisional figure for the first six months of 2002–03 was an estimated £1,247.

Motor Vehicle Abandonment

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* prosecutions and *(b)* convictions for abandoning a motor vehicle there were in each London borough in each of the last five years. [89407]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Court proceedings information held centrally on the offence of dumping, under the Refuse Disposal (Amenity) Act 1978, cannot separately identify the dumping of motor vehicles from the dumping of anything other than a motor vehicle.

Information is not collected by London borough. Available data are therefore given in the table for the Metropolitan Police area.

Number of proceedings and total findings of guilt for the offence of unauthorised dumping[1] within the Metropolitan Police area, 1998–2001

	Number of offences	
	Total proceedings	*Total findings of guilt*
1998	11	8
1999	42	32
2000	30	29
2001	18	17

[1] An offence under the Refuse Disposal (Amenity) Act 1978 section 2 (covers motor vehicles and other).

Note:
1997 data not available

Road Haulage Industry (Illegal Immigrants)

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with road haulage companies regarding the security of vehicles against illegal immigrants. [90324]

Beverley Hughes: There was widespread consultation with the transport industry prior to the introduction, in April 2000, of the regime under which road hauliers and others may receive penalties for the carriage of clandestine entrants to the United Kingdom. That consultation included how road hauliers could secure their vehicles against unauthorised entry.

Since the regime was introduced, and during the recent passage through Parliament of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act, which brought in an amended regime from 8 December 2002, there has been frequent correspondence and meetings with the industry, both at ministerial and official level.

Responsibility for securing vehicles against unauthorised entry lies with transport operators. Those who take the measures described in the "Prevention of Clandestine Entry Code of Practice" will greatly reduce both the risk of carrying clandestine entrants to the United Kingdom and of receiving a penalty should they do so. Compliance with the Code is promoted strongly in all our dealings with the industry and this message was reinforced more recently in the awareness raising campaign that took place in the weeks leading to the implementation of the amended penalty regime.

During the course of administering the penalty provisions, officials often give advice on an individual basis to companies about the level of vehicle security expected, and about compliance with the Code of Practice. The Code is available on the Home Office Website as well as on request from the Civil Penalty Central Administration Unit by telephoning 020 8745 6006.

Police (Bromley)

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many police officers there were in the London borough of Bromley in each year since 1973; [89803]

(2) how many special constables there were in the London borough of Bromley in each year since 1973; and how many police support staff there were in each year over the same period. [89804]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 14 January 2003]:* This information is not centrally collected. The deployment of resources between the London borough divisions is an operational matter for the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis.

Information on the number of police officers, special constables and civilian support staff for each force can be found in the Annual Reports of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary until 1995–96. Thereafter the data can be found in Home Office Statistical Bulletins on police strength in England and Wales from March 1998, copies of which are in the Library.

Prison Population

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many convicted prisoners there were in England and Wales in the last period for which figures are available; how many were *(a)* United Kingdom nationals, *(b)* nationals of another EU state and *(c)* nationals of other states; and how many, when sentenced, had no current right of abode in the United Kingdom. [90358]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 13 January 2003]:* On 31 October 2002 there were 63,772 convicted prisoners in prisons in England and Wales. 57,019 of these were UK nationals, 653 were from EU member states, 5,852 were from non-member states, and 248 have no recorded nationality. These figures exclude non-criminal prisoners and fine defaulters.

Information on how many prisoners had a current right of abode is not available.

Sex Offenders

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people are subject to the registration under the sex offender list 1997, as amended, solely for *(a)* offences that were decriminalised by the Sexual Offences Amendment list 2001 and *(b)* offences that the Government proposes to decriminalise or downgrade in its White Paper on Reform of Sexual Offences. [89660]

Hilary Benn: Although the notification requirements of the Sex Offenders Act 1997 are commonly known as 'the register or sex offenders', there is, in fact, no central register from which this information could be obtained.

It is not possible to say how many individuals in the categories specified are subject to the notification requirements of the Sex Offenders Act 1997 (the register). This is because not all those convicted or cautioned for buggery or gross indecency at present will be required to register. A person becomes subject to the Act's requirements in a variety of circumstances following a conviction or a caution for buggery or gross indecency.

Whether offenders convicted of buggery and gross indecency must register

Offence	*Offender under 20*	*Offender over 20 and victim/other party over 18*	*Offender over 20 and victim/other party under 18*
Buggery	Never	Only where sentence longer than 30 months	Always
Gross indecency	Never	Only where sentence longer than 30 months	Always

Criminal statistics do not record the circumstances of the offence with a sufficient degree of detail to say for each offence how many individuals will be affected. Moreover, the requirements on some offenders who were cautioned or convicted on or since the implementation of the Sex Offenders Act 1997 will since have lapsed.

Terrorism

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent tests have been conducted to establish the reaction time of the emergency services in the event of a terrorist attack. [88408]

Mr. Denham: In addition to regular training undertaken by the emergency services, the Home Office national counter-terrorist exercise programme is centred on three large-scale live exercises involving participants from Central Government, the police, military and specialist scientific or technical assistance if required.

TREASURY

Employment Statistics

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his most recent estimate was of the number of people, broken down by age and sex, who have never worked. [90817]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from J. Pullinger to Mr. Frank Field, dated 15 January 2003:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question about the number of people who have never worked. I am replying in his absence. (90817)

The attached table gives the information requested for the three month period ending August 2002. These estimates are from the Labour Force Survey (LFS).

People who have never had paid work [1], by sex and age United Kingdom, June to August 2002

Thousands, not seasonally adjusted

	All persons	*Male*	*Female*
All aged 16+	2,462	1,012	1,450
All of working age[2]	2,203	996	1,208
16–17	777	416	361
18–24	843	417	427
25–34	283	94	189
35–49	222	54	168
50–64*(m)*/50–59*(w)*	77	14	63
65+*(m)*/60+*(w)*	259	17	242

[1] Paid work excluding casual or holiday work but including periods of self-employment or support by a Government training and employment programme.
[2] Men aged 16–64 and women aged 16–59.
Note:
These Labour Force Survey (LFS) estimates are Not Seasonally Adjusted (NSA) and have not yet been adjusted to take account of the recent Census 2001 results.
Source:
ONS—Labour Force Survey

Barristers' Fees

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will explain the policy reasons for the special tax point regime for VAT due on barristers' fees; and if he will make a statement. [90422]

John Healey: The VAT tax point rules for barristers were introduced at the start of VAT in recognition of the fact that usually fees are still subject to negotiation after completion of the work and barristers are mostly unable to sue for unpaid fees.

Capita Group

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the contracts that have been awarded to the Capita Group by his Department. [89974]

Ruth Kelly: The information is as follows.

Department/number	*Description*
HMT (1)	Recruitment of Staff
IR (2)	Two Management consultancy frameworks let in 2002
HMCE (39)	Maximum return on Investment Training Membership Subscription Promoting Flexible Working Practices Managing Change Training e-Learning Training Leadership Training GORS Selection Interview Training Training Administration Introduction NLP Training IT Tests Talent Spotting Professional Skills for SEC Business Writing Taking Responsibility Training Civil Service Reform Training AA/AO Assessment Tests Training Evaluation Legal Trainees Fast Stream Recruitment Advanced Assertiveness for Managers Training Complaints Training Henry V and Inspirational Leadership Positive Image Training Assistant Print Buyer Access to Personal Information Training Time Management Training Data Protection Training Belfast Building Work Diagnostic Internal Communications Manager Feedback RAS Helpline Thinking on your feet GLS Lawyers Recruitment Human Resources Manager Communication Training Internal Communications Manager Effective Middle Management Human Resources Customer Contact Centre Advisor
OGC (1)	Capita Property Consultancy are appointed to provide property related advice and services under the terms of a framework agreement.

Departmental Running Costs

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the running costs of *(a)* the Department and *(b)* each of its sponsored agencies were in (i) 1997 and (ii) the most recent year for which figures are available. [90705]

Ruth Kelly: Detailed information on administration costs for HM Treasury and its agencies, going back to 1998–99 and with projections to 2003–04, is set out in Table 5, annex B, of the 2002 departmental report (Cm 5425). Data for years before 1998–99 are not available on the same basis. Provisional outturn for gross and net administration costs limits were published in "Public Expenditure 2001–02 Provisional Outturn" (Cm 5574), Tables 4 and 5. Updated information, with plans to 2005–06, will be published in the 2003 departmental report in the spring.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what distribution of his Department's whole-time equivalent staff was, including the staff in agencies and other bodies reporting to him, in each Government office region and nation of the UK *(a)* in 1996 and *(b)* at the most recent available period. [90466]

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many full-time equivalent staff are employed in *(a)* the Department and *(b)* each of the agencies it sponsors; and what the figures were for 1997. [90665]

Ruth Kelly: I refer my hon. Friend and the hon. Gentleman to the answer the Minister of State, Cabinet Office is giving today.

Honours and Dignities

Norman Lamb: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will break down by main spending heads *(a)* salaries and *(b)* ceremonial expenses paid for by his Department under its provision for honours and dignities, as set out on page 55 of the HM Treasury Departmental Report 2002. [89263]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 7 January 2003]:* Honours and dignities are normally awarded by HM the Queen on the advice of the Ceremonial Secretariat of the Cabinet Office. For historical reasons spending is included in the Treasury's Estimate. Estimated spending by the Central Chancery of the Orders of Knighthood (CCOK) for the financial year 2002–03 breaks down as follows:

	£
Admin expenses of CCOK, including salaries	469,100
Cost of Insignia issued	459,700
George Cross annuities	18,200
Other Ceremonial costs	69,000
Total	[1]1,016,000

[1] Net of £7,000 appropriations-in-aid.

Income Tax

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the revenue yield of a 50 per cent. income tax rate on *(a)* taxable incomes and *(b)* gross incomes exceeding £100,000 per annum; if he will estimate in each case the (i) income tax and (ii) capital gains tax yield; and if he will make a statement. [90175]

Dawn Primarolo: The full-year yield in 2003–04 of making the changes are set out in the table.

	(i) income tax yield (£ billion)	*(ii) capital gains tax yield (£ million)*
(a) 50 per cent. rate for taxable incomes over £100,000	4.9	120
(b) 50 per cent. rate for gross incomes over £100,000	5.1	120

The income tax estimates are based on the Survey of Personal Incomes and are consistent with the November 2002 Pre-Budget Report. These estimates exclude any behavioural response to the tax change.

Capital gains tax estimates take into account the likely effect on yield of changes in the volume of disposals in a full year caused by taxpayers' behaviour.

Inheritance Tax

Paul Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to ensure that inheritance tax is paid on the same basis by all residents of the United Kingdom. [90251]

Dawn Primarolo: Inheritance tax is payable on the world-wide estate of those who die domiciled in the UK, or are treated as domiciled here by virtue of their length of residence.

Loans (Second World War)

Bob Russell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what financial payments are being made to the United States of America in respect of loans and other financial assistance given to the UK during the Second World War. [90361]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) on 28 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1437–39W.

Table B19 in the Supplementary Statements to the Consolidated Fund and National Loans Fund Accounts for 2001–02, presented to Parliament on 19 December 2002, provides the latest published data on these loans (HC 113, Session 2002–03).

Lorry Charges

Mr. Wray: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made regarding the introduction of a lorry road user charge for non-UK vehicles; and if he will make a statement. [90461]

John Healey: The Government announced that it intends to introduce a lorry road user charge in 2005 or 2006 based on distance travelled. All haulage vehicles on UK roads will be subject to the charge, including UK operators as well as those from overseas. However, we are committed to ensuring that the UK haulage industry will not pay more as a result of the introduction of the charge and will introduce offsetting tax reductions for the industry.

As announced in the recent pre-Budget report, the Government will publish a second progress report in the near future. This will outline the results of the work on how to implement and procure the charge and offsetting tax cuts.

Manufacturing Exports

Sir Archy Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the value of manufacturing exports from companies in *(a)* the Scottish Borders, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* the UK in each of the last 10 years. [90371]

Ruth Kelly: The estimates for the value of manufacturing exports to EU and non-EU countries for 1993—September 2002 (year to date) are provided in the following table.

£ million

Year	*UK total*	*Scotland*	*Scottish Borders*
1993	80,475	N/A	N/A
1994	92,212	N/A	N/A
1995	107,073	N/A	N/A
1996	118,371	10,482	205
1997	123,887	11,692	190
1998	120,966	13,013	150
1999	120,294	13,978	102
2000	132,433	15,596	129
2001	133,380	16,127	145
2002[1]	98,320	10,236	86

[1] Year to date

Note: Regional trade estimates are not available for the period 1993–96. The Scottish Borders relates to the 'Scottish Borders' district council. The UK total figures are reproduced from the Overseas Trade Statistics time series, published by HM Customs and Excise

Musical Instruments (VAT)

Bob Russell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much he estimates will be raised in the current financial year from the levying of value added tax on musical instruments. [90360]

John Healey: It is not possible to provide the requested estimate. Customs and Excise do not disaggregate VAT receipts to this level of specific commodity detail.

National Insurance

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many employees in Scotland pay national insurance. [90392]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government Actuary's Department is not able to produce reliable estimates of the number of employees paying national insurance in Scotland.

Tax Relief

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the revenue yield of abolishing taper relief for financial years 2003–04 and 2004–05 and reintroducing indexation and retirement relief; and if he will make a statement. [90174]

Dawn Primarolo: Consistent with the assumptions of the November 2002 Pre-Budget Report forecast, the full year yield in 2003–04 from re-introducing indexation and retirement relief and abolishing taper relief is estimated to be £200 million. Information for 2004–05 is available only at disproportionate cost.

Tobacco Products (Revenue)

Paul Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the estimated annual consumption of tobacco products was in each of the last five years. [90274]

John Healey: Estimates of the quantities of cigarettes consumed in each of the last three full financial years are given in Table 3.3 of "Measuring Indirect Tax Losses", published by HM Customs and Excise in November 2002, and available in the Library of the House. Corresponding consumption estimates for the two years 1997–98 and 1998–99 are 85.5 billion cigarette sticks and 83 billion respectively.

PRIVY COUNCIL

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council how many statutory instruments have been issued by his Department in each calendar year since 1979. [89846]

Mr. Robin Cook: The information requested is as follows:

	Number
1979	10
1980	14
1981	4
1982	3
1983	6
1984	11
1985	8
1986	5
1987	9
1988	6
1989	9
1990	4
1991	4
1992	2
1993	3
1994	11
1995	6
1996	11
1997	5
1998	9
1999	14
2000	21
2001	11
2002	7

Notes:
1. For the period 1979 to 1998, statutory instruments were issued by the President of the Council.
2. Figures from 1999 include those issued by the Office of Leader of the House of Commons. Previously, this task was undertaken by the Cabinet Office.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Employers' Liability Insurance

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 10 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 262W, on insurance, what the timetable for the review of the operation of employers' liability compulsory insurance will be. [87793]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I refer the hon. Member to the written ministerial statement I gave on 12 December 2002, *Official Report*, columns 23–24WS, which said that the review would report to Ministers in spring 2003.

New Deal Costs

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts), *Official Report*, 9 December 2002, column 140W, on New Deal costs, how much of the windfall tax revenue has been allocated to *(a)* welfare-to-work programmes and *(b)* other items; and how much remains unallocated. [89855]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 13 January 2003]:* Information on the allocation of the windfall tax is in the Pre-Budget Report published in November 2002, which is available in the Library.

Public Sector Workers (Compulsory Retirement)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what action he is taking to prevent public sector workers from facing compulsory retirement at age 60; and if he will make a statement. [90218]

Mr. McCartney: In the recent Pensions Green Paper, "Simplicity, Security and Choice: Working and Saving for Retirement" (Cm 5677), we have proposed that the rules of public sector pension schemes should be

changed over the next few years to make an unreduced pension payable from a normal pension age of 65 rather than 60 in respect of all new members.

Under age legislation to be implemented by 2006, compulsory retirement ages are likely to be unlawful unless employers can show that they are objectively justified. The Department for Trade and Industry will be consulting further, later in the year, on the proposals for age legislation.

In the meantime, we will build on the work already done through promotion of the Code of Practice for Age Diversity in Employment and the Age Positive campaign. The Government will continue to encourage all employers, including those in the public sector, to review their retirement policies to allow people who want to work beyond normal retirement age, and should they wish, beyond state pension age, to do so.

In the Department, staff below the Senior Civil Service are able to choose to remain in employment beyond the age of 60 for any period up to the age of 65. The Department's flexible approach to age retirement allows staff to continue to work in their current grade and, subject to business need, to seek promotion to a higher grade or volunteer to down grade. Subject to business need, staff may also choose to work full-time or part-time. Senior civil servants can apply to work beyond age 60 where there is a business need.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Building Regulations (Home Energy Efficiency)

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what training will be provided for building control officers to enable them to enforce the requirements of Part L of the new Building Regulations for England and Wales. [90803]

Mr. Leslie: Training of building control officers to equip them for the proper discharge of their enforcement duties is a matter for local authorities and approved inspectors. However, the office of the Deputy Prime Minister co-operates closely with these bodies and the professional institutions to facilitate training whenever amendments to the building regulations are made. Regarding Part L, my right hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich and Woolwich made arrangements for the publication of the new requirements almost a year before they came into effect, and officials gave presentations of the new provisions at many events in months preceding the effective date.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what proportion of new buildings constructed between July and September 2002 were built to the new thermal standards in Part L of the Building Regulations for England and Wales. [90804]

Mr. Leslie: The information requested is not held centrally, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The new thermal standards were introduced by SI 2001:3335 and came into effect on 1 April 2002, subject to transitional provisions. These provided that any planned new building that had received building control approval before 1 April 2002, or which had started on site before that date, could proceed in accordance with the previous standards. All planned new buildings notified to the local authority under the Building Act on or after 1 April 2002 must comply with the new requirements. Between July and September 2002, there will thus have been some buildings being constructed to the old standards and some to the new standards. There is no centrally collected information on the proportions of new buildings in each category.

Fire Service

Mr. Chope: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what progress has been made in the procurement of a national radio network for the fire service; and when he expects the budget to be complete. [90434]

Mr. Raynsford: A notice announcing the procurement was published in the official journal of the European Communities on 24 October 2002, approximately three months ahead of schedule. As a result 45 companies requested pre-qualification documentation. Subsequently 33 companies submitted a response; of these 17 wished to be considered as the main contractor and 13 as possible subcontractors. The evaluation of these responses is continuing and due to be completed during February 2003. Invitations to submit formal proposals will be issued to the pre-qualified organisations in May 2003.

The budget for the ongoing costs of the project team is complete already: it is being funded from within the office of the Deputy Prime Minister resources. The budget for the main project investment will be in place before contracts fall to be signed, in financial year 2004–05.

David Davis: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when fire fighting personnel, including those military personnel on Operation FRESCO, have been redeployed from their home fire stations in each month since October 2002; and whether such stations are classified *(a)* rural and *(b)* urban. [90223]

Mr. Raynsford: Fire service redeployments are arranged at local level and are not recorded by Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate. In a number of fire brigades responsibility rests at station level to arrange short term redeployments to maintain crewing on a day by day basis. In such cases the overall crewing level for the brigade would be recorded, but individual movements would not be directly measured. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is not aware of any significant movement between rural or urban areas.

Armed Forces personnel were not attached to individual fire stations.

Housing Need (Children)

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to meet the housing needs of *(a)* homeless children and *(b)* families with children living in poor housing. [88540]

Mrs. Roche: Homeless children under the age of 16, are the responsibility of social services. Under the homelessness legislation, as amended by the Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002 and the Homelessness Act 2002

which both came into force on 31 July 2002, local housing authorities in England must ensure that suitable accommodation is available for children aged 16 or 17 who are homeless through no fault of their own (unless they are a relevant child for the purposes of the Children Act 1989 and the responsibility of social services).

In terms of supporting families with children, in March 2002 the Government announced a commitment that by March 2004 local authorities shall ensure that no homeless family with children is in a Bed and Breakfast hotel (B&B) other than in an emergency, and even then for no more than six weeks.

High B&B using councils have been required to submit action plans on how they intend to meet this commitment. The Homelessness Directorate is working closely with these and other lower using councils on delivery of these action plans. This has been supported by a £35 million grant programme in 2002–03 together with changes to housing benefit subsidy implemented by the Department for Work and Pensions.

For 2003–04 the Homelessness Directorate will allocate up to a further £15 million to help authorities meet the March 2004 B&B commitment.

On 3 December, I announced that the Government intends to outlaw the use of B&Bs for homeless families except in an emergency. The Government will be consulting in due course on options for strengthening the homelessness legislation by Order and through statutory guidance to:

end the use of privately owned B&B establishments as temporary accommodation for homeless families with children except in emergencies and even then for no more than six weeks;

set minimum accommodation fitness and proposed management standards in all temporary accommodation used by local authorities to house homeless households;

set additional fitness standards for shared facility (B&B) type privately owned temporary accommodation used by local authorities to house homeless households.

The Government has set a target to bring all social housing up to a decent standard and to increase the proportion of private housing occupied by vulnerable groups that is in a decent condition by 2010.

The Government has also announced a new house-building programme worth more than £1.2 billion, up £365 million on the current year. The extra funds have been allocated to the Housing Corporation's Approved Development Programme (ADP) and should deliver up to 21,000 affordable homes in 2003–04.

Light Pollution

Mr. Luff: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what recent planning policy guidance he has issued on light pollution. [90388]

Mr. McNulty: A specific Planning Policy Guidance Note on light pollution has not been issued. However, in 1997, the Government issued "Lighting in the Countryside: Towards Good Practice". This document gives advice on the adverse effects of lighting schemes associated with development, both in the countryside and in the urban context.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what estimate he has made of the cost, by English regions, of re-organising local government, should a decision be made to establish a regional assembly. [90701]

Mr. Raynsford: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has made no estimate of the cost of re-organising local government in the English regions as this will vary significantly, dependent on which regions opt for elected Regional Assemblies, the extent of two tier authorities in these regions, the changes recommended by the Boundary Committee for England and subsequent decisions made by the newly created authorities about their organisational structure and levels of service provision. As indicated in the draft guidance to the Boundary Committee on which the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is currently consulting. A model is being developed to be available to the Boundary Committee, or those making proposals to the Committee, to assess the relative cost differentials of different unitary structures.

Deprived Urban Post Office Fund

Lynne Jones: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his definition is of 'urban deprived' for the purpose of distribution of the Post Office Fund for Urban Deprived Areas; and if he will make a statement. [90043]

Mr. McNulty: For the purpose of distribution of the Deprived Urban Post Office Fund, an urban area is a ward in a community of over 10,000 people, while a deprived area is a ward in the 20 per cent. most deprived wards in England, as measured by the indices of Deprivation 2000.

The Indices of Deprivation 2000 are measures of deprivation for every ward and local authority area in England. They combine a number of indicators which cover a range of domains (Income, Employment, Health Deprivation and Disability, Education, Skills and Training, Housing and Geographical Access to Services) into a single deprivation score for each area.

The Deprived Urban Post Office Fund is only available to sub-post offices located in the 20 per cent. most deprived urban wards, with priority given to those located in the 10 per cent. most deprived urban wards.

Sefton Council (Neighbourhood Renewal)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much funding Sefton council has received from the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund; when funds were received; what projects have been funded and by how much; and which organisations are responsible for *(a)* managing and *(b)* delivering each project. [89485]

Mrs. Roche: Sefton council has received Neighbourhood Renewal Funding of £2,815,650 (2001–02), £4,223,475 (2002–03), with a further £5,631,300 to be made available during 2003–04.

The projects in the following tables have been funded during the first two financial years. The commissioning process for year three has commenced, with no funding decisions reached as yet, although some initial approvals may be made on 13 January 2003.

2001–02

Project	*Funding (£)*	*Managed and delivered by*
Raising Attainment	277,732	Sefton MBC
Mentoring and behavioural support	74,993	Sefton MBC
Alternative Curriculum	92,497	Sefton MBC
Pilot Area Learning Support	82,489	Sefton MBC
Crime Reduction	48,260	Merseyside Police
Communities against Drugs	50,600	Merseyside Police
Multi Agency Refurbishment of Premises	20,000	Merseyside Drugs Council
Neighbourhood wardens	244,583	Sefton MBC
South Sefton Healthy Neighbourhood Programme	377,744	South Sefton PCT
Central Southport Healthy Neighbourhood	36,254	Southport and Formby PCT
Healthy Workforce Development	50,000	Sefton MBC
Alexandra Mount Parenting Centre	50,000	Sure Start Partnership and Parenting 2000
Demolition of Princess Royal	35,804	Sefton MBC
Move On Accommodation	80,000	Sefton MBC
Park Lane Regeneration	243,000	Sefton MBC
Greencroft Regeneration	301,000	Sefton MBC
Feasibility Study for Environmental Improvements	7,315	Sefton MBC
Environmental Improvements Fund	182,422	Sefton MBC
Environmental Hit Squad	107,847	Sefton MBC
Enhancing Citizens Panel in Bootle and Litherland	11,074	Sefton MBC
Community Development Initiative	1,707	Sefton MBC
Learning, Skills and Knowledge	20,000	Sefton MBC
Neighbourhood Renewal Enabling Budget	203,275	Sefton MBC
Total	2,598,596	

Note:
£217,054 funding carried over to 2002–03

2002–03

Project	*Funding (£)*	*Managed and delivered by*
Schools for the community	350,000	Sefton MBC
Raising Pupil Attainment	149,599	Sefton MBC
Mentoring and Behavioural Support	75,000	Sefton MBC
Alternative Curriculum	92,500	Sefton MBC
Pilot Area Learning Support	82,500	Sefton MBC
Neighbourhood Wardens	100,000	Sefton MBC
Alchemy	33,578	Alchemy
Crime Reduction	50,553	Merseyside Police
Youth Inclusion Programme	35,000	Youth Offending Team
Kids off the Streets	243,000	Sefton MBC
Communities against Drugs	100,000	Merseyside Police
SWACA—Centre of Excellence	50,000	Sefton Women and Childrens Aid
South Sefton Healthy Neighbourhoods	361,850	South Sefton PCT
Southport Healthy Neighbourhoods	60,000	Southport and Formby PCT
Surestart Development Workers	76,374	Surestart Partnership
Netherton Feelgood Factory	200,000	Netherton Feelgood
May Logan Centre	100,000	May Logan Centre
Brighter Living Initiative	50,000	Brighter Living Initiative
Play Area Improvements	166,500	Childrens Fund/Sefton MBC
Environmental Hit Squad	343,645	Sefton MBC
Community Kerbside Recycling	398,598	Sefton MBC/Community Enterprise
South Sefton Recycling Centre	50,000	Sefton MBC
Community Environmental Manager	33,000	Sefton MBC
Move on Accommodation	80,000	Sefton MBC
Greencroft Regeneration	300,000	Sefton MBC
Park Lane Regeneration	240,000	Sefton MBC
Neighbourhood Area Panel	17,000	Sefton MBC
Management Information Project	44,000	Sefton MBC
Community Development Worker	16,338	Sefton MBC
Community Development Worker—North Sefton	30,000	Sefton Council for Voluntary Services
Neighbourhood Renewal Action Fund	120,000	Sefton MBC/Sefton Community Foundation
I Kiosks	63,000	Sefton MBC
Neighbourhood Renewal Facilitation Budget	240,026	Sefton MBC
Learning, Skills and Knowledge	36,212	Sefton MBC
One Stop Shops	50,000	Sefton MBC
Total	4,438,182	

HEALTH

Amnesic Shellfish Poisoning

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether there is scientific evidence to suggest that the presence of amnesic shellfish poisoning toxins in scallops represent a threat to human health; what scientific investigations have been carried out by the Government in relation to the impact of ASP on human health; and what scientific evidence was used to determine this level. [89453]

Ms Blears: The most recent significant outbreak of amnesic shellfish poisoning affecting humans was recorded in Canada in 1987. Approximately 150 people became ill; there were 19 people hospitalised and four deaths. Following the outbreak, the Canadian authorities imposed an action limit in mussels of 20mg/kg domoic acid per gram of tissue, above which harvesting was suspended. This was based on observations of those who became ill, including estimates of levels of toxins actually ingested.

The European Union adopted this action limit for mussels and other bivalve molluscs including scallops in 1997 (Directive 97/61/EC). The Food Standards Agency has recently written to the European Commission asking them to consider the case for a scientific review of the current internationally accepted action level of 20 mg/kg in scallops, and how such a review may be taken forward.

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the level of amnesic shellfish poisoning may vary from scallop to scallop; and on what basis the whole Irish Sea scallop fishery is closed when one particular scallop is detected with levels of AMP above that of the safety level. [89454]

Ms Blears: I am advised by the Food Standards Agency that the level of domoic acid, which causes amnesic shellfish poisoning, may vary from scallop to scallop. Closures of scallop fisheries are not based on the analysis performed on one scallop, but an homogenate sample of a number of scallops.

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what scientific evidence the decision was taken to impose the safety level of 20mg/kg of amnesic shellfish poisoning in scallops caught in UK waters; on which dates the Irish Sea scallop fishery was closed and reopened in each of the last five years; and what estimate she has made of the length of time that the Irish Sea scallop fishery would have been closed in each of the last five years had there been a safety limit of 4.6mg/kg for amnesic shellfish poisoning in place. [89455]

Ms Blears: Following an outbreak of amnesic shellfish poisoning in mussels in Canada in 1987, where approximately 150 people became ill, resulting in four deaths, the Canadian authorities imposed an action limit in mussels of 20mg/kg domoic acid per gram of tissue, above which harvesting was suspended.

The EU adopted this action limit for mussels and other bivalve molluscs including scallops in 1997 (Directive 97/61/EC). This was implemented in Northern Ireland by the Food Safety (Fishery Products and Live Shellfish) (Hygiene) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999. The Irish Sea scallop fishery was closed from September 1999 to February 2000, and part closed from November to December 2002. The new level of 4.6 mg/kg forms part of a Commission Decision which member states have the option to implement. No final decisions have been made as to whether the United Kingdom will adopt this Decision. Full regulatory impact assessments will be prepared before any such decision is taken.

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is with regard to the introduction of a 4.6mg/kg safety limit for amnesic shellfish poisoning toxins; and what estimate he has made of the likely effect upon the UK scallop fishery industry. [89456]

Ms Blears: Council Directive 91/492/EEC currently provides for production areas to be closed when amnesic shellfish poisoning toxin levels exceed 20mg/kg in whole scallops (or any part edible separately). The new level of 4.6 mg/kg forms part of a Commission Decision which member states have the option to implement. No final decisions have been made as to whether the United Kingdom will adopt this Decision. Full regulatory impact assessments will be prepared before any such decision is taken.

Social Work Students (Bursary Scheme)

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate how many students will take up the Bursary Scheme to take the Diploma in Social Work. [90577]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 14 January 2003]:* The number of social work students who will be entitled to the bursary will depend on the number accepted onto courses by the universities and whether or not the student is in employment and supported through training by their employer. At the end of 2002 there had been 5,070 applications to the Social Work Admissions Service for social work courses beginning in September 2003.

Elderly Care

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures have been introduced since 1997 to help ensure that elderly people not capable of self-care can maintain the highest possible quality of life. [88875]

Jacqui Smith: Older people are the major users of health and social care. They have benefited, and will continue to, from the increased levels of funding of the national health service and social care services. Within this overall context and within the framework initially set out in the White Papers, "The New NHS: Modern; Dependable" (December 1997), and "Modernising Social Services" (November 1998), a range of measures have been introduced to ensure that older people's quality of life is maximised. They include:

The NHS Plan;

Saving Lives: Our Healthier Nation;

NHS Direct;

establishment of the Royal Commission on long-term care and response to its recommendation, including free nursing care;

national service framework for older people, including the development of intermediate care facilities;

availability of direct payments for older people;

increased funding for carers;

Commission for Health Improvement;

Essence of Care toolkit, aimed at assisting nurses and others to maintain and improve the quality of care; and

establishment of the National Care Standards Commission, an independent body to regulate social and health care services, including domiciliary care agencies.

'No Secrets' Guidance

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans his Department has to review the implementation of the 'No Secrets' guidance. [89816]

Jacqui Smith: Under the 'No Secrets' guidance, local multi-agency codes of practice were to be implemented by 31 October 2001. The Department has since commissioned the centre for policy on ageing to analyse these codes. The analysis, entitled "No Secrets: Findings from the analysis of local codes of practice", is available in the Library and through the Department of Health website at www.doh.qov.uk/scg/nosecrets.htm.

Additionally, the Department is funding the practitioner alliance against abuse of vulnerable adults to examine progress at local level on implementing key aspects of practice identified in "No Secrets".

Abattoirs

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what financial assessment he has made of the impact of European Commission Regulation COM (2002) 377 on abattoirs in the UK; what discussions he has had and what representations he has received on European Commission Regulation COM (2002) 377; what steps he is taking to assist abattoirs in meeting the requirements of the Regulation; and if he will make a statement. [89686]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 13 January 2003]:* The Food Standards Agency has published an initial regulatory impact assessment on its website as part of its stakeholder consultation on the Commission's proposed Regulation COM (2002) 377. That Regulation will provide rules for official controls on abattoirs. The Agency estimates the costs to the meat sector would be approximately neutral, although some abattoirs would benefit from reduced levels of veterinary supervision. How costs fall between industry and government will be dependent on a proposal for a further Regulation on official feed and food controls expected to be published shortly.

The Agency's consultations on the Commission's official controls proposals have elicited a number of responses, many expressing concern should the proposals result in new unjustified burdens and costs on the abattoir sector. In addition the previous Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Public Health (Yvette Cooper) received representations and had discussions with UNISON over the union's concerns that the proposal contained provisions allowing plant staff to carry out tasks currently undertaken by its members. I have received similar representations.

Cancelled Operations

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list *(a)* the number of operations cancelled at the last minute and *(b)* the number of patients not readmitted within 28 days of their operation being cancelled in each of the last four quarters in (i) England and (ii) each NHS region. [89650]

Mr. Hutton: Quarterly data are collected on the number of operations cancelled by the hospital for non-clinical reasons (i) at the last minute (ie on the day patients are due to arrive or after arrival in hospital or on the day of their operation) and (ii) on the day of surgery.

The NHS Plan cancelled operations guarantee has been in place since 1 April 2002 and since then, data have been collected on the number of patients not admitted within 28 days of cancellation on the day of surgery.

Data have been aggregated to strategic health authority level since 1 April 2002. Trust level data have been collected since Quarter 1 2001–02. Prior to this, data were collected at health authority level.

Data are available in the Library and on the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/hospitalactivity/data requests.htm.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations were cancelled for NHS patients in each of the last six years. [89929]

Mr. Hutton: Quarterly data are collected on the number of operations cancelled by the hospital for non-clinical reasons (i) at the last minute (i.e. on the day patients are due to arrive or after arrival in hospital or on the day of their operation) and (ii) on the day of surgery. These data are available in the Library and on the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/hospitalactivity/data—requests.htm.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations have been cancelled by the NHS in each of the past eight quarters; and what percentage of these cancellations have not been rebooked *(a)* within a month and *(b)* for a date within two months, broken down by (i) Strategic Health Authority Area and (ii) NHS trust. [90433]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 13 January 2003]:* Quarterly data are collected on the number of operations cancelled by the hospital for non- clinical reasons (i) at the last minute (i.e. on the day patients are due to arrive or after arrival in hospital or on the day of their operation) and (ii) on the day of surgery. Data are also collected on the number of patients not admitted within 28 days of cancellation on the day of surgery.

Data have been aggregated at strategic health authority (StHA) level since Quarter 1 of 2002–03. Prior to that, data was aggregated at regional level. Trust level data has been collected since Quarter 1 of 2001–02. Prior to this data were collected at health authority level. All the data can be accessed in the Library and on the Department's website at: www.doh.gov.uk/hospitalactivity/datarequests.htm.

Since 1 April 2002, the NHS Plan cancelled operations guarantee has been in place. National Health Service trusts are performance managed on their performance against the NHS Plan guarantee by StHAs. Patients re-booked within 28 days are not separately identified in the data and may have had their operation cancelled in the previous quarter. Therefore, it is not statistically valid to calculate the percentage of patients who have been re-booked as a proportion of those cancelled.

Care Homes

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average fee paid per week by each local social services department to private care homes for clients in *(a)* nursing and *(b)* residential care was in 2002, broken down by local authority in England; and what the average costs were for self-funders. [89695]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 14 January 2003]*: Information regarding the average fee paid per week by each social services department and the average fee paid by self-funders is not kept centrally. The setting of fee levels by local councils is a matter for local decision. Councils must take into account a range of factors and market conditions when negotiating fee levels. Fee levels for self-funders is a matter negotiated between the home and the individual requiring care or their representative.

Children in Custody

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice he has given to *(a)* the Care Standards Commission and *(b)* Social Services Department since 29 November on the application of the Children Act 1989 to children held in prison custody. [88234]

Jacqui Smith: The Howard League for Penal Reform took the Home Office to judicial review over a statement in Prison Service guidance that the Children Act 1989 did not apply to children under the age of eighteen in prison establishments. Mr. Justice Munby's judgment, handed down on 29 November, ruled that the Children Act 1989 applied to children in prison, subject to the requirements of imprisonment. The judgment upheld the Prison Service's policy in relation to juveniles in custody. One sentence in its policy, which was to be changed regardless of the outcome of the judgment, has been found to be wrong. This will now be changed by the Home Office in the context of the judgment.

The Department therefore sees no immediate need to revise existing guidance to councils with social services responsibilities, or to the National Care Standards Commission (NCSC). In the latter case, this is because the NCSC is responsible for children's services, regulated under the Care Standards Act 2000, which does not include prison establishments. However, we will, together with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department, carefully study Mr. Justice Munby's judgment, in the context of the recommendations of the Joint Chief Inspectors' report, "Safeguarding Children".

Consultants

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many medical consultants undertake work in the private sector, broken down by nation and region. [90759]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 14 January 2003]*: We do not collect information centrally about the proportion of consultants working in the private sector in England and Northern Ireland. Information about the consultant workforce in Scotland or Wales is a matter for the Scottish Executive or the National Assembly for Wales.

NHS Dentistry

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department proposes to take to increase NHS Dental Service provision in the Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale area; and if he will make a statement. [89594]

Jacqui Smith: Patients in Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale can, where necessary, gain access to national health service dental services by calling NHS Direct.

The working group, 'Options for Change', has proposed new methods of service delivery and would allow the NHS locally to place a greater emphasis upon preventive care and reducing oral health inequalities.

Mr. Peter Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what NHS dentistry services are available to new adult patients in the Gosport area. [89858]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 14 January 2003]*: Hampshire and Isle of Wight Strategic Health Authority has confirmed that currently no national health service dentists within Gosport are accepting new adult patients. Emergency dentistry for new adult patients, is available from the dental access centre in Fareham. Dental practices in Gosport will also provide emergency treatment to such patients.

New patients wishing to access NHS dentistry in the surrounding area can obtain information on practices accepting adult patients from Fareham and Gosport Primary Care Trust or NHS Direct. The strategic health authority has advised me that registrations are being accepted in Southsea, Portsmouth and Cosham.

Drugs (Black Market)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what investigations have been undertaken by his Department into reports of Aids drugs provided at cost to African countries being resold in the UK; what assessment he has made of the level of drugs provided at cost by pharmaceutical companies in Africa being resold illegally in the UK or Europe; and what drugs are involved. [89937]

Ms Blears: The enforcement group of the Medicines Control Agency is currently investigating one suspected case of diversion in the United Kingdom.

There is no current assessment of the quantity of drugs potentially diverted.

Drugs identified to date involved in diversion in Europe are Epivir and Combivir.

Food Safety

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on the use of disclaimers by restaurants when selling undercooked meat products. [88988]

Ms Blears: Any person who sells food for human consumption in a restaurant, or indeed elsewhere, which fails to comply with food safety requirements is guilty of an offence.

The food safety requirements, as set out in Section 8 of the Food Safety Act 1990, contain three alternative limbs.

The first states that the food must not have been rendered injurious to health by means of certain operations, e.g. adding articles or substances to the food or subjecting it to processes or treatments.

The second is that the food must not be unfit for human consumption.

The third is that the food must not be so contaminated that it would not be reasonable to expect it to be used for human consumption in that state.

If food is sold which breaches any of the three limbs then, regardless of a disclaimer, an offence is committed.

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what statistical baseline from laboratory reports in 2000 the Food Standards Agency has based its target for reduction of food-borne illness; and what the most recent performance statistics are in relation to this target. [88715]

Ms Blears: The Food Standards Agency's target for reducing food-borne illness by 20 per cent. by 2006 is based on laboratory reports of the five major food-borne pathogens (Salmonella, Campylobacter, E. coli 0157, Listeria and Clostridium perfringens), excluding cases reported as having been acquired abroad. These data are collected by the Public Health Laboratory Service communicable disease surveillance centres in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and by the Scottish Centre for infection and environmental health for Scotland.

When the baseline was announced in August 2001[1], there were 65,209 confirmed laboratory reports in the year 2000. However, it should be noted that the majority of people with food-borne disease do not consult a doctor or have a specimen sent for laboratory testing, and therefore the number of cases of food poisoning will be significantly higher.

Updates on progress against the target will be reported annually to the Board and can be downloaded from the Agency's website.

The figures for 2001 (the year in which the Agency's strategy for reducing food-borne disease was being finalised) were reported to the Board in May 2002, and showed a small increase (1 per cent.) in the number of cases.

[1] www.food.gov.uk/news/pressreleases/poisoningreduction

Foundation Hospitals

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether an individual will be able to serve again on a board of governors of an NHS foundation hospital after a period of time has elapsed between the completion of the maximum of nine years' service and the recommencement of a further term. [87804]

Mr. Hutton: The position is as set out in paragraph 2.28 of "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts". Details will be set out in forthcoming legislation.

Fruit and Vegetable Consumption

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding his Department makes available to increase consumption of fruit and vegetables. [84460]

Ms Blears: The Department of Health and the New Opportunities Fund have together made £55.3 million available for initiatives to increase fruit and vegetable consumption since the 2000–01 financial year.

In addition to the above, initiatives to increase fruit and vegetable consumption have been funded through health action zones, sure start, healthy living centres and through general funding allocations to health authorities and primary care trusts.

General Agreement on Trade in Services

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether provisions under the proposed GATS will affect decisions over the provider of publicly financed health services; and if he will make a statement. [90041]

Mr. Hutton: General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) cannot prevent Governments from regulating to meet national policy objectives. These rights are enshrined in GATS itself and repeated in negotiating guidelines for current negotiations. The Government has made clear to the House in the past that we have no intention of making GATS commitments that could call into question our ability to continue providing public services such as health or education.

Heroin

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how his Department defines treatment for heroin misusers. [90557]

Ms Blears: The recently published models of care document, which has the status of a national service framework for substance misuse, defines treatment for heroin users as follows:

Drug treatment needs to be comprehensive and multifaceted. Local specialist substance misuse treatment systems need to include a range of interventions, including advice and information, harm reduction, structured programmes of psychological therapies in conjunction with substitute prescribing where appropriate and residential provision. There should be a range of interventions and a range of treatment philosophies.

HIV

Mr. Portillo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice his Department *(a)* issues and *(b)* endorses

on the likelihood of HIV being transmitted through oral sex; and if he will estimate the proportion of HIV cases contracted in the last 12 months that can be attributed to oral sex. [90930]

Ms Blears: A statement of risk on 'Oral sex and transmission of HIV', together with a question and answer briefing, was issued by the Department of Health in June 2001. This was distributed widely to health professionals and the voluntary sector and is available from the Department's website http://www.doh.gov.uk/eaga/hivoralsex.pdf).

For the general population, advice on the transmission of HIV via oral sex is available through a number of sources funded by the Department. These include sexual health leaflets, the Sexual Health and National AIDS Helpline and the website which supports the Department's new safer sex campaign. In addition, Terrence Higgins Trust are funded by the Department to produce health promotion materials for gay men. These include leaflets (specifically 'The Manual' and 'Man[sex]Man') with messages around oral sex. The advice is consistent with the statement of risk issued in 2001.

Oral sex is common in both homosexual and heterosexual relationships, but its frequency among men who have sex with men has highlighted its potential contribution to HIV transmission. Recent information collected by the Public Health Laboratory Service found that, in 2 per cent. of new HIV cases in men reported as infected through sex between men, they believed themselves to have been infected through oral sex. On following up these reports, more probable routes of infection than oral sex were found in some men. Hence the true proportion of new HIV cases that can be attributed to oral sex will be less than 2 per cent..

Homeless People

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has received on the difficulties of homeless people in accessing health services, particularly during winter; and if he will make a statement. [81679]

Ms Blears: I have received no recent representations on this subject. However, the Government fully recognises the difficulties which people who are homeless face in accessing health services. The first point of contact with the national health service should usually be primary care and the Department has taken a range of actions to improve the accessibility of primary care services for homeless people and later this month will be reminding general practitioners that people do not need to have a permanent address to register with them.

HPA

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff the HPA Steering Group has who are dedicated exclusively to setting up the new organisation. [90062]

Ms Blears: The implementation team co-ordinating the arrangements for the establishment of the Health Protection Agency has eight full-time staff. They are joined on particular issues by a number of part-time team members and others drawn from the current organisations and the Department of Health.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements have been made for liaison between the National Radiological Protection Board and the HPA whilst the latter remains constituted as a Special Health Authority. [90089]

Ms Blears: I wrote to the chairs of the bodies most affected by our proposals for creating a Health Protection Agency on 15 November 2002, setting out the decisions we had taken following consultation on the Agency. Copies of the letters are available in the Library. In doing so, I made clear that it is important that the Health Protection Agency and the National Radiological Protect Board should work closely and effectively together from April 2003 to help achieve improvements in services to users. In the first instance, and subject to the legislation establishing the Agency being put in place, it will be for the Agency and the Board to decide how to achieve this. We shall hold them to account for doing so.

IVF Treatment

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent meetings he has had with the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority to discuss revisions to their Code of Practice on IVF treatment. [90615]

Ms Blears: Departmental officials discuss revisions to the code of practice at regular meetings with the executive of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA). The most recent meetings were on 10 December 2002 and 9 January 2003. Ministers also meet regularly with the chair of the HFEA to discuss issues including the code of practice; the last meeting was on 30 October 2002. The HFEA members intend to consider the latest revision at their meeting on 16 January, when departmental officials will be present as observers. It is anticipated that a revised code of practice will be issued in February.

Lifestyle Survey

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will place in the Library a copy of the most recent annual national survey of lifestyle conducted by his Department; [84467]

(2) what the cost to his Department was in 2001–02 of conducting a national survey of lifestyle; and what benefits have resulted therefrom. [84461]

Ms Blears: The Department commissions a number of annual surveys that include questions on lifestyle issues, such as the Health Survey for England.

The annual cost of the Health Survey for England is around £2.8 million. The cost of the other survey activity is around £0.7 million.

The Health Survey for England is a major vehicle for providing valuable annual data about the nation's health and the information is used to underpin strategies for promoting better health. It is unique in providing objective measures of health such as measurements of height, weight, blood pressure and analysis of blood

samples, together with information from questionnaires. It also contains a wealth of socio-demographic data, which is valuable for monitoring inequalities in health. It has established itself as an important research tool.

Secondary analysis of health survey information on many topics has been published in national and international journals.

Copies of all the surveys commissioned by the Department are routinely placed in the Library. The next report of the Health Survey for England is due to be published on 20 January.

Mental Health Services

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what patient advocacy services are available to *(a)* disabled and *(b)* ethnic minority mental health patients. [86147]

Jacqui Smith: A number of nationally and locally based advocacy services are available to help disabled and ethnic minority mental health patients. A range of agencies, including the voluntary sector provides these services. The Department is also providing three year funding for the United Kingdom Advocacy Network (UKAN) to develop standards in independent advocacy whereby they are establishing programmes of regional training courses for advocates. UKAN also employs a worker to work specifically on advocacy issues affecting black and minority ethnic groups.

The majority of national health service trusts and primary care trusts now have a patient advice and liaison service to advise patients, their carers and families about how to access appropriate advocacy services.

Microbiology Laboratories

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many state-run microbiology laboratories have not applied for clinical pathology accreditation. [90136]

Ms Blears: We do not collect this information centrally.

Mobile Phone Masts

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the public health implications arising from the placing by mobile phone companies of masts in *(a)* chimney stacks, *(b)* drainpipes, *(c)* alarm boxes and *(d)* other adjuncts to domestic properties; if he will take steps to ensure the location of such masts is maintained on a register open to the public; and if he will make a statement. [90343]

Ms Blears: *[holding answer 13 January 2003]:* The public health implications of mobile phone base stations were assessed by the independent expert group on mobile phones (IEGMP). Their report, the Stewart Report, concluded that the balance of evidence indicates that there is no general risk to the health of people living near to base stations on the basis that exposures are expected to be small fractions of guidelines.

Measurements undertaken by the National Radiological Protection Board and the Radiocommunications Agency (RA) have confirmed that public exposures are very much lower than the international guidelines. These results are available to the public from these organisations' websites, at *www.nrpb.org and www.radio.gov.uk*. Network operators have undertaken to ensure that all base stations will be designed and sited so that members of the public will not be exposed in excess of the recommended basic restriction.

The IEGMP noted that if people are unduly concerned about potential exposures then that in itself may affect their well-being. A number of recommendations of the group were, therefore, designed to provide more information to people about local base stations. One of these measures was to develop the 'Sitefinder'mobile phone base station database, which is a national database of mobile phone base stations and their emissions. The database is managed by the RA, an executive agency of the Department of Trade and Industry, on behalf of the Government. The database provides information on all operational, externally sited, cellular radio transmitters in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and is updated every three months.

National Radiological Protection Board

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health where the National Radiological Protection Board will have its headquarters after 1 April. [90090]

Ms Blears: There are no plans to move the headquarters of the National Radiological Protection Board after 1 April.

Overseas Treatments

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS patients have been treated in continental European hospitals since the ruling by the European court; which continental European hospitals have been used by NHS patients and what operations have been carried out; and if he will list the origin of NHS patients who have received treatment in continental European hospitals by PCT area. [89930]

Mr. Hutton: Since the ruling of the European Court of Justice in July 2001, a total of 234 national health service patients have received treatment abroad as part of the overseas treatment programme. All of these referrals have been to hospitals in continental Europe.

Patients have received treatment in two hospitals in France and eight hospitals in Germany. The French hospitals are Polyclinique de la Louviere, Lille and Institute Calo-Hadin, Berck Sur Mer. The German hospitals are Lutherhaus, Essen; Eduardus Krankenhaus, Cologne; Henriettenstiftung, Hanover; Das Klinikum, Osnabruck; Gilead, Bielefeld; Endo Klinik, Hamburg; Ostseeklinik, Damp; and a clinic in Celle.

Of the 234 patients who have received treatment abroad, 197 were orthopaedic patients and 37 were ophthalmology patients.

Details of the origin of the patients are held by health authority area. Portsmouth, Isle of Wight and South East Hampshire health authority has referred 50 patients abroad. West Sussex and East Surrey health authorities have referred 50 patients abroad. East Kent health authority has referred 126 patients abroad. Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire health authority has referred eight patients abroad.

Pneumococcal Disease (PHLS Programme)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many service level agreements he estimates will be required to maintain the programme co-ordinated by the PHLS on pneumococcal disease. [90048]

Ms Blears: There will be no service level agreements to maintain the Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS) co-ordinated programmes on pneumococcal disease. All work for the Department of Health by PHLS on pneumococcal disease are part of the core funding provided by the Department.

Private Sector Services

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the present annual cost is to the NHS of recurrent services provided by the private sector; what his estimate is of the likely cost over the next three years; and what proportion of total NHS spending this represents. [90040]

Mr. Hutton: Data are not held centrally on all service contracts held by national health service bodies with private sector organisations and could be collected only at disproportionate cost. Information is available centrally on private finance initiative (PFI) schemes and spending on healthcare provided by non-NHS bodies.

Data on the revenue consequences of NHS PFI schemes, for example estimated payments to the private sector under signed PFI contracts, is provided each year to the Health Select Committee of the House and to the Office of Government Commerce for their biannual returns to Parliament on PFI transactions contained in the budget report. Outturn figures for the last closed financial year (2001–02) and estimated payments for the following three years are in the table:

	Payments (£000)	*As a proportion of total NHS revenue expenditure[1] (%)*
2001–02	221,334	0.5
2002–03	314,613	0.6
2003–04	405,303	0.7
2004–05	419,465	0.7

[1] 2001–02 as measured on Stage 1 Resource Budgeting basis. 2002–03 onwards on Stage 2 Resource Budgeting basis.

In 2001–02 (the latest year for which information is available), NHS trusts, primary care trusts and health authorities in England spent approximately £1.8 billion on the purchase of health care from non-NHS bodies. This figure includes expenditure on services provided by all non-NHS bodies, including local authorities and other statutory bodies, as well as private healthcare providers, and cannot be broken down by type of provider. This represents around 3.8 per cent. of total NHS revenue expenditure. We have not estimated the level of equivalent spending in future years.

Residential Homes

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to improve surveillance of the elderly in residential homes in order to protect them from abuse. [90250]

Jacqui Smith: We believe that determining the appropriateness of specific measures for surveillance in care homes is best done locally, on a home by home basis. National Care Standards Commission area offices are best placed to assess the need for such measures in a particular care home within the broad statutory guidelines. In doing so they should take into account such things as the perceived needs of residents; the prevention of abuse; residents' right to privacy; staff training, numbers, and supervisory arrangements. These needs will vary from home to home and from area to area.

Residential/Nursing Home Beds

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many residential and nursing home beds were available in England in 2002, broken down by local authority. [90034]

Jacqui Smith: Information for 2002 is not yet centrally available.

Safer Travel to School

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money was disbursed under the safer travel to schools initiative; how many projects benefited; and what evaluation he has made of the initiative. [84021]

Ms Blears: Local safe routes to school schemes are being developed as part of local transport plans. The Department for Transport allocated £620 million to local authorities for small-scale schemes such as road safety and measures to encourage walking and cycling, including up to 800 more safe routes to school in the 2002–03 local transport plan settlement.

According to local transport plan annual progress reports (APRs) submitted to the Department for Transport in August 2002 1,782 safe routes to school schemes were in place in April 2002, with a further 1,543 planned for 2002–03. The APRs also showed that safe routes schemes to 8,006 schools, or about 35 per cent., of schools, are planned by 2006.

Between 1999 and 2001, this Department also developed and funded the safe and sound challenge scheme, which disbursed around £210,000 to over 80 schools to implement initiatives to promote healthy active modes of travel. We commissioned follow up monitoring and evaluation of some of the schemes, which had been funded in the first two years of the challenge. The results showed that schools had successfully implemented school travel initiatives with the funding that had been awarded. However, it was not possible to establish whether any real changes in school travel patterns had occurred, as most schools did not have baseline data for comparison.

Smoking

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to discourage smoking in public places. [89056]

Ms Blears: The Government have no plans to implement a ban on smoking in public places.

This year the Department is funding local tobacco control alliances across England to carry out projects in close co-operation with local employers to tackle passive smoking and to increase the number of smoke-free environments. These projects vary in nature from the production of 'smoke free' guides to pubs and restaurants to the provision of advice and support to managers wishing to introduce policies. We hope that many will be suitable for national application.

We will also be increasing the visibility of health messages highlighting to smokers the risks environmental tobacco smoke presents. This is through regulations to transpose into United Kingdom law the EU Directive on the Manufacture, Presentation and Sale of Tobacco Products. These regulations require tobacco products to carry larger and starker health warnings, on both the front and back of the packet. The dangers of passive smoking are highlighted in two of the new warnings, which include "Smoking Seriously Harms You and Others Around You" and "Protect Children: Don't Make Them Breathe Your Smoke".

Sterile Service Facilities

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much his Department plans to spend on centralised sterile service facilities for the NHS in England during the *(a)* 2003–04 and *(b)* 2004–05 financial years. [90292]

Mr. Lammy: The following figures represent money for investment in new and improved services, it does not include the cost of day-to-day running of sterile services departments or money invested by health bodies from their own resources:

2003–04: £134 million[1]

2004–05: £30 million

[1] £114 million brought forward from 2002–03.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on his Department's plans for a new network of centralised sterile service facilities for the NHS in England; [90303]

(2) what discussions his Department has had with suppliers for the proposed network of centralised sterile service facilities for the NHS in England; and which suppliers these were; [90304]

(3) whether procurement for the new network of centralised sterile service facilities for the NHS in England will be on a single national basis or by sub-region; [90305]

(4) when his Department will begin procurement for the new network of centralised sterile service facilities for the NHS in England; and if procurement will be open to a full range of suppliers; [90291]

(5) how many units will comprise the new network of centralised sterile service facilities for the NHS in England. [90293]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 13 January 2003]:* We envisage a mixed economy in decontamination services provided to the national health service. Local needs and facilities will determine the way in which the service is provided locally but all will be provided to a nationally agreed set of standards.

It is not possible to say at this stage how many centres there will be in total, nor how many procurements there will be, or when they will take place, but we expect the first—covering the Bradford Hospitals NHS Trust and The Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust—to be advertised in the *Official Journal* of the European Communities (OJEC) before the end of 2002–03. All procurements will be carried out in accordance with the rules of the European Union.

The Department is actively seeking to develop the market in sterile services and is encouraging new entrants as well as existing suppliers to participate in procurements. To that end, officials have met existing and potential suppliers on over 100 occasions: in specially arranged conferences and workshops, private meetings with individual companies, visits to reference sites and meetings with trade associations. It would bea breach of commercial confidentiality to disclose the names of the companies involved.

Tuberculosis

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 3 December, Ref 83323, what extra funding has been made available to health authorities with levels of tuberculosis higher than the national average. [86805]

Ms Blears: The level of funding is still under consideration.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Custodial Sentences

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the offences for which his Department's guidelines recommend a custodial sentence. [90423]

Yvette Cooper: My Department does not issue guidelines on sentencing. Determination of the correct sentence in any given case is a matter for judicial discretion, taking into account any guidance issued by the Court of Appeal (Criminal Division) and relevant legislation.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Confederation of European Councillors Year Book Launch

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what his policy is on Ministers from his Department attending events in conjunction with Ministers from the Republic; and how this policy was applied with reference to the invitation to join

Pat Gallagher TD at the launch of the Confederation of European Councillors' Year Book at Newry on 7 January. [90105]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Where diary commitments permit, I, and my ministerial team, seek to accept as many invitations to events as we are able to. No Northern Ireland Office Minister attended the event in Newry on 7 January 2003 to launch the Confederation of European Councillors' Year Book and Diary 2003, as there is no record of an invitation to the event having been received by any Northern Ireland Office Minister.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on what date his Department received the invitation by the National Association of Councillors (Northern Ireland) for a Minister to attend the launch of the Confederation of European Councillors' Year Book at Newry on 7 January; on what date follow-up telephone requests were logged; and if he will make a statement of his Department's handling of the invitation. [90106]

Mr. Paul Murphy: There is no record of an invitation by the National Association of Councillors (Northern Ireland) to the launch of the Confederation of European Councillors' Year Book and Diary 2003 on 7 January 2003, having been received by my Department or any Northern Ireland Office Minister. There is no record of any follow-up telephone calls specifically relating to this matter.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for what reason no Minister, or departmental representative attended the launch of the Confederation of European Councillors' Year Book at Newry on 7 January, co-hosted by the National Association of Councillors (Northern Ireland) and the Local Authority Members Association of the Republic. [90107]

Mr. Paul Murphy: No Northern Ireland Office Minister or departmental representative attended the launch of the Confederation of European Councillors' Year Book and Diary 2003, as there is no record of an invitation to the event having been received by any Northern Ireland Office Minister or Department.

Correspondence

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if there is a policy in his Department relating to the receipt and processing of letters from local authorities in relation to *(a)* their acknowledgement, *(b)* the normal period for the dispatch of a substantive reply and *(c)* when it is appropriate to dispatch an interim or holding reply; and if he will make a statement. [90497]

Mr. Paul Murphy: My Department complies with the Six Service Standards for General Government. To meet the key standard of answering letters quickly and clearly, the Department has set itself a target of responding, in full, within 15 working days of receipt. This is in regard to general correspondence and would include any responses to local authorities. The procedures my Department follow are in accord with the Government guidance which requires that correspondence be acknowledged on receipt or within a targeted period and if it becomes clear that a full reply cannot be provided within the deadline, then a holding reply will issue.

Following the guidance from Cabinet Office on the handling of correspondence from Members of Parliament, the Department has set itself a target time of replying to this type of correspondence within 10 working days. As with other correspondence, the Department strives to issue a substantive reply within the target time. When this is not possible, an interim or holding reply issues as a matter of courtesy and to reassure the correspondent that their letter has been received and that action is being taken.

Diabetes

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people in Northern Ireland suffer from type I and type II diabetes mellitus; and what estimate he has made of the prevalence of this condition in Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom. [82216]

Mr. Browne: The 1997 and 2001 Northern Ireland Health and Social Wellbeing Surveys indicated that 3 per cent. of the population aged 16 and over (approximately 39,000 adults) had been told by a doctor that they had diabetes. About three-quarters of these are estimated to be Type II diabetics who developed the condition in adulthood.

Ethical Banking

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what contracts have been concluded as a result of the Government's commitment to support ethical banking. [89947]

Mr. Pearson: The Government believe it is important for consumers to have choice in financial products, including the availability of 'ethical' products. However, it would not be appropriate for the Government to exclusively support the development of one specific group of financial service providers. It is for individual consumers to decide the attributes they most value from their financial services and for financial services firms to be transparent about their use of funds and investments.

EU Fishing Grants

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the total amount of European Union grants to the fishing ports of *(a)* Kilkeel, *(b)* Portavogie and *(c)* Ardglass was in each financial year since 1997. [85690]

Mr. Pearson: The information requested is not held in the format requested and could not be provided without disproportionate cost.

Total grants paid to each of these locations under the European Union Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance (FIFO) over the period were as follows.

£

	Kilkeel	Portavogie	Ardglass
1997–98	0	22,447	33,789
1998–99	115,285	21,732	8,411
1999–2000	316,975	322,469	0
2000–01	163,665	198,317	5,837
2001–02	25,390	280,904	0
Total	621,315	845,869	48,037

Other examples of European Funding to these areas include:

£3,043 was paid to Ards Borough Council in November 2002 for the refurbishment of self-catering chalets in Portavogie. The funding was made available from Priority 1 'Economic Growth and Competitiveness', Measure 4 'Local Economic Development' of the Building Sustainable Prosperity Programme.

£14,781 was paid to Newry and Kilkeel Institute of Further and Higher Education in April 2001 to bring together people from Portadown, Newry, Dundalk and Kilkeel, giving them the opportunity to explore each others culture through a series of leadership activities and workshops. Of this total £3,695 was targeted at Kilkeel. The funding was made available from Sub-Programme 3 'Cross-Border Development', Measure 1 'Business and Cultural Linkages' of the Peace I Programme.

Over the period 1994–2002, some £10.3 million was invested in processing and marketing projects, most of them located in the three fishing ports, of which 35 per cent. was EU Structural Funds (from FIFO), 5 per cent. national funding, and the remainder private investment.

Former Military Sites

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will estimate the costs of setting up the structures proposed in relation to former military sites in the Strategic Investment and Regeneration of Sites Order. [86625]

Mr. Pearson: No decisions have been made about the sites or how they will be developed. As stated in the Explanatory Memorandum to the Draft Strategic Investment and Regeneration of Sites Order, operating costs in relation to development corporations or regeneration companies could be in the range of £1 million to £2 million each. Such a cost may only be relevant for the larger sites.

House Seller's Pack

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to introduce a requirement for the vendor of a house to provide a seller's pack to prospective buyers in Northern Ireland. [83115]

Mr. Browne: The proposal to impose a condition on house vendors to produce a sellers information pack for prospective purchasers is aimed at making the home buying process in England and Wales more transparent and certain. Officials at the Department for Social Development continue to monitor developments with a view to determining whether there may be merit, at some time in the future, in introducing similar measures in Northern Ireland.

Human Organs Inquiry

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the report of the Human Organs Inquiry has been referred to *(a)* the Police Service of Northern Ireland and *(b)* the Director of Public Prosecutions. [83560]

Mr. Browne: The report of the Human Organs Inquiry has not been referred to the Police Service of Northern Ireland or to the Director of Public Prosecutions. While the Report criticises past practices it does not indicate that any member of staff within the Health Service acted outside the law.

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action he plans to take with reference to members of medical and managerial staff in the three hospitals named in the report of the Human Organs Inquiry. [83561]

Mr. Browne: There are no plans to take action with reference to any member of the medical or managerial staff employed at Altnagelvin, Craigavon area hospital or the Royal group of hospitals. Action is being taken to implement all the recommendations of the report by he Human Organs Inquiry. This will include new legislation with criminal penalties for the breach of its provisions.

Industrial/Provident Societies

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many industrial and provident societies have addresses registered in Northern Ireland. [86627]

Mr. Pearson: There are 167 industrial and provident societies with a registered office address in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations he has received about reform of industrial and provident society law in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [86628]

Mr. Pearson: No representations have been received. I have however announced on 29 November 2002 details of a major review of Industrial and Provident Society law in Northern Ireland. The review process has already commenced with the first phase scheduled for completion in October 2003.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many industrial and provident societies in Northern Ireland have a turnover in excess of £1 million. [86629]

Mr. Pearson: The statutory annual returns held on file in Companies Registry indicate that 33 societies have a turnover or income in excess of £1 million.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many representations he has received about reform of industrial and provident society law; and if he will make a statement. [86630]

Mr. Pearson: No representations have been made. However, as stated in my answer to (86628), I have recently announced a major review of industrial and provident society law in Northern Ireland. The review has already commenced with the first phase scheduled for completion in October 2003.

Londonderry

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the Heart of the City study relating to Londonderry will be published for public consultation. [87334]

Mr. Browne: In March last year, the Department of Social Development announced that it had appointed consultants W S Atkins to undertake an urban design study for the centre of Londonderry. The study intends to develop a strategic framework to inform the future development of key city centre sites such as Ebrington Barracks, Fort George and Queen's Quay.

"Heart of the City" aims to enhance the quality of urban design and architecture in the central core of Londonderry.

In October 2002 W S Atkins undertook some public consultation on their draft proposals, including a presentation to Derry City Council and three workshops. This resulted in extensive local media coverage on the Heart of the City study.

W S Atkins are currently compiling their final report, which will include revised sections on the economic viability of the key proposals in the study. It is expected that the final report will now be presented to the Department in January 2003.

The Department for Social Development proposes to publish the report for wider public consultation in February 2003.

Northern Ireland Railways

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which Minister was responsible for the placing of an order for 23 new train sets for Northern Ireland Railways; who signed the contract; and on what date it was signed. [90763]

Angela Smith: The Minister responsible for transport matters at the time the order for 23 new trains was placed was Mr. Peter Robinson MP, the Minister for Regional Development in the Northern Ireland Assembly. The contract was signed on 28 February 2002 by Dr. Joan Smith and Mr. Ted Hesketh, on behalf of Northern Ireland Railways and by Sr Luis Capuchino, on behalf of Construcciones y Auxliar de Ferrocarrilles SA, the Spanish company that will supply the trains.

Post Offices

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the total value is of funding available to support *(a)* urban and *(b)* rural post offices in Northern Ireland. [83247]

Mr. Browne: There is no specific funding allocated to Northern Ireland in respect of either urban or rural post offices.

Social Security Appeals Service

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cases are waiting to be listed for social security appeals tribunals; how long these cases have waited; how many of these cases are for *(a)* disability living allowance and *(b)* incapacity benefit; what centres these hearings will be listed for; and if he will make a statement. [82762]

Mr. Browne: The total number of social security cases waiting to be listed for hearing by an appeal tribunal was 5,368 at 1 October 2002. This included 3,111 appeals relating to disability living allowance and 1,644 relating to incapacity benefit. The current average waiting time to list an appeal for a first hearing is 19 weeks for disability appeals, nine weeks for social security appeals and 13 weeks for medical appeals. The number of cases to be held in each centre is set out in the following table.

The hearings for the cases waiting to be listed are likely to be held at the following locations:

Tribunal centre	*Number of cases to be heard*
Armagh	60
Banbridge	37
Belfast	1,765
Ballymena	191
Ballymoney	30
Cookstown	55
Craigavon	223
Coleraine	197
Dungannon	124
Downpatrick	125
Enniskillen	156
Londonderry	254
Limavady	51
Magherafelt	80
Newcastle	18
Newtownards	176
Newry	270
Omagh	122
Strabane	84

Strategic Investment Board

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will estimate the costs associated with proposals to set up a Strategic Investment Board for Northern Ireland. [86621]

Mr. Pearson: As stated in the Explanatory Memorandum to the Draft Strategic Investment and Regeneration of Sites Order, operating costs could be in the range of £2-£3 million.

Teachers

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the *(a)* satisfaction and *(b)* needs of teachers in Northern Ireland; and what plans he has for further research. [90621]

Jane Kennedy: My Department funded the Teachers' Health and Well-being Survey, which was the first of its kind for Northern Ireland's teaching profession. The report, which I launched on 16 December 2002 in partnership with the employing authorities and the teacher unions, shows that 57.7 per cent. of respondents were either very satisfied or satisfied with their jobs while 22.2 per cent. were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. The remainder fell in between both groups.

There was a relatively high response rate to the survey by teachers. Their valuable feedback will be taken fully into account by the employing authorities, working

closely with my Department and the teacher unions, in implementing the report's recommendations so that support services continue to improve to meet the needs of teachers. The report has been published on my Department's website and an executive summary has been sent to all teachers. There are no immediate plans for further research.

University Top-Up Fees

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make an assessment of the impact of the introduction of university top-up fees on universities in Northern Ireland. [86619]

Jane Kennedy: The Government are currently preparing a strategy document setting out their vision for the development and reform of higher education, including student finance. The final proposals will be published in January 2003. Until then I am not in a position to comment on the matter.

University Research Funding

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland why the results of the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise relating to university funding for Northern Ireland are not being funded. [86460]

Jane Kennedy: I am pleased to advise that, in the financial year 2003–04 and in each of the subsequent two financial years an additional £10 million has been allocated to the two universities for research related work. This increase is in response to their improved performance in the recent Research Assessment Exercise and in recognition of the essential role played by the universities in overall research and development in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the level of central Government funding for university research for the current year for Northern Ireland per head of population was. [86463]

Jane Kennedy: Recurrent grant aid to the Northern Ireland universities for 2002–03 from the Department for Employment and Learning, based on the 2001 Census figures, amounts to £16.41 per head of population. Additionally, £4.09 per head is profiled to be spent through the Support Programme for University Research and £1.74 through the Science Research Investment Fund. These figures disregard capital funding not specifically for research initiatives and research funded by other Departments.

West Credit Card

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the investigation into the West Credit Card Scandal has been completed; and when the report of the investigation will be made available to Parliament. [90182]

Mr. Pearson: A report on the allegations made about the affairs of Into the West (Tyrone & Fermanagh) Ltd. is well advanced and a final report will be issued to the funding bodies and the Northern Ireland Audit Office by February 2003.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 16 January 2003

CABINET OFFICE

Departmental Staff

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many full-time equivalent staff are employed in *(a)* the Department and *(b)* each of the agencies it sponsors; and what the figures were for 1997. [90662]

Mr. Alexander: Full-time equivalent numbers for staff in all civil service departments and agencies is released twice-yearly by press notice. The latest data, for April 2002, was published on 31 October 2002. Data for April 1997 appears in the annual publication "Civil Service Statistics". Copies of the press notices and annual publication are available from the Library of the House.

It is not possible to make exact comparisons over time because of changes in the make up of the departments and agencies comprising the civil service. Not only do new organisations appear and old ones disappear, but staff changes may reflect the transfer of work between departments and agencies.

TRANSPORT

Accreditation

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what his Department is doing to support the Government's policy on accreditation. [88090]

Mr. Jamieson: The United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) is recognised by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry as the sole national body for the accreditation, against international standards, of certification and inspection bodies, testing and calibration laboratories. My Department uses UKAS accreditation services whenever it is appropriate to do so.

Examples include our ISO 14001 environmental management systems and the certification work undertaken by the Vehicle Certification Agency in the motor trade industry and proposed by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency in the shipping industry. The Highways Agency also continues to work closely with UKAS to help establish benchmark standards within the industry for certification purposes.

Central Railway

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he plans to publish the Government's response to the Central Railway's proposals for a freight line; and if he will make a statement. [91027]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 28 November, *Official Report*, column 455W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle).

Departmental Staff

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the distribution of his Department's whole-time equivalent staff was, including the staff in agencies and other bodies reporting to him, in each Government office region and nation of the UK *(a)* in 1996 and *(b)* at the most recent available period. [90471]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 15 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 609W.

External Consultants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the total cost to his Department was of the use of external consultants in 2002. [90515]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department was formed on 29 May 2002. Expenditure on external consultants by my Department during the remainder of 2002 was £93.1 million.

Freight Facilities Grant

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much was paid in freight facilities grant in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [91547]

Mr. Jamieson: The following table shows UK Freight Facilities Grant payments by financial years:

	£ million
1997–98	8.4
1998–99	9.6
1999–2000	12.1
2000–01	19.9
2001–02	46.5

I believe this year-on-year increase in the amount of money paid in grant to be clear evidence of our continuing commitment to transferring freight from road to rail or water, wherever it is practical and environmentally beneficial to do so.

Job Sharing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the extent of job sharing in his Department. [90859]

Mr. Jamieson: Approximately 7 per cent. of staff in DfT Central Units work part time. Information specifically on job sharers is not held centrally and can be provided only at disproportionate cost. Job sharing forms just one strand of a range of possible alternative and flexible working arrangements. Under DfT central posting arrangements, all posts are open to part-time workers or job sharers. In very exceptional cases where line managers consider that a post cannot be filled on a

part- time/job share basis, they must make a case to HR setting out compelling reasons for this. The vast majority of such requests are denied.

The central Department, in conjunction with ODPM, supports a part-time workers network.

The DfT agencies, in almost all cases, also operate a policy of advertising all posts as open to part-time workers or job sharers. All operate a range of flexible working options. Several also support part-time working or carers networks.

Network Rail

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the impact of expenditure by Network Rail on public expenditure commitments; and if he will make a statement. [90613]

Mr. Jamieson: The Rail Regulator is currently conducting an interim review of Network Rail's access charges. This began on 15 November 2002 and is expected to be completed by the end of 2003.

Port Marine Safety Code

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to his answer of 9 December 2002, *Official Report*, columns 38–41W, on statutory harbour authorities, which statutory harbour authorities *(a)* have not completed and *(b)* have not indicated that they have completed implementation of the Port Marine Safety Code. [90801]

Mr. Jamieson: The following competent harbour authorities have neither *(a)* completed nor *(b)* indicated that they have completed implementation of the Port Marine Safety Code because they have not yet issued a formal statement of compliance:

Eastbourne (Sovereign Harbour)
Irvine Harbour Company
Porthleven Harbour and Docks Company
Canterbury District Council (Whitstable)
Carmarthenshire County Council (Llanelli/Burry Port)
Exeter City Council
Isle of Wight Council (Newport)
Waveney District Council (Southwold)
Worthing Borough Council
Crouch Harbour Authority
Looe Harbour Commission
Maryport Harbour Commission
Mousehole Harbour Commission
Sandwich Port and Haven Commission
Duchy of Cornwall (Isles of Scilly)
Broads Authority

My Department is reviewing the quality of compliance by harbour authorities and will be making further investigations of the above authorities and any others where there is an indication that they may not have given proper consideration to the principles embodied in the Code.

Portland Search and Rescue Helicopter

Jim Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the risk assessment of the safety implications of moving the Portland search and rescue helicopter to Lee-on-Solent. [90409]

Mr. Jamieson: An operational analysis of the Portland area helicopter was carried out for the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) by consultants for internal purposes. The analysis is technical in nature and is considered to be commercially sensitive and is therefore exempt from disclosure under Section 13 of Part 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. Discussions about the future of the helicopter base are continuing.

Rail Freight

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will require the Strategic Rail Authority to publish regional freight strategies. [90846]

Mr. Jamieson: The SRA's Strategic Plan, due to be published shortly, will provide some area-based information on the current use of the rail network for passenger and freight traffic throughout the country. There is no immediate plan to publish separate regional freight strategies.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many statutory instruments have been issued by his Department in each calendar year since 1979. [89836]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department for Transport was formed on 29 May 2002. During the remainder of the calendar year 2002 it issued a total of 639 statutory instruments comprising 78 general instruments and 561 local instruments.

Performance Targets

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on progress made to meet his target of *(a)* an increase of 75 per cent. investment in the transport service through the Transport 2010 programme and *(b)* a reduction of 15 per cent.in traffic congestion. [90793]

Mr. Jamieson: No such targets were included in the 10 Year Plan for transport. Progress against the objectives in the Plan are set out in 'Delivering Better Transport: Progress Report' which was published 17 December 2002, a copy of which has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Trains (Cycle Storage)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met members of the Strategic Rail Authority to discuss the provision of cycle storage on trains; what the outcome was of these discussions; and if he will make a statement. [88942]

Mr. Jamieson: The Secretary of State for Transport, and other Departmental Ministers, meet the Chairman and Chief Executive of the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) on a regular basis and discuss a range of issues.

The SRA is continuing to encourage the provision of secure storage for bicycles at railway stations and for their carriage on trains where this is feasible. The SRA encourages all train operators to tailor their bicycle provision to the demand and latent demand on each route.

Transport 2010

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the levels of *(a)* public and *(b)* private money being used to fund Transport 2010 in London. [90797]

Mr. Jamieson: Total public and private spending for London over the period of the 10 Year Plan are set out in the Finance Annex to "Delivering Better Transport: Progress Report" which was published on 17 December 2002 and placed in the Libraries of the House.

In addition, Transport for London and the London Underground will have fares income available to them, and the Mayor will also have the revenues from his congestion charging scheme to spend on transport.

Vehicle Registration

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many possible vehicle registration numbers exist, and how many were issued, in each of the series 51 and 02. [90990]

Mr. Jamieson: In each of the series 51 and 02 there are 7,312,896 registration numbers. For the 51 series 2,108,111 numbers were issued and for the 02 series 2,205,995 numbers.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many possible combinations of letters in the pattern of current vehicle registration numbers exist; and of those, how many are available for allocation in any six month period. [90991]

Mr. Jamieson: There are 7,312,896 possible combinations in the current registration number system. From this total, combinations are withheld if they are likely to cause offence or are reserved for sale and in each six-month period the number available for allocation fluctuates. In the periods September 2001 to February 2002 and March 2002 to August 2002 there were 5,072,976 and 5,082,391 combinations available for allocation respectively.

DEFENCE

Naval Air Defence

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate his Department has made of the comparative effectiveness in their air defence roles of *(a)* fixed-wing carrier-borne aircraft, *(b)* modernised Type 42 destroyers and *(c)* future Type 45 destroyers. [90103]

Mr. Ingram: United Kingdom maritime forces normally operate as part of a Task Group, which protects itself against air attack through a series of 'layered' defences. Task Groups typically include carrier and/or land based fixed wing aircraft as an outer layer. Inside and complementary to this, the Type 42 Anti-Air Warfare Destroyers (and also Type 22 and 23 Frigates) are equipped to provide an air defence capability for both Force and self protection. The Type 42 Destroyers systems are being enhanced to ensure they remain effective in the air defence role.

The Type 42 Destroyers will be replaced by the Type 45 Destroyers, fitted with the highly capable Principal Anti-Air Missile System (PAAMS). PAAMS will represent a significant improvement in Air Defence capability compared with that provided by the current Type 42 Destroyer fitted with Seadart. Key improvements will include better surveillance, increased channels of fire, a larger magazine capacity and a faster, more manoeuvrable missiles.

The comparative effectiveness of these complementing layers has been successfully demonstrated in many recent National, NATO and Allied exercises and proven in the Gulf and Adriatic conflicts to adequately protect a Task Group.

Defence Contracts

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will introduce a policy whereby defence contracts awarded to foreign companies require 50 per cent. of the work to be carried out in the United Kingdom. [90430]

Mr. Ingram: I refer my hon Friend to the answer I gave on 13 January 2003 *Official Report*, columns 405–06W.

Dstl Staff

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will estimate the initial capital spend for relocation of Dstl staff from Farnborough to Portsdown Main. [89814]

Dr. Moonie: The costs of house moves for the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl) staff relocating from Farnborough to Portsdown Main, together with the additional travelling costs for staff choosing not to move house, are estimated to be £13.3 million.

Dstl considered many different site rationalisation options. The selected option delivers the greatest improvements in synergy while remaining affordable.

The estimated capital value of the contract to refurbish the Portsdown Main site is commercially sensitive and is withheld in accordance with Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if an environmental sustainability assessment was made of factors that may result from the relocation of Dstl staff in Farnborough to Portsdown Main, with particular reference to changes in the level of commuter traffic; and if he will make a statement. [89815]

Dr. Moonie: A Strategic Environmental Appraisal (environmental sustainability assessment) was prepared in accordance with MOD Policy for each of the site relocation options considered by the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl).

It is recognised that the rationalisation of Dstl sites will result in a change in travel patterns, the overall effect of which is likely to be beneficial, in that it will contribute to reducing the need for travel between geographically dispersed sites. Dstl also recognises, however, that at Portsdown Main there will be local issues concerning the increased level of commuter traffic entering and leaving the area. Dstl are consulting with the local planning authorities and are commissioning consultants to identify any significant environmental constraints and to prepare a Preliminary Environmental Report. As part of this commission a detailed transport assessment will be completed, which will highlight areas where improvement and mitigation might be beneficial. Dstl are committed to establishing a travel plan for Portsdown Main with the aim of reducing dependency on the private car and promoting the use of other modes of transport. The prime contractor appointed to complete the refurbishment and re-population of Portsdown Main will be required to take full account of these findings during design, construction and subsequent operation of the site.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the financial appraisal and independent review by the MoD Senior Economic Advisor of the decision to move Dstl staff from Farnborough to Portsdown Main. [89831]

Dr. Moonie: The appraisal referred to contains information that is commercially sensitive, it is withheld in accordance with Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl) is currently requesting bids from contractors for the refurbishment of the Portsdown Main site and information contained in the appraisal may weaken Dstl negotiating position.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the loss to Dstl of experienced staff who are unable or unwilling to relocate from Farnborough to Portsdown Main. [89832]

Dr. Moonie: The move of the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl) staff from Farnborough to a new site at Portsdown is planned for 2006. At this comparatively early stage it is difficult to predict whether or not Dstl will lose staff and if so in what numbers. We hope that all staff currently employed by Dstl at the Farnborough site will choose to stay with the Laboratory and move to the new site.

In October 2002, after the relocation decision had been announced to staff, Dstl commissioned MORI to carry out an independent Staff Opinion Survey. The response of staff, particularly at Farnborough, was very positive and had improved in key areas over the previous survey in 2001. There are no indications at this time that Dstl will lose significant numbers of staff because of its relocation plans.

DynCorp

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many personnel and from which departments or agencies within his Department, currently employed by his Department, would be transferred to the employ of DynCorp should the company's bid prove successful; and if he will make a statement. [90776]

Mr. Ingram: Landmarc Support Services (LSS) have been selected by the Ministry of Defence as the preferred bidder to act as the strategic partner in the management and running of the Army Training Estate. LSS is a special purpose company owned by Interserve Defence Ltd and DynCorp International.

Approximately 1,450 Civil and Crown Servants from the Army Training Estate, Defence Estates and Reserve Forces and Cadets Association would transfer, with their jobs, to LSS between April and August 2003, should a contract be placed. These staff will have their employment rights protected by both Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 and MOD's codes of practice.

Ethical Banking

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contracts have been concluded as a result of the Government's commitment to support ethical banking. [89942]

Mr. Ingram: The Government believe it is important for consumers to have choice in financial products, including the availability of 'ethical' products. However, it would not be appropriate for the government to exclusively support the development of one specific group of financial service providers. It is for individual consumers to decide the attributes they most value from their financial services and for financial services firms to be transparent about their use of funds and investments.

European Rapid Reaction Force

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) for what purposes beyond humanitarian relief, peacekeeping and crisis management British hardware and personnel committed to the European Rapid Reaction Force may be used; [89587]

(2) what the British *(a)* hardware and *(b)* personnel commitment is to the ERRF; and to what extent this has changed since November 2002; [89588]

(3) what British commitment he estimates will be required to meet goal shortfalls by fellow members of the ERRF in *(a)* its first year and *(b)* subsequent years. [89589]

Mr. Hoon: There is no standing European Rapid Reaction Force. Under the European Security and Defence Policy, national forces will come together for specific, EU-led crisis management operations (the 'Petersberg tasks') where NATO as a whole is not engaged. These incorporate humanitarian and rescue tasks, peacekeeping tasks, and tasks of combat forces in crisis management, including peacemaking.

We are not committing British forces to a standing structure—we and other member states are, on a voluntary basis, offering to make forces available to meet requirements identified in the Helsinki Headline Catalogue as necessary to enable the EU to undertake the full spectrum of Petersberg tasks. The potential British contribution could be up to 12,500 troops, 72 combat

aircraft and 18 warships, with a full range of supporting capabilities. At the Capabilities Improvement Conference in November 2001, along with other member states, the United Kingdom increased its potential contribution in areas where capability shortfalls were identified. There has been no change since then.

Headline Goal shortfalls are identified by comparing the combined total of forces offered by member states with the Headline Goal requirements and are therefore collective; it is not the case that the United Kingdom contribution is intended to meet the shortfalls of others. Implementing solutions to shortfalls is a matter for nations or groups of nations to undertake voluntarily.

Field Hospital Volunteers

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the 202 Field Hospital Volunteers have been called up; what their profession is in each case; and in which NHS facility they are employed. [90911]

Dr. Moonie: To date no members of 202 (Volunteer) Field Hospital have been called up, nor are there any immediate plans to do so.

Iraq

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what *(a)* briefing and *(b)* other assistance personnel from his Department gave to *The Sunday Telegraph* in respect of its report of 22 December 2002 about preparations for a military campaign against Iraq. [89883]

Mr. Hoon: No authorised briefing or assistance was given.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what guidelines he has given to the media about what is not appropriate to report in advance of possible military action against Iraq. [89884]

Mr. Hoon: No guidelines have been issued to anyone detailing what would not be appropriate to report should there be any military action against Iraq. However, the specific issue of reporting restrictions is dealt with under the DA Notice procedures, further details of which can be found on the Defence Press and Broadcasting Advisory Committee website at:

The Ministry of Defence will shortly be in touch with editors of the mainstream media about the arrangements for reporting during any possible future military action against Iraq.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many children have been killed in Iraq as a direct result of bombs and missiles used to enforce the no-fly zones in Iraq since the policy of implementation was started. [90234]

Mr. Hoon: We are not aware of any child fatalities resulting from responses made in self-defence by coalition aircraft patrolling the no-fly zones.

Coalition aircrew only ever respond in self defence against military targets. When attacks by Iraqi air defences force coalition aircraft to respond in this way, we go to great lengths to ensure that the risk of civilian casualties is minimised. Targets are selected with extreme care and precision-guided weapons are used.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the cost to date of mobilisation of British troops and medical auxiliaries for prospective military activities in the Gulf. [90239]

Mr. Hoon: The information requested is not yet available. I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House in due course.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what role he expects the Fairford air base in Gloucester to play in any conflict with Iraq. [90255]

Mr. Hoon: RAF Fairford is a NATO designated standby base that is made available to the United States Visiting Force and from which a wide range of aircraft types can be deployed. The United Kingdom Government must be fully consulted and agree before any US Air Force aircraft are deployed operationally from any RAF base, including RAF Fairford.

No request has been received to activate RAF Fairford for operational purposes and it would be inappropriate to speculate what role, if any, the base might play in the event of any conflict with Iraq.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many MoD personnel are engaged in *(a)* translating and *(b)* analysing the dossier submitted by Iraq to the UN; and if he will make a statement. [88959]

Mr. Hoon: The Iraqi declaration in response to United Nations Security Council resolution 1441 is being analysed by the Ministry of Defence in conjunction with other Departments. Parts of the declaration are being translated into English by Ministry of Defence personnel and by personnel drawn from other Departments. I am withholding the number of personnel engaged in the tasks of translating and analysing the declaration in accordance with Exemption 1a of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Future Joint Combat Aircraft

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when a decision is to be made on the additional purchase of Future Joint Combat Aircraft; and if he will make a statement. [90159]

Mr. Ingram: We do not expect to make a decision on how many Joint Strike Fighters are required to meet our Future Joint Combat Aircraft requirement until 2006. Work to inform this decision is ongoing and in the meantime our planning assumption remains that up to 150 Short Take Off and Vertical Landing Joint Strike Fighters will be required.

A purchase of additional Joint Strike Fighters is one of the options being considered to fill any manned aircraft requirement within the Future Offensive Air System. A range of potential mixes of platforms is currently being looked at, including Long Range Cruise Missiles, Uninhabited Combat Air Vehicles and manned aircraft. No decisions have yet been taken.

New Barracks

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the sites being considered for new barracks. [88571]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy will be placed in the Library of the House.

RAF Menwith Hill

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 16t December 2002, Official Report, column 518W, on RAF bases, for what reason no budget is shown for RAF Menwith Hill. [90153]

Mr. Ingram: RAF Menwith Hill is owned by the Ministry of Defence and made available to the US Department of Defense under the NATO Status of Forces Agreement of 1951. Administration of the base is the responsibility of the US authorities.

Information on detailed operational matters at RAF Menwith Hill, including funding issues, is withheld under Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information on the grounds of national security.

Reservists

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the contracts signed by his Department requiring the service provider to employ sponsored reserves; how many sponsored reserves are required in each case; and if he will make a statement. [90774]

Dr. Moonie: As of 14 January contracts have been signed for the RORO Strategic Sealift which has a requirement for 180 Sponsored Reserves (SRs), the Survey Vessels Project which has a requirement for four SRs, the Mobile Met Unit which has a requirement for 48 SRs and the Heavy Equipment Transporter which has a requirement for 85 SRs.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many call-out notices have been sent out recently; how many call-out notices were sent to reservists and under what legal headings prior to and during *(a)* the Kosovo crisis, *(b)* the first Gulf war and *(c)* operations in Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement. [90798]

Dr. Moonie: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence stated in his announcement to the House on 7 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 24, we envisage initially sending out sufficient call-out notices to secure about 1,500 Reservists and we will issue further notices as appropriate. As of 13 January, some 615 call-out notices had been sent under the authority of the call-out order made on 7 January 2003 under Section 54 of the Reserve Forces Act 1996 (RFA 96). For operations in the former republic of Yugoslavia (including Kosovo) and Afghanistan, Reservists were also called out under Section 54 of RFA 96. For Operation Granby (the Gulf conflict 1990–91), Reservists were called out under Section 10 of the Reserve Forces Act 1980. Information regarding call-out notices served for these operations is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether reservists are awaiting call-up to come from *(a)* the Territorial Army and *(b)* the Civilian Regular Reserves; what reserve liabilities exist for each category of reserve in each of the three services; which situations must exist before recall can be permitted; what procedures have to be followed in order to implement the call-up in each case; and if he will make a statement. [90799]

Dr. Moonie: Initially we envisage to secure about 1,500 reservists under the call-out Order made on 7 January 2003. That Order was made under section 54(1) of the Reserve Forces Act 1996. The vast majority of those being called out will come from the volunteer reserve forces, ie. the Royal Naval Reserve, the Royal Marines Reserve, the Territorial Army and the Royal Auxiliary Air Force. However, some reservists, particularly those who have skills not readily available in the volunteer reserve forces, will be called out from the ex-regular reserve forces, ie. the Royal Fleet Reserve, the Army Reserve and the Royal Air Force Reserve.

The general liabilities for members of the reserve forces, both volunteer and ex-regular, are set out in Part VI of the Reserve Forces Act 1996, particularly sections 52, 54 and 56. The liability of certain officers and former servicemen who are not members of any reserve force to be recalled for service is set out in Part VII of the Act and the power to authorise their recall is laid down in section 68. The call-out Order made on 7 January does not authorise the mobilisation of such individuals and there are no plans to make a recall Order. Such an Order could only be made in time of national danger or if a great emergency had arisen.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons reservists can refuse to serve; what powers the MoD has to compel reservists to serve; and if he will make a statement. [90800]

Dr. Moonie: The Reserve Forces Act 1996 (RFA 96) requires Reservists who are served with a call-out notice to report for service at a specified time and place. Failure to comply may result in the Reservist being charged with desertion or absence without leave and may be tried by court-martial or summarily by a civil court. However, RFA 96 also contains safeguards for individuals, including the right to apply for exemption from or deferral of call-out. The detailed regulations are contained in the Reserve Forces (Call-out and Recall) (Exemptions Etc) Regulations, Statutory Instrument 1997/307. Schedule 1 of those regulations sets out the grounds on which a Reservist may make an application. Reservists are made aware of their right to apply for deferral or exemption at the time of their call-out. There are separate arrangements for conscientious objectors.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many reservists are being called up who reside in Scotland. [90391]

Dr. Moonie: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence stated in his announcement to the House on 7 January 2003 *Official Report*, column 24, experience shows that the number of call-out notices issued needs to be significantly larger than the number of individual Reservists likely to be required. Under the

call-out order made on 7 January 2003, we envisage initially sending out sufficient call-out notices to secure about 1,500 Reservists and we will issue further notices as appropriate. As of 13 January, some 615 call-out notices had been issued, of which 32 were sent to addresses in Scotland.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many statutory instruments have been issued by his Department in each calendar year since 1979. [89850]

Dr. Moonie: The information requested is not held for the years prior to 1999. The Ministry of Defence issued the following number of statutory instruments:

Date	*Statutory Instruments Issued*
1999	4
2000	18
2001	10
2002	12

Strategic Sea Lift Capability

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the *(a)* current and *(b)* projected future strategic sea lift capability of the armed forces. [90102]

Mr. Ingram: Currently the Ministry of Defence has four Roll-On/Roll-Off vessels available full-time to meet our strategic sealift requirement. It is MOD policy is to charter merchant shipping from the commercial market to meet additional demands. In addition to this capability five Landing Ships Logistic (LSL) provide additional lift capability if not required for amphibious operations.

For the future, with the full introduction of our new strategic sealift service by the summer, we will have six RoRo vessels available at various degrees of readiness. Four of these vessels will be employed by MOD to meet day-to-day requirements with the remaining two vessels at lower states of readiness being available to MOD when operational situations warrant. This capability will also be augmented by four Landing Ship Dock (Auxiliary) (LSD(A)) which again, will be available when not required for amphibious operations. These vessels, which have a significantly enhanced lift capability, will replace current LSLs and are scheduled to come into service from 2004.

Type 23 Frigates (Chile)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans his Department has to sell RN Type 23 frigates to the Chilean Navy; and if he will make a statement. [90160]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon Member to the answer my hon Friend the Under Secretary of State for Defence gave on 30 April 2002 *Official Report*, column 746W to the hon. Member for Essex, North (Mr. Jenkin).

War Pensions

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of UK veterans from conflicts since and including World War II have claimed war pensions *(a)* three years, *(b)* five years, *(c)* 10 years and *(d)* more than 20 years after they would have been entitled to start receiving the benefit since 1972. [91049]

Dr. Moonie: The information requested is not available in the format required and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The War Pensions Scheme is unique in that there are no time limits for claiming a war pension. As a consequence of this, the onus has always been on the veteran to make a claim and entitlement is normally only given from the date of claim.

Warship Modernisation Project

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will write to the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South regarding his answer of 7 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 457W, concerning the Warship Modernisation Project. [84153]

Mr. Ingram: I replied to the hon. Member today.

WALES

Capita

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the contracts that have been awarded to the Capita Group by the Office. [89977]

Peter Hain: No contracts have been awarded to the Capita Group by my Department.

Correspondence

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many letters the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State received from members of the public in relation to his ministerial responsibilities in 2002. [90729]

Peter Hain: During 2002 the Parliamentary Under-Secretary answered 46 letters from members of the public in his Ministerial capacity. In addition 258 letters, which had been addressed either to myself or to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, were answered on our behalf by officials.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many letters he received from members of the public in relation to his ministerial responsibilities in 2002. [90959]

Peter Hain: During 2002 my predecessor and I answered 307 letters from members of the public in our Ministerial capacity. In addition, 258 letters which had been addressed to either the Secretary of State or the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, were answered on Ministers' behalf by officials.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on his Department's performance against each of its public service agreement targets. [89922]

Peter Hain: My Department is not required to have a public service agreement because of the nature of its role and its size.

Welsh Office Assets

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the assets of the Welsh Office valued at more than £50,000, identifying in each case *(a)* the nature of the asset, *(b)* the latest estimated value of the asset and *(c)* the rationale for possession of the asset; and if he will make a statement. [89952]

Peter Hain:

(a) Land and Buildings, that is, Gwydyr House in Whitehall, London SW1;

(b) £1,7 million; and

(c) it is the London headquarters of my Department and the location of my London office.

Freehold Land and Buildings were valued on 31 March 2000 on the basis of open market value for existing use in accordance with the "Appraisal and Valuation Manual" produced jointly by the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, the Incorporated Society of Valuers and Auctioneers and the Institute of Revenues Rating and Valuation. The valuation has been adjusted to its level at 31 March 2002 in accordance with accounting conventions.

Welsh Office Costs

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what his estimate is for the latest year for which information is available of the cost to the Welsh Office of *(a)* its press office, *(b)* its legal office, *(c)* its private office, *(d)* its briefing unit, *(e)* its social policy unit and *(f)* its finance and administration unit; and if he will make a statement. [89956]

Peter Hain: The net administration costs of my Department in 2001–02 were £2.839 million. The costs of the constituent branches are not separately identifiable.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Departmental Expenditure (Newsprint)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the total expenditure of her Department was on newspapers, magazines and periodicals in 2002. [90519]

Dr. Howells: The Department's spend on newspapers, magazines and periodicals in 2001–02 was £28,234.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many full-time equivalent staff are employed in *(a)* the Department and *(b)* each of the agencies it sponsors; and what the figures were for 1997. [90678]

Dr. Howells: The number of full-time equivalent staff employed in the Department and the Royal Parks Agency are set out in the following table.

	Current	*1997*
DCMS	459	340
RPA	237	238

Ethical Banking

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what contracts have been concluded as a result of the Government's commitment to support ethical banking. [89946]

Dr. Howells: My Department uses the Bank of England for banking services and there have been no other relevant contracts concluded.

External Consultants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the total cost to her Department was of the use of external consultants in 2002. [90500]

Dr. Howells: 11 contracts were awarded to external consultants in 2002 totalling £323,820. This includes the Royal Parks Agency.

Job Sharing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the extent of job sharing in her Department. [90868]

Dr. Howells: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport has a range of policies intended to help staff to better manage work-life balance, including support for part-time and job-share opportunities. All posts are open to those wishing to work part-time or job share although there are currently no posts being filled on a job-share basis.

National Lottery

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much lottery money remains unspent, broken down by the distribution body. [91113]

Mr. Caborn: The amounts not yet drawn down from the National Lottery Distribution Fund (NLDF) are shown in the following table.

Distributing body	*Unspent balance as at 31 December 2002 (£)*
Arts Council of England	233,021,761.89
Arts Council of Northern Ireland	35,014,526.62
Arts Council of Wales	31,016,874.65
Community Fund	303,497,261.54
Film Council	72,119,368.59
Heritage Lottery Fund	1,020,616,023.34
Millennium Commission	330,359,968.55
New Opportunities Fund	937,329,787.85
Scottish Arts Council	50,812,445.67
Scottish Screen	2,839,957.24
Sport England	295,290,905.58
Sport Scotland	77,913,479.92
Sports Council for Northern Ireland	21,008,670.19
Sports Council for Wales	34,445,319.32
UK Sport	4,166,877.84
Total	3,449,453,228.79

At 30 September 2002, the distributing bodies collectively had made commitments, with varying degrees of firmness, totalling £3.99 billion.

Minimum Wage

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will estimate the impact of increasing the minimum wage *(a)* in line with average earnings, *(b)* to £4.17 per hour, *(c)* to £4.87 per hour, *(d)* to £5.00 per hour and *(e)* to £5.30 per hour, on the cost of salaries of departmental employees (i) in total and (ii) for each nation of the United Kingdom in the next financial year. [90598]

Dr. Howells: There would be no impact on the cost of salaries of DCMS employees in any of the scenarios *(a)* to *(e)* as all DCMS employees are paid at a higher hourly rate than £5.30 per hour. All DCMS employees work in England.

Public Handling Rights

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much on average was paid out annually through Public handling Rights over the last five years; and what the administrative cost was. [89857]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 14 January 2003]:* The average total amount paid out annually by the Public Lending Right fund to registered authors between 1997 to 2001, the last five years for which payments have been made, was £4.3 million. During the same period, the average annual administrative cost of the scheme was £745,000.

Public Libraries

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many public libraries have *(a)* closed and *(b)* opened in each local authority in England since 1997. [90733]

Dr. Howells: This information is not held centrally. However, the total number of service points in each local authority open 10 hours or more per week, is contained in the annual Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy Annual Public Library Statistics, copies of which are in the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many public libraries there are in each local authority in England. [90961]

Dr. Howells: This information is not held centrally. However, this information is contained in column 18 (Total Service Points open 10 hours or more per week) of the annual Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy Public Library Statistics, copies of which are in the House of Commons Library. The latest Actual figures available are for 2000–01. Estimates are available for 2001–02.

Sickness Absence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many days were lost due to sickness absence in the Department in 2002. [90536]

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many working days were lost due to illness in her Department in *(a)* 2002 and *(b)* each of the preceding five years. [90745]

Dr. Howells: Cabinet Office publishes an annual report "Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service". The most recently published figures for the calendar year 2001 were announced by Ministerial Statement on 19 December 2002, and copies placed in the Libraries of the House.

For DCMS the 2001 average working days absence per staff year figures were:

	Number
Certified Sickness	3.8
Self-Certification	2.1
Total	5.9
Staff years	420

The 1999, 2000 and 2001 reports are available on the Cabinet Office website: www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/civilservice/publications/sickness/index.htm. The sickness absence figures for 2002 will be announced in due course.

DCMS is committed to managing sickness absence effectively, and in meeting the 2003 target for reduced sickness absence as set out in the Service Delivery Agreements (SDA).

Sport (Stakeholder Support)

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent discussions she has had with *(a)* the Independent Football Commission, *(b)* football supporters' associations, *(c)* football clubs, *(d)* the Football Association and *(e)* the Football League regarding supporter and other stakeholder involvement with clubs; and if she will make a statement. [90735]

Mr. Caborn: I met Professor Derek Fraser, the Chairman of the Independent Football Commission, on 7 January to discuss a range of football issues including the involvement of supporters with clubs. DCMS officials regularly discuss issues of supporter involvement with the football authorities and supporters' representatives, most recently at the Football Association's meeting with supporters' groups on 13 January. The Football League and the Football Federation Supporters' Federation were represented at that meeting.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

A-level Results

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of children were achieving *(a)* five or more GCSEs at A*-C grade, and *(b)* at least one GCSE at A*-G grade in (i) specialist schools, (ii) city technology colleges, (iii) all other comprehensives, (iv) grammar schools and (v) secondary modern schools. [89299]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested for the 2001 results is shown in the following table. The 2002 performance tables are due to be published later in January and I will write to the hon. Member with the updated information as soon as the data are available. I will also place a copy of the 2002 data in the Library.

Type of school	*Average percentage of children gaining:* 5 or more A*-C GCSE/GNVQ[3]	1 or more A*-C GCSE/GNVQ[3]
Specialist schools[1,2]	54.4	96.9
City technology colleges	78.0	99.0
All other comprehensive schools[4]	45.6	95.8
Grammar schools[1]	97.5	99.6
Secondary modern schools[1]	36.8	95.8

[1] Includes 27 grammar schools and 20 secondary modern schools that are specialist schools. These schools are also included in the data for grammar and secondary modern schools.
[2] Maintained schools (excluding special schools) designated and operating as specialist schools as at September 2000.
[3] Results shown on same basis as Secondary Performance Tables i.e. adjusted for refugees and admitted pupils.
[4] Excludes specialist schools, grammar schools and secondary modern schools.

Centres of Vocational Excellence

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many Centres of Vocational Excellence have been established and in what specialisms; and how many have been established by *(a)* colleges, *(b)* private training providers and *(c)* employers. [90927]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Excellent progress has been made in establishing Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs). 157 CoVEs have been created so far and in the Spending Review we announced additional funding to establish a total of 400 CoVEs by 2006.

These CoVEs cover a range of specialisms and have a geographical spread to ensure local, regional and national skills needs are addressed. The following table sets out the range of specialisms (by number and percentage of current network):

Specialism	*Number of CoVEs*	*Percentage of current CoVE network*
Engineering	36	23
Construction	23	15
Hospitality/Tourism	22	14
Creative Industries	20	13
Health/Care	17	11
ICT	16	10
Land Based	7	4
Business/Management	5	3
Retail/Distributive	4	3
Sport/Leisure	3	2
Food Manufacture	2	1
Hair/Beauty	2	1

Of the 157 CoVEs established to date 138 are in Further Education colleges. 19 are in work based learning providers. Of these 8 are in private training providers, 8 in group training associations and three in large companies.

Child Care

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many child care staff have been trained through learning and skills councils. [87983]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: This is a matter for the Learning and Skills Council. John Harwood, the Council's chief executive will write to the hon. Member with the information requested and a copy of his reply will be placed in the Libraries.

Departmental Consultation

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what his reason was for the duration of the consultation on the code of practice on admissions which concluded on 11 October 2002. [91244]

Mr. Miliband: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 14 January, *Official Report*, column 562W.

Departmental Projects

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills *(a)* which projects will be funded and *(b)* how much will be spent on each project, in areas covered by each sub-category in table 4.2 of the Departmental report 2002 in (i) 2002–03 and (ii) 2003–04. [89306]

Mr. Charles Clarke: We are in the process of finalising expected programme expenditure for the current year and will make any necessary changes through the spring supplementary estimate which will be presented to Parliament in due course. Overall expenditure is likely to exceed the provision set out in the Departmental report through the planned use of accumulated end-year flexibility.

My Statement to the House of 19 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 67WS, set out planned expenditure for 2003–04. I will be making a Statement on funding for higher education later this month.

Departmental Special Advisers

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the *(a)* names, *(b)* salaries and *(c)* responsibilities of each special adviser employed by his Department are. [89337]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Special Advisers in the Department for Education and Skills are Robert Hill and Lisa Tremble. They advise on the full range of education and skills issues for which the Department is responsible.

The salaries of Special Advisers are determined by a job evaluation process undertaken by the Special Advisers' Remuneration Committee.

Details of individual Special Adviser salaries are not given in order to protect the privacy of the individual concerned.

Departmental Underspend

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on

underspend for his Department in *(a)* the current financial year and *(b)* each of the last five financial years. [89364]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Final expenditure figures for 2002–03 are not available until the publication of the Public Expenditure Outturn White Paper in July 2003.

Figures for 1997–98 to 2001–02 are presented in the following table:

£ million

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Total in year underspend	72	261	615	1,128	1,246
Of which:					
DfES	72	259	536	998	1,111
Sure Start	—	2	76	129	71
Ofsted	0	0	4	1	3
Children's Fund	—	—	—	—	61

The main reason for these in-year variances from plans stems from the nature of the Department's budgets and the difficulties this causes in forecasting spending accurately. For example: new and innovative programmes such as Sure Start rely on the pace of build up of local partnerships; capital projects can also take longer than anticipated to get off the ground; and the Department has a significant number of demand led budgets. The availability of End-Year Flexibility is designed to allow us to manage such fluctuations sensibly over a number of years.

This year my Department intends to utilise approximately £600 million accumulated End-Year Flexibility, across a range of priorities, this will be drawn down at the spring Supplementary Estimate in February. The planned use of over £880 million accumulated End-Year Flexibility for years beyond 2002–03 was tabled in my statement of 19 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 67WS.

Notes:

1. All figures represent in year underspends with the exception of 1997–98 which includes cumulative underspends from the previous year. They are measured against the Departmental Expenditure Limit including any accumulated End-Year Flexibility drawn down in the year concerned.

2. Figures exclude Welfare to Work and the Employment Service prior to the machinery of government changes in June 2001.

3. Figures are not comparable due to the change to Resource Accounting and Budgeting in 1998–99. Figures for 1997–98 are in cash accounting terms.

Development Teaching

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what progress has been made in the teaching of development issues in state schools; and if he will make a statement. [90904]

Mr. Miliband: Pupils study international development issues as part of both the citizenship curriculum—now statutory in secondary schools—and within geography. Primary pupils learn about living in a diverse world through citizenship, and about less economically developed countries through geography as part of studying water, settlements and environmental issues. As they progress to secondary level, they are taught about the world as a global community, including the political, economic, environmental and social implications of this, both through geography and citizenship. We have worked with educational bodies in this field, such as the Development Education Association, to produce a teaching resource: "Citizenship, the Global Dimension". QCA has also sent detailed guidance to all schools to help teachers to develop pupils international understanding at various stages of their learning.

Mandarin

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what level of funding has been required from secondary schools in relation to offering Mandarin on the curriculum in the next financial year; and what level of funding has been allocated to the subject; [90383]

(2) how many secondary schools that are *(a)* providing and *(b)* pursuing specialist status on languages will have the teaching of Mandarin on the curriculum; [90384]

(3) how many secondary schools taught Mandarin as an extra-curricular subject in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2002; and how many taught Mandarin as part of the curriculum in (i) 1997 and (ii) 2002; [90368]

(4) what resources were allocated to train teachers to teach Mandarin in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2002. [90385]

Mr. Miliband: The Department does not allocate funding for the teaching of specific individual languages. The National Curriculum requirement is that all maintained secondary schools should offer one of the working languages of European Union. Over and above that, it is for schools to decide which and how many additional languages they choose to offer. There are no specific resources allocated by the Department to train teachers in Mandarin. It is up to Initial Teacher Training providers to choose which languages to include in the courses they offer. However, the Government does allocate £300,000 per year to the British Council run UK-China Educational Co-operation programme, which includes language immersion courses in Mandarin Chinese for teachers and pupils and the exchange of language assistants.

Although there is a strong language learning element to the programme, the UK-China Educational Co-operation programme, which has been running since 2000, also provides grants for school linking visits, joint curriculum projects, electronic curriculum links and head teacher study visits.

There are no figures available on how many language colleges offer Mandarin but 50 of the 157 language colleges offer Chinese. Aspiring language colleges are not required to give advance notice to the Department of the languages they intend to include in their applications so it is not possible to indicate how many intend to teach Mandarin. However language colleges are encouraged to diversify their language provision and Chinese continues to be a popular choice for applicant schools. Specialist applications are assessed by independent assessors and are not approved by the Department on the basis of a specified range of modern foreign languages.

From an analysis of OFSTED inspection reports for 1997–98, no mention is made of Mandarin. From the reports of secondary schools inspected by OFSTED for

2001–02, it is noted that four schools taught Mandarin as part of the curriculum, four taught Mandarin as an extra-curriculum subject and three other schools taught Chinese as part of the curriculum.

Modern Apprenticeships

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many employers with *(a)* 25 employees or more and *(b)* less than 25 employees, were involved in modern apprenticeships in (i) 2000, (ii) 2001 and (iii) 2002. [90925]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Data are only available for 2001. The Learning and Training at Work Survey in England for that year indicates that 12,000 employers with 25 or more employees had participated in modern apprenticeships in the previous 12 months and 24,000 with between one and 24 employees. The results of the 2002 survey are due to be published by the Department shortly.

New Schools (Private Companies)

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many new schools have been funded by private companies since 1997; and how many are planned. [90902]

Mr. Miliband: All new maintained schools are funded principally through public funds, but promoters of voluntary aided schools generally provide 10 per cent. of the capital costs. The Department does not maintain any records of the source of the 10 per cent. funding for the establishment of any new voluntary aided schools, or any significant contribution to the costs of establishing any other maintained school.

Academies are publicly funded independent schools with private and voluntary sector sponsors contributing up to 20 per cent. of the capital cost. Three Academies opened in September 2002, one of which is sponsored by a private sector company. A further nine will open in September 2003. At least 33 Academies will be open by 2006.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on his Department's performance against its public service agreement targets on truancy, literacy and numeracy. [90552]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department publishes progress against all its outstanding public service agreement targets (PSAs) in its annual departmental report and autumn performance report. Progress against PSAs was most recently reported in the 2002 autumn report, published in November 2002, together with commentary where appropriate. A copy of the report is available from the House of Commons Library.

Plant Hire

Mr. Laxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what discussions he has had with the Construction Industry Training Board about the levy made on plant hire construction. [91223]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I have had no discussions with the Construction Industry Training Board about the levy made on plant hire construction.

Mr. Laxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to meet representatives of the Hire Association Europe to discuss the Construction Industry Training Board levy made on members' companies in the hire industry. [91224]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: One of my officials met with Mr. John Coyne, Managing Director of the Hire Association Europe on 27 November last. I have no plans to meet with them.

Mr. Laxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action he proposes to take arising from the judgment of the hon. Mr. Justice Keith in the High Court of Justice, Queen's Bench Division, on 23 November 2001, about Gibbon Equipment Hire Ltd. and the Construction Industry Training Board. [91225]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The judgment by Mr. Justice Keith concluded that the definition of 'contractor's plant' in the Industrial Training (Construction Board) Order 1964 (Amendment Order) 1992 was clear, unequivocal and unambiguous. Also that Gibbon Equipment Hire was an employer in the construction industry, and therefore, required to pay the CITB levy.

However, I have agreed to consider whether the hiring out of plant and equipment should continue to be included in the definition of the construction industry, and am awaiting proposals from the hire service sector.

Ring-fenced Grants

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many ring-fenced grants *(a)* are provided and *(b)* were provided in each of the last five years to (i) each school in England and (ii) each local education authority in England; and what the (A) name, (B) purpose and (C) financial value of each was. [89342]

Mr. Miliband: The following ring-fenced grants have been provided by the Department since 1997–98:

Standards Fund Grant (1997–98 to 2002–03):

The Government's main means of targeting funds towards national priorities, such as the literacy and numeracy strategies and Excellence in Cities to reflect the central priority of raising standards in schools.

School Standards Grant (2000–01 to 2002–03):

To help schools to improve standards.

School Budget Support Grant (2000–01):

To increase the budget shares of schools maintained by local education authorities.

Education Budget Support Grant (2001–02):

To provide support to help some local education authorities manage funding changes in the financial year.

Post Sixteen Budget Support Grant (2002–03):

To provide support to local education authorities in respect of the transfer of funding for sixth form provision to the Learning and Skills Council.

Teachers' Pay Reform Special Grants (2000–01 to 2002–03):

To support the costs of the teachers pay reforms.

Nursery Education Grant (1997–98 to 2002–03):

To providers of early education to enable them to make free high quality, part-time early education places available to eligible children.

Childcare Grant (1998–99 to 2002–03):

To help improve locally, the infrastructure for the provision of child care.

GM Transitional Funding Grant (2000–01 to 2001–02):

To contribute towards local authority expenditure on the costs of transitional funding paid to former grant-maintained and grant-maintained special schools.

GM Transitional Insurance Grant (1999–2000 to 2002–03):

To help schools meet the cost of any insurance contract entered into when they were still grant-maintained schools.

Education Action Zone Grant (1998–99 to 2002–03):

To enable local partnerships of schools, parents and the private sector to develop innovative and radical solutions which will raise educational standards.

Education Maintenance Allowance (1999–2000 to 2002–03):

A financial incentive targeted at young people from less well off families to encourage them to enter and remain in further education.

Capital Grants (1997–98 to 2002–03)

To assist in raising educational standards by contributing towards meeting the capital investment needs of buildings at schools including condition, suitability, sufficiency and modernisation needs.

Most funding provided by the Department is distributed via local education authorities (LEAs). EAZ funding is paid direct to the EAZ and not to the LEA. All maintained schools receive almost all their public funding from their LEA. The Department does not hold information on funding provided to individual schools.

Copies of tables giving a breakdown of the funding allocated for the above grants to each LEA in England since 1997–98 have been placed in the House of Commons Library. 2002–03 figures are to date and provisional. There are some gaps in 1997–98 as some LEAs only came into being the following year. For Standards Fund Grant in 1997–98 the allocations are shown against the 'successor' LEAs. Capital funding does not include Basic Need, when this has been allocated via Basic Credit Approvals which are un-hypothecated.

As part of the Government's commitment to reducing the proportion of support for local authorities provided as ring-fenced grants, we have ensured all of the growth in schools spending announced in the Spending Review will go direct to schools. DfES support will in future increasingly be provided through local authorities' Education Formula Spending Shares, which, following the outcome of the Spending Review and transfers of funding from DfES grant budgets, will be £5.6 billion higher in 2005–06, compared to 2002–03. The number of ring-fenced grants, and the level of support provided through ring-fenced grants, will fall over the next three years from 13 per cent. of the total school spending to 11 per cent.

School Funding (Faith Organisations)

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many new schools have been funded by faith organisations since 1997, broken down by faith; and how many are planned. [90903]

Mr. Miliband: The following table gives numbers of new grant maintained and voluntary aided faith schools that have opened, or have been approved to open, since 1997. These include independent schools approved for establishment as new maintained schools; but do not include former community schools which closed and re-opened with a religious character. All these proposals, except one Jewish school, involved some capital building work and a financial contribution by the promoters.

	RC	*CE*	*CE/ Methodist*	*Jewish*	*Muslim*	*Sikh*	*7th Day Adventist*	*Greek Orthodox*
1997	3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1998	—	—	—	1	2	—	1	—
1999	2	1	—	3	—	2	—	—
2000	2	1	—	1	—	—	—	1
2001	1	2	—	—	2	—	—	—
2002	—	3	—	—	—	—	—	—
2003	1	3	1	—	—	—	—	—
2004	—	1	—	1	1	—	—	—
Total	9	11	1	6	5	2	1	1

School Standards

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will estimate the additional costs of achieving the targets contained in his Department's report, "Time for Standards", on recruiting *(a)* extra teachers and *(b)* extra support staff. [89294]

Mr. Miliband: We are committed during this Parliament to the recruitment of at least an extra 10,000 extra teachers. We also estimate that there will be 50,000 new support staff in the same period. Both figures are for full-time equivalents.

The additional pay bill costs[1] in the 2005–06 academic year, compared to the 2000–01 academic year, of the additional teachers are estimated as some £200 million.

The costs of the additional support staff will depend on school decisions about the level and mix of support staff they recruit and the wide range of support staff pay levels for different roles. The additional pay bill costs[1] in the 2005–06 academic year, compared to the 2000–01 academic year, are estimated as some £650–750 million.

Total school revenue budgets will rise by some £6 billion in the 2005–06 financial year compared to this year.

[1] At today's prices and including NI and superannuation.

Logistics (Skills)

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what support the Government have committed to the Sector Skills Council for the logistics industry. [90321]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Skills for Logistics Expression of Interest for a Sector Skills Council (SSC) was accepted, on 18 December 2002, by the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA). This will result in the SSDA committing development funding of up to £100,000 to help the sector prepare its bid for SSC status. If the resulting SSC bid is successful, Skills for Logistics will receive a full SSC licence and be eligible for up to £1 million a year from the SSDA to meet its core costs.

In addition to the financial support the SSDA has provided advisory support to the logistics sector in the form of a dedicated business consultant who has been giving support and guidance to the sector since December 2001. This support has included advice on preparing their expression of interest and will continue throughout the six month development stage.

Selection

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what mechanisms have been set up to ensure that schools set up by private companies and faith organisations *(a)* do not select their pupils, *(b)* follow the national curriculum, *(c)* teach science, including Darwin's theory of evolution and *(d)* protect the human rights of female students. [90905]

Mr. Miliband: The information is as follows:

(a) Selection

All new maintained schools are prohibited from selecting pupils by high academic ability by the School Standards and Framework Act (SSFA) 1998. The SSFA permits fair banding whereby schools select a proportion of pupils from each part of the full range of abilities. Academies and City Technology Colleges (CTCs) are prohibited from selecting by high academic ability by virtue of their funding agreements.

Schools with a specialism in a prescribed subject are allowed to select up to 10 per cent. of pupils by aptitude in that subject.

Schools with a religious character are allowed in their admission criteria to give preference to adherents of their faith or denomination.

(b) National curriculum

All maintained schools, including those set up by faith organisations, are required to teach the National Curriculum. Academies are required through their funding agreements broadly to follow the National Curriculum and the national system of assessing it. CTCs are required to provide a broad and balanced curriculum with an emphasis on science and technology, and to teach the core and other foundation subjects of the National Curriculum. They are not required to follow the National Curriculum programmes of study, although most do so.

(c) Science curriculum

The National Curriculum requires all pupils to study the Science Curriculum at key stages 1, 2, 3 and 4 (ages 5–16). At key stage 4 pupils study the fossil record as evidence for evolution and how variation and selection may lead to evolution or extinction. Schools do teach how scientific controversies can arise from the interpretation of empirical evidence and this is likely to include Darwin's theory of evolution. Pupils are encouraged to explore different views, theories and beliefs. The origins of the universe are also addressed in the teaching of religious education at key stage 3 (ages 11–14).

(d) Human rights

The human rights of female students are protected by legislation. All maintained schools, including those set up by faith organisations, must comply with the Race Relations and Sex Discrimination Acts, and with the Human Rights Act. The Human Rights Act provides a right to education without discrimination on any grounds, including sex and religion. Its application extends to female pupils in Academies and CTCs.

Teachers' Pay

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps he is taking to harmonise *(a)* pay rates and *(b)* pay scales between teachers in schools and further education, and if he will make a statement. [90696]

Mr. Miliband: Further education colleges are independent corporations responsible for determining the pay and conditions of their staff. Therefore, it is not for the Government to harmonise FE and school teacher pay scales.

Truancy

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many school days were lost due to truancy in Lancashire in each year since 1997. [90741]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The number of school days lost due to truancy in Lancashire since 1997 are as follows:

Academic year (September-May)	*Number of day pupils of compulsory school age*	*Number of school days lost due to truancy*
1996–97[1]	201,219	176,296
1997–98	159,143	129,313
1998–99	162,583	150,654
1999–2000	162,979	140,519
2000–01	160,768	135,585
2001–02	159,398	136,053

[1] The figures for 1996–97 are pre local government reorganisation and are not directly comparable with the other years.

Union Learning Representatives

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many Union Learning Representatives there are within his Department; and if he will make a statement. [88831]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: There is currently one Union Learning Representative in the Department. My officials are working with the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS), the main civil service union, on how best to promote the development of Union Learning Representatives within the Department.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the Government's budget is for the promotion of Union Learning representatives in the *(a)* public and *(b)* private sectors; and if he will make a statement. [88832]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Government does not have a specific budget for the promotion of Union Learning Representatives in either the public or the private sector. We recognise, however, that trade unions and their learning representatives have a key role to play in promoting the development of learning and skills in the workplace. To help them do this, my Department has provided financial support through the Union Learning Fund since 1988. This year (2002–03) £9 million is available and a further £33.6 million has been allocated for the next three years up to 2005–06.

When it was launched, the Union Learning Fund was a new and innovative experiment, but it has now become an established part of the lifelong learning agenda. It is helping trade unions use their influence with employers, employees and others to encourage greater take up of learning at work and boost their capacity as learning organisations. It has so far benefited over 28,000 people in the workplace through a wide variety of projects ranging from tackling basic skills needs to advanced professional development. It has also led to the development of a new breed of activist, the Union Learning Representative, and has helped to establish and train a growing network which now stands at more than 4,000 learning representatives nationwide.

Union Learning Representatives are ideally placed to help and encourage workers to improve their skills, particularly amongst the very lowest skilled workers and those with literacy and numeracy problems. That is why we have included a clause in the new Employment Bill that will give statutory backing to Union Learning Representatives. It will reinforce the invaluable role that Union Learning Representatives are currently playing in the workplace to promote workforce development and open up new training opportunities for their colleagues.

Any trade union based in England can submit an application to the Union Learning Fund. A prospectus inviting bids for Union Learning Fund projects for the coming year was sent to trade unions at the end of November. This information is also available electronically via the DfES or TUC Learning Services websites. The closing date for applications is 24 January.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether Union Learning representatives will be made available in job centres; and if he will make a statement. [88833]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: There are around 70 ULRs working in the Department for Work and Pensions. It is not known how many of these are working in Jobcentre Plus.

Vocational Placements

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* Beacon Schools, *(b)* Specialist Schools, *(c)* Centres of Vocational Excellence and *(d)* Education Business Links are involved in the part-time vocational placements announced in the Green Paper "14–19: Extending Opportunities, Raising Standards". [90928]

Mr. Miliband: The Department is in the process of collecting this type of data about the "Increased Flexibility for 14–16 Year Olds" programme —analysis of the baseline will be available in the spring.

SCOTLAND

Boundary Commission for Scotland

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how long after receiving the final report from the Boundary Commission for Scotland she intends to lay *(a)* the report and *(b)* the orders required to implement it before the House. [90404]

Mrs. Liddell: The Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 requires me to lay the Boundary Commission for Scotland's report before Parliament, together with the draft of an Order in Council for giving effect, with or without modifications, to the report's recommendations, as soon as may be after receiving it from the Commission.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many full-time equivalent staff are employed in the Department; and what the equivalent figures were for 1997. [90668]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Cabinet Office.

Electoral Registers

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many electors there are in each Westminster parliamentary constituency in Scotland as set out in the latest electoral registers. [90494]

Mrs. Liddell: The Office for National Statistics is responsible for the collection and annual publication of data on the electorate. I understand that the figures for the electorate as at December 2002 will be published on 27 February 2003.

Friends of Scotland Initiative

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what her estimate is of the cost of the Friends of Scotland initiative; and if she will make a statement. [90376]

Mrs. Liddell: The Friends of Scotland initiative was launched in November 2001. The total cost of the initiative since then, not including staff costs, is £239,000.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the key Public Service Agreement targets of her Department are; what her latest estimate is of progress in relation to each target; and if she will make a statement. [90375]

Mrs. Liddell: The Friends of Scotland initiative was launched in November 2001. The total cost of the initiative since then, not including staff costs, is £239,000.

Public Spending

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what her estimate is of public spending per head from all sources in Scotland in the last year for which figures are available, originating from *(a)* local councils, *(b)* the Devolved Government and *(c)* Central Government. [90006]

Mrs. Liddell: The latest estimates of public expenditure for Scotland were published in the annual Treasury publication, "Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 2002–03". The next edition of this publication is expected in the spring.

Table 6.9 shows local authority expenditure in Scotland for 2000–01 as £8,974 million, equivalent to £1,773 per head of Scotland's population. Table 8.7 shows total identifiable expenditure under Scottish Executive programmes in 2000–01 as £17,557 million, equivalent to £3,468 per head of Scotland's population.

Table 8.7 also shows identifiable expenditure by other Central Government Departments in Scotland in 2000–01 of £10,871 million, equivalent to £2,148 per head of Scotland's population. In addition, there is £40,436 million of non-identifiable expenditure which is not specifically associated with a particular part of the UK.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Chemicals Policy

Sir Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of *(a)* the effect of the European Commission's Strategy for a future chemicals policy on the future competitiveness of the UK's chemical industry and *(b)* the level of UK skilled resource required to implement the strategy; and if she will make a statement. [87022]

Mr. Meacher: The overall aim and approach set out in the Commission's White Paper of February 2001 on a strategy for a Future Chemicals Policy are supported by the Government.

In May 2001, the Government prepared a preliminary regulatory impact assessment (RIA) of the proposals in the European Commission's White Paper. A revised RIA will be required when proposals for the European Commission's legislation are available. As well as considering the benefits and costs of the proposals in detail, the RIA will include an assessment of the implications of the proposed legislation for the international competitiveness of the UK chemicals industry and other manufacturing sectors that use chemicals in their processes and products.

The Government and Devolved Administrations have agreed a position statement on the New European Chemical Strategy, a copy of this is in the House Library and can be found on the Defra web site at www.defra.gov.uk. The result of this additional work will need to be taken into account before developing a final view.

Agricultural Exports

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much *(a)* her Department has spent and *(b)* has been raised through (i) its agricultural export promotion service and (ii) Food from Britain in each of the last 10 years. [87949]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* The information is as follows:

(a) Departmental spend on its agricultural export promotion service[1]

Year	*Spend £000*
2001–02	1,111
2000–01	1,240
1999–2000	1,318
1998–99	1,407
1997–98	1,240
1996–97	1,384
1995–96	1,651

[1] Cash prices. Figures for years prior to 1995/6 not available because of organisational changes.

Note:

The Department has not charged for any aspect of its export promotion service and consequently, no money has been raised through this service.

(b) Departmental grants to Food from Britain and amounts raised by Food from Britain through fee income for specific services provided to companies or organisations 1992–2002[1]

£000

	Departmental grant to FFB	*FFB fee*[1] *income for services provided*
2001–02	7,868	7,787
2000–01	5,402	7,029
1999–2000	4,986	6,406
1998–99	5,282	7,234
1997–98	4,918	6,491
1996–97	5,318	6,177
1995–96	5,400	6,165
1994–95	5,249	4,698
1993–94	5,009	4,026
1992–93	4,757	3,836

[1] Cash prices

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department is taking to promote agricultural exports from small and medium sized businesses in the UK. [87951]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* Defra's Agricultural Exports Branch has a varied programme of export promotion measures, including seminars, inward trade missions and a presence at key trade events abroad, all designed to provide a showcase for British excellence in agriculture. These measures are specifically devised to benefit small and medium sized companies and producers.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations she has received from and discussions she has had with *(a)* the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, *(b)* ERM Consultancy and *(c)* other organisations and individuals regarding the export promotion service for agricultural exports. [87950]

Mr. Morley: My right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment has received a letter from the Minister of State for International Trade and Investment, enclosing a copy of a report undertaken for her by ERM assessing the effectiveness of various central Government Departments international trade support services. ERM's consultants had previously had discussion with DEFRA officials. Ministerial colleagues have also received representations regarding the agricultural export promotion service from the China-Britain Business Council, the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) and two individual companies.

Food from Britain

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when Food From Britain was last subject to a review by *(a)* her Department and *(b)* other Departments; and if she will place a copy of the review in the Library. [87952]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* A full quinquennial review of the efficiency and effectiveness of Food from Britain was completed by the Department (then MAFF) in 1998. A copy of the report has been placed in the Library. In common with other non-departmental public bodies within the responsibilities of the Department, a specific review of Food from Britain's system of corporate governance was undertaken by the Department's internal audit division in 2002. Food from Britain has not been reviewed by other Departments.

Agricultural Shows

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact of livestock movement controls on agricultural shows; and if she will make a statement. [90386]

Mr. Morley: The current rules already allow animals of all species to move to shows even if there is a standstill in place on their farm of origin, to move from show to show or to return to their farm of origin without triggering a 20-day standstill, provided they are individually identified and kept in isolation for 20 days before the first show, between shows, and on final return to the farm.

A detailed risk assessment and cost-benefit analysis into the 20-day standstill is currently being carried out in line with the FMD Inquiry recommendations. We hope to be able to take account of the emerging findings to make decisions soon so that any agreed changes can be introduced in time for the 2003 spring movement season.

Ancient Woodland

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how she intends to implement the proposals to protect England's ancient woodland as set out in *(a)* the Forest Partnership for action and *(b)* Working with the Grain of Nature; a biodiversity strategy for England. [89757]

Mr. Morley: At the World Summit on Sustainable-Development in Johannesburg we launched the UK Forest Partnership for Action bringing together government, forest industry and environmental groups with a commitment to working together to promote sustainable development in the forest sector. Each partner will make their own contribution to the four priority areas, one of which is forest restoration and protection, through a range of actions.

As set out in the biodiversity strategy for England we will be refining our approach to the conservation and restoration of ancient woodland, including research to increase our knowledge of the condition of woodland and practical action on the Forestry Commission's own estate to enhance biodiversity. We will also be revising our package of incentives to ensure they help protect and enhance ancient woodland, developing ways of providing more direct advice to owners, and ways of promoting the high value of ancient woodlands.

One of the main threats to ancient woodland is the impact of adjacent agricultural activity and that is why the new entry-level agri-environment scheme pilots include woodlands. The scheme provides support for the maintenance of woodland fencing and the creation of buffer strips adjacent to woodlands. Both these measures will reduce or avoid any adverse impacts on woodland from adjacent agricultural activities.

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions her Department has had with the Government Departments responsible for provision of emergency telecommunication services about minimising the *(a)* numbers and *(b)* environmental impact of transmitters located in (i) AONBs and (ii) national parks. [90852]

Alun Michael: Defra officials met officials from the Home Office and Department for Trade and Industry in February 2002, and met officials from the Planning Division of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in December 2002. The meetings addressed the level of coverage required by the emergency services against the need to contain the number of telecommunication masts in AONBs and national parks, and to minimise the impact of the installation of essential masts.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much was paid to the Countryside Agency for AONBs in 2002–03, for core costs and projected expenditure, broken down by AONB. [90895]

Alun Michael: For 2002–03, Defra has provided the Countryside Agency with an extra £2.5 million to increase core funding for AONBs and cover the necessary costs incurred by local authorities in preparing and publishing statutory AONB management plans. This has raised the AONB programme budget to £6.2 million. It is for the Agency to allocate monies to individual AONBs. I am advised by the Agency that currently the national figure is only broken down to a regional level. The Agency is moving to resource accounting this year, so that accurate figures by AONB will be available shortly.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what the timetable is for the creation of the first Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Conservation Boards under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000; [90896]

(2) when the secondary legislation necessary for the establishment of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Conservation Boards for the Chilterns and the Cotswolds will be considered by Parliament. [90851]

Alun Michael: Subject to successful completion of the current preparations, we plan to consult on draft statutory instruments establishing Conservation Boards for the Chilterns and the Cotswolds from March to June this year. I would then expect the orders to be laid (in draft form) before both Houses after Parliament returns from the summer recess. The orders would be subject to the affirmative resolution procedure.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to encourage AONBs to become recognised as biosphere reserves by UNESCO; and what support her Department will provide to successful applicants. [90853]

Mr. Morley: Any area considered for nomination as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve will need to fulfil the specific criteria for that designation. AONBs can be a useful supporting mechanism for a Biosphere Reserve as is the case with the recently extended Biosphere Reserve at Braunton Burrows in Devon. An area designated as AONB will not automatically meet the criteria for Biosphere Reserves. It is for the UK Man and Biosphere (UK MAB) Committee to consider applications for Biosphere Reserve status. The Committee will shortly be considering the next steps following the review of UK Biosphere Reserves. The Government will consider any proposal put forward by the UK MAB Committee on its individual merits for submission to UNESCO.

There is no funding programme specifically for Biosphere Reserves, but Biosphere Reserve status has the potential to provide an area with a framework for attracting relevant funding streams such as LEADER + and stimulating investment. The Government support AONBs generally in England through the AONB programme, which in 2003–04, will receive grants worth more than £6 million. The Countryside Agency, who administers this funding on behalf of Government, pays up to 75 per cent. of an AONBs core costs and 50 per cent. of its project costs.

British Cattle Movement Service

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many inquiries regarding lost documentation at the British Cattle Movement Service are under investigation. [90400]

Alun Michael: The British Cattle Movement Service operates to ISO 9001:2000 standards, is registered with the British Standards Institute and its operating practices have received the Kite mark. All documents received by the organisation are scanned electronically and recorded on arrival, and great care is taken to avoid any loss.

It is likely that this question refers specifically to movement notifications made by cattle keepers to the British Cattle Movement Service. BCMS has received around 22,000 representations about movement notification failures since May this year from around England, Scotland and Wales. Some cattle keepers have claimed to have told the BCMS about cattle movements, when their computerised records have been cross checked and deficiencies found, as part of the subsidy claims checking process. The Rural Payments Agency and the BCMS check these cases very carefully, and it is not right to assume that the BCMS has lost keepers' movement notification when there is no evidence of the document ever arriving at the BCMS site.

If keepers want to guarantee that their notifications are received by BCMS, they can send them electronically to BCMS using the online system at: www.bcms.gov.uk The BCMS are encouraging all cattle keepers to register their records via the cattle tracing system online.

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps are being taken to improve administrative *(a)* accuracy and *(b)* efficiency at the British Cattle Movement Service. [90399]

Alun Michael: The cattle passport scheme has been in operation for over six years now and the national cattle database contains the details of the 9.4 million animals that make up the national herd. We are currently investing a further £12 million to upgrade the system and improve its performance.

The British Cattle Movement Service operates to ISO 9001:2000 standards, is registered with the British Standards Institute and its operating practices have received the Kite mark. In addition to paper reporting systems, we have provided online facilities via a website for cattle keepers to register their animals. CTS Online was runner-up in the Government Computer Innovation Award in June 2002. The BCMS is constantly striving to improve their service and efficiency.

Cetacean Bycatch

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment has been made of the trials into the use of exclusion devices developed by the Sea Mammal Research Unit to reduce the bycatch of cetaceans in pelagic trawl fisheries. [90777]

Mr. Morley: During March and April last year the Sea Mammal Research Unit at St. Andrews University made encouraging progress in developing and testing separator grids during their monitoring work on the seasonal bass fishery off South West England. Some further work was carried out in December 2002 to refine the gear but planned trials at sea could not take place because of an accident involving one of the vessels chartered for the trial. The trial will now be resumed in spring once the commercial fishery restarts in order to further refine the system and assess its suitability for protecting dolphins in the fishery.

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the deaths of dolphins in Devon and Cornwall in December 2002; and if she will make a statement. [90779]

Mr. Morley: Full figures detailing the deaths of dolphins and other cetaceans in Devon and Cornwall in December 2002 are not yet available and so an assessment has not yet been made.

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what discussions she has had with other European Governments regarding cetacean bycatch; [90780]

(2) what recent discussions she has had with the European Commission on the issue of dolphins and other cetaceans being trapped in fishing nets. [90778]

Mr. Morley: I have written to Commissioner Fischler and to the French Minister pressing the need for action in this area and will continue to press the issue with EU Ministers. The Commission produced a draft discussion paper on these issues last year as part of its commitment under the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy to introduce measures to reduce cetacean bycatch. It is now for the Commission to bring forward concrete proposals, and when these come to the Council of Ministers for discussion I shall press for effective measures to be introduced.

CHP Strategy

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she plans to publish the final version of her Department's draft CHP Strategy. [90350]

Mr. Morley: The Government published its draft CHP Strategy for consideration on 15 May 2002. Responses to the Strategy consultation were summarised on Defra's website last November, and provide an important input to the Energy White Paper, which the Government aim to publish shortly. The White Paper will set out the Government's strategic approach to encouraging the further growth of CHP.

Christmas Expenses

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many departmental Christmas cards she and her Ministers intend to send in 2002; how much these cards will cost *(a)* to buy, *(b)* to post and *(c)* in staff time to sign, address and place in envelopes; and if she will place in the Library a sample copy of the official Christmas card she has sent this year. [88114]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* Defra Ministers sent approximately 800 official Christmas cards in 2002, at a cost of £0.65 each, and total postage of £160. Clerical staff in Ministers' Private Offices spent the equivalent of approximately 22 man hours, at a cost of £10 per hour, addressing and placing the cards in envelopes. A sample copy of the official Christmas card will be placed in the Library.

All expenditure incurred in the purchase and despatch of official Christmas cards is made in accordance with the departmental guidance on financial procedures and propriety, based on the principles set out in "Government Accounting".

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much will be spent on *(a)* entertaining, *(b)* Christmas decorations and *(c)* other festive activities this Christmas season by her Department and Government agencies answerable to her Department; and of this sum, how much will be spent in Ministers' (i) private offices and (ii) official residences. [88129]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* The information requested could not be provided without incurring disproportionate costs. However, any expenditure incurred on decorations, entertainment and any other festive activities is strictly for official purposes only, and is made in accordance with the departmental guidance on financial procedures and propriety, based on the principals set out in "Government Accounting".

Common Fisheries Policy

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will review the Common Fisheries Policy with the EU; and whether conditionality on UK registered vessels to *(a)* land a percentage of catch in the UK, *(b)* have a minimum percentage of UK residents in the crew and *(c)* operate from UK ports will be part of the review. [90616]

Mr. Morley: Since 1 January 1999, and with the agreement of the European Commission, all vessels fishing against UK quotas have had to maintain a genuine economic link with coastal communities in the UK. Annual reports on the operation of these arrangements have been placed in the Library of the House, the last report covering the year 2001. We have no plans to seek a review of these arrangements.

Community Energy Programme

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the budget is for the Government's Community Energy programme in the financial year *(a)* 2002–03 and *(b)* 2003–04; what proportion of the funds available in each year have been committed to strategic research designed to secure the wider use of district energy schemes; what proportion of the funds in each year are absorbed by the administration of the programme by

the Energy Saving Trust; and what plans there are for continuation of the programme beyond March 2004. [90351]

Mr. Morley: The Community Energy programme budget is £20 million in 2002–03 and £30 million in 2003–04. Up to £2 million of this is available for consultancy advice to develop bids. Support for strategic research to secure the wider use of district energy is funded and carried out separately, but informs the programme. The cost of the programme's administration by the Energy Saving Trust and the Carbon Trust is not met from the programme budget, but is separately funded by my Department. I hope that it will be possible to extend the programme beyond March 2004, but this is subject to resources being available.

Countryside and Rights of Way Act

Andrew Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will set out the timetable for the implementation of regulations under Part I of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. [91136]

Alun Michael: The table records the overall progress we have made towards consulting on, and bringing regulations into force, and our current timetable for completing the process. The precise timing of each of the remaining intermediate stages may vary but we are firmly committed to ensuring the necessary regulations are made so as to allow the new right of public access under the Act to be rolled out on a region by region basis as scheduled.

Regulation	*Section*	*Consultation commenced*	*Date regulations in force*
Regulations regarding mapping of access land and consultation on draft maps	Section 11	March 2001 (ended June 2001)	1 November 2001
Regulations regarding the establishment of LAFs and the appointment of members	Section 94 (Part V)	July 2001 (ended October 2001)	7 August 2002
Regulations regarding issue of provisional maps, appeals, and issue of conclusive maps	Section 11	November 2001 (ended 8 Feb 2002)	29 July 2002
Regulations on correcting minor errors and omissions in provisional and conclusive maps	Section 11 (2)*(l)*	October 2002 (ended 7 November 2002)	February 2003
Regulations regarding dedication of land for access	Section 16	January 2002 (ended 15 April 2002)	March 2003
Regulations relating to exclusion or restriction of access under Chapter II, including appeals (but not emergencies)	Section 32	December 2001 (ended 22 March 2002)	February 2003
Regulations on removal or relaxation of restrictions on access land and to exclude access in emergencies (including appeals)	Paragraph 7, Schedule 2; Section 31	February 2003	August 2003
Regulations on appeals relating to notices	Section 38	February 2003	September 2003
Regulations on references to public places in existing enactments	Section 42	March 2003	October 2003
Regulations regarding review of conclusive maps	Section 11	February 2004	August 2004

European Landscape Convention

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether the Government intend to ratify the European Landscape Convention adopted by the Council of Europe in October 2000. [90854]

Alun Michael: The United Kingdom already meets many of the requirements of the European Landscape Convention and Defra has commissioned consultants to report on the costs and benefits of the UK deciding whether or not to sign and ratify the European Landscape Convention. That report, together with a Regulatory Impact Assessment, will inform the Government's decision which will be taken in the next few months.

Fishing Licences

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what plans she has to review the operation of UK fishing licences; [90645]

(2) how many UK fishing licences have been purchased by foreign owners operating from within the EU in each year since 1997; [90646]

(3) what recent reports she has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the purchase of UK fishing licences by foreign owners operating from EU member states; [90647]

(4) what estimate she has made of the proportion of boats over 10 metres in length in the UK offshore fishing fleet whose fishing licence is held by a non-UK resident EU national. [90649]

Mr. Morley: The operation of UK fishing vessel licences is kept under constant review, in consultation with the industry, through the Joint Industry/ Departmental Licensing Working Group which meets regularly and last reported to Ministers in November 2002. In accordance with EU rules on freedom of movement and rights of establishment, EU nationals and corporate bodies incorporated in a member state may own and license vessels on the UK fishing vessel register provided that they are resident in the UK or have a place of business in the UK respectively or alternatively that they appoint a representative person in the UK. All vessels so owned must be managed, and their operations directed and controlled, from within the UK. They must also maintain an economic link with the UK. Reports on economic link compliance are

published annually by Fisheries Departments and copies are available from the Library. Details of the number of licences acquired annually by foreign owners operating from within the EU are not recorded centrally by Fisheries Departments. However the reports on compliance include estimates since 1996 of the numbers of vessels which are understood to be beneficially owned in whole or in part by foreign interests. At 31 December 2001 there were 118 such vessels out of a registered over 10 metre fleet of 1,942 vessels, compared with 161 vessels out of a fleet of 2,467 vessels at 31 December 1996. There are currently nine vessels on the UK register whose licences are held by EU nationals not resident in, or companies not with a place of business in, the UK.

Flood Defence

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the grant levels for flood defence throughout England are in *(a)* 2001–02, *(b)* 2002–03 and *(c)* 2003–04. [91171]

Mr. Morley: Defra provides grant aid as a percentage of eligible costs to the flood and coastal defence operating authorities—the Environment Agency (EA), local authorities and internal drainage boards—to assist with capital works and studies to manage flood risk. Grant is also made to the EA to assist towards the cost of national initiatives (such as the national flood and coastal defence database, flood warning public awareness and catchment flood management plans) and in 2001–02 exceptional funding was provided to the EA following the floods of autumn 2000 for emergency response and repair works and feasibility and design costs for accelerated river defences.

2001–02 and 2002–03

Amounts of grant in cash terms were as follows.

	2001–02		*2002–03*	
	Grant rate (percentage)	*Grant (£ million)*	*Grant rate (percentage)*	*Grant (£ million)* [1]
Environment Agency capital grant	[2]—	42.3	[2]—	65.0
Environment Agency national initiatives and special funding after 2000 floods	n/a	19.2	n/a	5.0
Local authorities	45	2.2	45	6.0
Internal drainage boards	45	1.5	45	2.0

[1] Current provision, subject to change.

[2] Capital grant to the EA is limited by Grant Earning Ceilings (GECs) which are set annually for each EA flood defence committee and represent the maximum amount of expenditure on which Defra will pay grant in the year to which they apply. Each committee is also set a grant rate annually at levels which are designed to provide extra support in those parts of the country where needs are higher, as compared to local resources. The following table shows EA GECs and grant rates for the two years.

	2001–02		*2002–03*	
	GEC (£ million)	*Rate (percentage)*	*GEC (£ million)*	*Rate (percentage)*
North west	7.8	35	9.1	45
Northumbria	2.0	35	3.7	45
Severn Trent	10.3	35	14.0	45
Yorkshire	13.8	65	22.1	65
Anglia, Essex	2.2	45	2.9	45
Anglia, Great Ouse	5.3	45	3.7	55
Anglia, Lincolnshire	8.6	75	7.7	75
Anglia, Norfolk and Suffolk	5.7	76	10.1	75
Anglia, Welland and Nene	3.6	65	3.6	65
Thames	13.1	35	4.4	35
Southern, Hampshire and Isle of Wight	1.1	45	1.2	45
Southern, Kent	2.2	55	8.5	65
Southern, Sussex	4.6	65	9.6	65
Wessex, Avon and Dorset	0.4	35	1.0	35
Wessex, Bristol Avon	0.3	35	0.4	35
Wessex, Somerset	3.2	65	5.1	75
South West	3.4	45	5.2	65

2003–04

Allocations between operating authorities (including EA GECs and grant rates) for 2003–04 are still being considered.

Flooding

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her estimate is of how many homes flooded *(a)* in January and *(b)* in the previous three major floods. [90214]

Mr. Morley: I am advised that 645 houses were flooded during the floods over the New Year holiday. As for previous events, it depends on what the hon. Member defines as a major flood. Floods occur most winters although property flooding is generally avoided. Obviously we are all aware of the autumn 2000 event in which more than 10,000 homes were affected. In addition the 1998 flood remains in most people's memory and in that event more than 4,200 homes were flooded. Prior to that, probably the most notable was the flood event which occurred in September 1968 when large areas of the south west and southern England

including south and south east London were flooded. We do not have detailed information on the number of properties that were flooded.

Foot and Mouth

Sir Archy Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will pay invoices submitted to her Department by Peter Boddy Ltd. in connection with the slaughter of animals at Skipton, Thirsk and Whitby during the foot and mouth outbreak. [88501]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 7 January 2003]:* Valid invoices submitted to the Department by Peter Boddy Ltd. in connection with the slaughter of animals during the foot and mouth outbreak have been paid. A legally binding full and final settlement agreement was made between the Department and Peter Boddy Ltd on 20 August, 2002.

Sir Archy Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will *(a)* authorise interest to be paid on the outstanding sums in the invoices rendered by Peter Boddy Ltd. and *(b)* make an ex-gratia payment to Peter Boddy Ltd. and his sub-contractor Mr.Houldey for the costs incurred in trying to obtain payment for her work during the foot and mouth outbreak. [88503]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 7 January 2003]:* A legally binding full and final settlement agreement was made between the Department and Peter Boddy Ltd. on 20 August 2002. No moneys are owed by the Department to Peter Boddy Ltd. and Mr. Houldey. The Department wrote to Peter Boddy Ltd. on 3 December 2002 confirming no further payments would be made and that any question of Mr. Houldey's accounts were and remain a matter between Mr. Houldey and Peter Boddy Ltd.

GM Organisms

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the separation distances are between GM and non-GM or organic oilseed rape in North America. [86975]

Mr. Meacher: The Canadian and US authorities do not require separation distances to be applied for commercial GM oilseed rape crops, but do require them for field trials. They distinguish between Brassica napus (which they call Argentine rape canola or swede rape) and Brassica rapa (which they call Polish rape canola or turnip rape). They do not differentiate separation distances based on whether the neighbouring crop is non-GM (conventional) or organic. In the UK the vast majority of the oilseed rape grown is Brassica napus, although some Brassica rapa is also grown. Cross-pollination frequency between B. napus and B. rapa is less than between plants of the same species. The separation distances in North America are as follows:

Separation distances for GM rapeseed trials in North America

	Brassica napus	*Brassica rapa*
Canada	200 metres from Brassica species or a 10 metre guard row of B. napus	400 metres from other B. rapa and 200 metres from other Brassica species, or a 100 metre guard row of B. rapa flowering concurrently with the GM rape
USA	660 feet (201 metres) or a 30 foot (9.2 metre) border of non-GM rape flowering concurrently with the GM rape	1,320 feet (403 metres) or a 30 foot (9.2 metre) border of non-GM rape flowering concurrently with the GM rape

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to her answer of 7 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 549W, on GM organisms, when she expects to conclude her consideration of the European Commission's proposals on thresholds for the adventitious presence of approved GM seeds in non-GM seeds. [88007]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* Since my reply of 7 November, it has become necessary to consider the implications of the settlement reached at the November Agriculture Council for a 0.9 per cent. threshold for GM food and feed labelling and we still await sight of the European Commission's final proposals on seeds on which member states will be asked to vote.

The Government's considerations are informed by the need for policy to be based on sound science and to be practicable and enforceable. We aim to preserve consumer choice by seeking adequate protection for the integrity of non-GM seeds.

Industrial Action

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many working days have been lost in her Department and its predecessors due to industrial action in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000, *(d)* 2000–01, *(e)* 2001–02 and *(f)* 2002–03. [90245]

Alun Michael: During 2001–02 16,201 days were lost owing to industrial action by members of staff in the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and its Agencies.

During 2002–03 to date 205 days were lost owing to industrial action by staff at the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS) who are members of the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) and Prospect unions.

During 1997–98, 1998–99, 1999–2000, and 2000–01, neither the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and food and its Agencies nor the sections of ex-DETR now part of Defra and their Agencies, lost any working days through industrial action by staff.

Liability Legislation

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what position Her Majesty's Government took at the last Agriculture Council in Luxembourg on proposals for specific liability legislation for GMOs; and if she will make a statement. [86173]

Mr. Meacher: The Agriculture Council has not discussed specific proposals for GMO liability legislation. The Environment Council is at an early stage in its consideration of a draft environmental liability Directive that covers various activities including the release of GMOs.

Nitrate Vulnerable Zones

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many farms fall in nitrate vulnerable zones. [90727]

Mr. Morley: The total number of major farm holdings located in a Nitrate Vulnerable Zone (NVZ) in England is around 71,500. This figure is based upon Agricultural Census data 2000.

River Management

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans there are to divert water from the River Frome into the River Stour; if the consequences of flood risk will be taken account of in such plans; and if she will make a statement. [90463]

Mr. Morley: Neither the Government nor the Environment Agency are aware of any plans to divert water from the Dorset Frome to the River Stour. While a number of such schemes involving other rivers have been considered in the past there are no plans relating to the Frome and Stour.

If such a scheme were to be proposed then the Environment Agency would consider all the impacts of the scheme on flooding and the environment.

Slaughter Premiums

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the implications for Government policy on the payment of slaughter premium of the arbitration decision in the case of Feakins v Defra. [89013]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 7 January 2003]*: There are no implications. The arbitration award included no payment of slaughter premium. The Government have made it clear that slaughter premium is not payable in respect of FMD culled cattle because the scheme criteria were not met, and that no adjustment is needed to compensation based on market value.

Statutory Instruments

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many Statutory Instruments subject to negative procedure made by her Department *(a)* came into force and *(b)* were considered by a delegated legislation committee in each of the last three sessions. [88026]

Alun Michael: Defra was created in June 2001. During the 2001–02 Session, 141 Statutory Instruments subject to negative resolution procedure came into force. Of these, 12 were considered by a delegated legislation committee.

Tallow

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which companies her Department has contracts with for the incineration of tallow produced under the over-thirty-months scheme; and when those contracts were *(a)* agreed and *(b)* signed. [90844]

Alun Michael: 9 companies have been awarded contracts for the incineration of tallow arisings produced under the Over Thirty Month Scheme. The companies and dates of contracts awarded are as follows:

Company	*Date*
Gilberts Animal Feed (now John Pointon & Sons)	17 December 1996
Prosper De Mulder	6 February 1997
J. G. Pears	12 February 1997
Dundas Brothers	9 May 1997
Lisburn Proteins	5 July 1997
Canterbury Mills	5 January 1998
William Forrest & Son	5 January 1998
Dundas Chemical Company	5 December 2000
Ulster Farm by Products	25 November 2002

WORK AND PENSIONS

Stakeholder Pensions

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 26 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 212W, which companies were registered as stakeholder pension providers on 6 April 2001; and whether any of these have stopped offering stakeholder pensions direct to individuals since then. [88221]

Mr. McCartney *[pursuant to his answers, 7 January 2003, Official Report, c. 172–74W and 13 January 2003, Official Report, c. 366–68W]*: The information available is in the table.

Companies registered as stakeholder pension providers on 6 April 2001[1]	*Address*	*Have since 6 April 2001 notified that they have stopped offering stakeholder pensions direct to individuals*[2]
Abbey National Life Plc	Abbey National House, 287 Vincent Street, Glasgow	
Allied Dunbar Assurance Plc	UK Life Centre, Station Road, Swindon	
AXA Sun Life Plc	AXA Centre, PO Box 1810, Bristol	

Companies registered as stakeholder pension providers on 6 April 2001[1]	*Address*	*Have since 6 April 2001 notified that they have stopped offering stakeholder pensions direct to individuals*[2]
St Andrew's Life Assurance Plc	PO Box 10,Walton Street, Aylesbury	De-registered[3] as a stakeholder pension scheme August 2002 following parent company's (Bank of Scotland) merger with the Halifax
B&CE Insurance Ltd	Manor Royal, Crawley	
Brittanic Assurance Plc	1 Wythall Green Way, Wythall, Birmingham	
Canada Life Ltd	Canada Life Place, Potters Bar	De-registered as a stakeholder pension scheme December 2002
Chamber Pensions Ltd	Manning House, 22 Carlisle Place, London	Stopped[4] July 2001
Co-operative Insurance Society	Miller Street, Manchester	
Clerical Medical Investment Group	Narrow Plain, Bristol	
Deutsche Asset Management Life and Pensions Ltd	One Appold Street, London	
Eagle Star Life Assurance Company Ltd	UK Life Tower, Montpellier Drive, Cheltenham, Gloucester	
Friends Provident Life and Pensions Ltd[5]	Pixham End, Dorking, Surrey	
Halifax Life Ltd	Trinity Road, Halifax, West Yorkshire	
HSBC Life (UK) Ltd	Norwich House, Nelson Gate, Commercial Road, Southampton	
INVESCO Pensions Ltd	INVESCO Park, INVESCO Park Drive, Henley on Thames	
Legal and General Assurance Society Ltd	Temple Court, 11 Queen Victoria Street, London	
Marks and Spencer Life Assurance Ltd	Kings Meadow, Chester	
Merrill Lynch Pensions Ltd	33 King William Street, London	
Nationwide Unit Trust Managers Ltd	Nationwide House, Pipers Way, Swindon	
National Westminster Life Assurance Ltd	PO Box 886, Trinity Quay, Avon Street, Bristol	
National Farmers Union Mutual Insurance Society Ltd	Tiddington Road, Stratford-upon-Avon	
CGNU Life Assurance Ltd	2 Rougier Street, York	
NPI Ltd	Box 89, 55 Calverley Road, Tunbridge Wells	
Pearl Assurance (Unit Linked Pensions) Ltd	Box 89, 55 Calverley Road, Tunbridge Wells	
Police Mutual Assurance Society Ltd	Alexandra House, Queen Street, Lichfield	
The Prudential Assurance Company Ltd	Abbey Gardens, 55 Kings Road, Reading	
Royal and Sun Alliance Life and Pensions Ltd	St. Marks Court, Chart Way, Horsham	
Royal Liver Assurance Ltd	Royal Liver Building, Pier Head, Liverpool	
The Royal London Mutual Insurance Society Ltd	Royal London House, Middleborough, Colchester	
Royal Scottish Assurance Plc	42 St. Andrew Square, Edinburgh	
Schroder Pensions Ltd	31 Gresham Street, London	
Scottish Amicable Life Plc	PO Box 25, Craigforth, Stirling	
Scottish Equitable Plc	Edinburgh Park, Edinburgh	
The Royal London Mutual Insurance Society Ltd	Royal London House, Middleborough, Colchester	
Scottish Mutual Assurance Plc	Abbey National House, 301 Vincent Street, Glasgow	
Scottish Widows Plc	69 Morrison Street, Edinburgh	
FPS Stakeholder Trustee Limited	Castle House, Park Road, Banstead	
The Standard Life Assurance Company	Standard Life House, 30 Lothian Road, Edinburgh	
Teachers Provident Society Ltd	Deansleigh Road, Bournemouth	
TUC Stakeholder Trustees Ltd	Congress House, Great Russell Street, London	
Virgin Money Unit Trust Managers Ltd	Discovery House, Whiting Road, Norwich	
Wesleyan Assurance Society	Colmore Circus, Birmingham	
Winterthur Life UK Ltd	Winterthur Way, Basingstoke	

[1] Information from The Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority's (Opra) register of stakeholder pension schemes.

[2] While registered stakeholder pension providers are required to inform Opra of any restrictions they impose on membership to their scheme, they do not have to inform the Authority of any changes to their marketing or publicity strategies.

[3] 'De-registered' effectively means leaving the stakeholder pensions market altogether.

[4] 'Stopped' means the provider does not accept business from individuals, but does offer stakeholder pensions to group clients.

[5] The Friends Provident Stakeholder Pensions Scheme closed to both new group and individual business in January 2002, while remaining open to accept contributions from existing members. However, Friends Provident's other stakeholder pension scheme, Friends Provident Pensions Limited Stakeholder Pension Scheme, continues to sell stakeholder pensions to both groups and individuals.

Note:

James Hay Trustees Ltd is not included in the table above because it did not register until after 6 April 2001 (registered March 2002 and de-registered August 2002).

Child Poverty

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what discussions he has had with other Ministers to ensure that no Government strategy impacts adversely on child poverty. [88542]

Malcolm Wicks: The Government is committed to building a fairer and more inclusive society in which everyone can contribute to, and share in, rising national prosperity. 'Opportunity for all—(the) fourth annual report' is the latest in a series that comprehensively describes the Government's strategy and progress in tackling poverty and social exclusion.

The Government has set itself an ambitious target to eradicate child poverty within a generation.

Ministers regularly meet with ministerial colleagues to discuss issues related to the alleviation of child poverty. They attend the Ministerial Group on Children and Young People (MISC9) and the Joint Ministerial Committee on Poverty, both of which address child poverty issues.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what differences there are in the treatment of *(a)* endowment mortgage savings and *(b)* ISA mortgage savings in assessing savings in each relevant means tested benefit, including council tax benefit with savings thresholds and disregards; and whether this issue is under review. [89104]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 9 January 2003]:* Unlike an ISA mortgage savings scheme, an endowment mortgage also provides life insurance cover. It is a long-standing principle that the surrender value of any life insurance policy should be disregarded when determining entitlement to the income- related benefits, including Council Tax Benefit. This is because the intended beneficiaries of life insurance policies, are not the policy-holders themselves, but any dependants they may have at the time of their death. Because a life insurance policy is an integral part of an endowment mortgage, the overall surrender value is disregarded in the same way. However, if a life insurance policy is surrendered early or linked endowment mortgage savings are redeemed, any resulting capital is taken into account in the normal way.

Because ISA mortgage savings schemes do not provide life insurance cover any savings held are taken into account as capital from the outset when determining entitlement to the income-related benefits, including Council Tax Benefit.

We keep all our policies under review. However, we have no plans to change the present rules in this area.

Benefits Budget

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the benefits budget is for this financial year, broken down by English region. [87002]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 12 December 2002]:* The Department does not forecast nor budget for expenditure on a regional basis. However, using the regional distribution of benefit expenditure for the previous two years, where available, an illustrative regional breakdown of benefit spending for 2002–03 is given in the table.

	£ billion
Region	
North East	5.6
North West	14.2
Yorkshire and the Humber	9.4
East Midlands	7.3
West Midlands	9.9
Eastern	8.8
London	13.2
South East	12.5
South West	8.7
Total England	89.6

Source:
Pre-Budget Report forecasts for 2002–03, combined with statistical and accounting data for 2000–01 and 2001–02. Figures may not sum due to rounding.

Information is not available by Government Office Region for some benefits, the main ones being Statutory Maternity Pay, Social Fund and the Independent Living Funds. These are not included in the table. The amount of expenditure on benefits where no information is available is forecast to be £1.6 billion in 2002–03 for Great Britain as a whole (equating to 1.5 per cent. of benefit spending).

Bereavement Allowance

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the time limit is for claiming Bereavement *(a)* Allowance and *(b)* Payment; what powers exist to extend the limit in individual cases; and in what circumstances these powers are used. [88470]

Malcolm Wicks: We want bereaved people to claim and receive the help that they and their families are entitled to when they need it—immediately after the bereavement. Most people do: more than four-fifths claim within four or five weeks of their loss.

Entitlement to Bereavement Allowance lasts for 52 weeks after the death of a spouse. If the claim for Bereavement Allowance is made within three months of the death, the benefit will be paid for the full 52 weeks. Where a claim is made more than three months after the death occurred, benefit is paid from the date of claim for the balance of the 52-week period.

There are no powers to extend the three-month time limit for claims for the full 52 weeks benefit. However, there are special rules for cases in which a death is not confirmed until some time after it has occurred, for example, following a disappearance.

Bereavement Payment, a one-off lump sum, must currently be claimed within three months of the death of a spouse. However, we laid amending regulations on 24 October 2002, which extend the time limit within which the lump sum Bereavement Payment may be claimed to 12 months in respect of deaths that occur on or after 1 April 2003. This aligns it with the period for which Bereavement Allowance can be paid. We believe this is a sensible alteration that will simplify the scheme for everyone, while remaining compatible with underlying benefit entitlement rules.

Child Support Agency

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he expects the computerisation of the Child Support Agency to be completed. [90648]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer my hon. Friend to the written answer I gave the hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Duncan) on 27 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 317W.

Final Salary Pension Schemes

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what action he is taking to encourage companies to retain final salary pension schemes for existing employees and to make them available to new employees. [89051]

Mr. McCartney: I refer my hon. Friend to my written answer of 13 January 2003, *Official Report*, volume 397, columns 361–62W.

Pensioners

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the role of means-testing in providing provision for pensioners. [89776]

Mr. McCartney: The purpose of the minimum income guarantee is to ensure that no pensioner need live on less than £98.15 a week—£149.80 for couples (from April 2003, £102.10 a week for single pensioners and £155.80 for couples). In addition, the pension credit when it is introduced in October 2003, is intended to reward rather than penalise those people who have modest amounts of second pension or other savings.

Maxwell Communications Pension Plan

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what discussions he has had with the Consultative Committee of the Maxwell Communications Pension Plan; and if he will make a statement on the proposed reduction in benefits payable to pensioners under the plan. [88980]

Mr. McCartney: The Government is aware of the difficulties surrounding the Maxwell Communications Pension Plan and sympathises with those affected.

We have had discussions with the Independent Trustee of the Plan, The Law Debenture Trust Corporation plc. but have received no request to meet the Consultative Committee of the Maxwell Communication Pension Plan.

The difficulties faced by the Plan are not connected to Maxwell's original fraud but reflect the subsequent performance of the pension fund in relation to the scheme's liabilities. As we have made clear to Law Debenture, this is an issue for the trustees, not the Government.

We have set out the facts of the case in full in our response to representations received on this matter and I have placed a copy of that response in the Library.

State Second Pension

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what is the weekly value of the state second pension in 2050 in the case illustrated in Figure 7.5 of the pensions Green Paper (Cm 5677); what it would have been under SERPS *(a)* as amended prior to April 2002 and *(b)* if the 20 best years provision had not been repealed; and what are the assumed earnings of the woman concerned. [89646]

Mr. McCartney: The weekly value of the state second pension in the particular case illustrated is £67. The weekly value of SERPS as amended prior to April 2002 is £33. If the 20 best years provision had not been repealed, the weekly value of SERPS would have been £87.

It is assumed that the woman in question earns the average female full-time weekly wage when working full time (£383) and the average female part-time weekly wage when working part time (£144). She is assumed to work for 30 years, 17 of which are full-time.

The reason that the 20 best years provision in SERPS generates a higher pension than state second pension is that an example of someone with substantial full-time work at average earnings is used. State second pension has been designed to benefit lower earners and part-time workers who would generally receive far less from the 20 best years rule than from state second pension.

TREASURY

Small Suppliers (Video)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the cost of preparation and distribution of the Office of Government Commerce's video "Smaller Supplier...Better value?" was; how many were produced in each format; and how many have been distributed. [89593]

Mr. Boateng: The "Smaller Supplier ... Better Value?" video was launched in November 2002, following a commitment to the Public Accounts Committee at the Improving Public Services through e-Government hearing held on 13 May 2002. The preparation costs were shared equally between the Office of Government Commerce (OGC) and the Small Business Service (SBS).

To reduce the postage and packaging costs this video was sent to some organisations as part of a larger mailing, sent in bulk for others to distribute using their existing networks and some were distributed at no cost. As these distribution costs are not held centrally this information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Cigarettes

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to the answer of 16 December 2002, *Official Report*, columns 587–88W, on cigarettes, what method of calculation was used; and if he will place the calculations in the Library. [90313]

John Healey: The allowance made in the pre-Budget report public finance forecast is based on assumptions about changes to cross-border shopping behaviour following the October launch of the next stage of the Government's long-term strategy to tackle tobacco smuggling.

The assumptions focus on effects that can be quantified with a degree of certainty. EU shoppers have always been allowed to bring back as much tobacco as they like, as long it is for their own use, and the revisions to the tobacco indicative levels as part of the October package do not affect that entitlement. Data from Customs and Excise's survey of cross-Channel travellers show that the majority of travellers made no purchases of cigarettes, and that, of those who did make purchases, two thirds purchased below the previous indicative level of 800 cigarettes, and that a further 15 per cent. purchased above. The recent change to the levels can be expected to have little effect on the shopping patterns of these travellers.

The assumptions for the public finance forecasts relate to the impact on behaviour of those remaining travellers purchasing at the previous indicative levels for tobacco. Those assumptions include:

that a small proportion of travellers may be expected to increase their purchases to the new level; and

that the average level of other purchases would increase to 1,600 cigarettes, a three-month supply for an average smoker, taking into account the affordability and profitability of trips.

Devolved Administration Finance

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what funds will be transferred from the Treasury to the *(a)* Scottish Parliament, *(b)* Welsh Assembly and *(c)* Greater London Assembly in the next financial year. [91327]

Mr. Boateng: Figures for the grants paid to the Scottish consolidated fund and the NAW in 2003–04 will be published in the 2003–04 main supply estimates for the Scotland Office and the Wales Office in due course.

The 2003–04 figure for GLA funding is not yet available. GLA funding comes from a range of sources and is not a single grant as in the case of Scotland and Wales. A large percentage of GLA funding comes from the local government revenue support grant, and the police grant. The Home Secretary and the Minister for Local Government announced a consultation on proposals for these amounts to the House on the 5 December. Further funding to the GLA comes through the GLA transport grant.

Drugs

Pete Wishart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many drugs seizures, broken down by type of drug, have HM Customs in Scotland made by *(a)* financial value and *(b)* weight in each of the last five years. [90611]

John Healey: Details of Customs' drug seizures are published in their annual reports, copies of which are available in the House of Commons Library. Drugs seized by Customs are destined for all parts of the UK, and there is little direct importation of class A drugs into Scotland. For this reason it is not policy to break down seizure information to the constituent parts of the UK.

Employment Costs

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the employment costs are, including benefits, of *(a)* Ministers representing the Office of Government Commerce and *(b)* special advisers and their supporting staff retained by the Office of Government Commerce. [90562]

Mr. Boateng: Treasury Ministers and special advisers spend a proportion of their time on OGC business. Their employment costs are borne by the Treasury.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what amounts were claimed by companies under the Enhanced Capital Allowances scheme for each qualifying energy efficiency technology and product type in the last year for which figures are available. [90802]

Dawn Primarolo: The information requested is not yet available.

Government Contracts

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list government contracts, including those with SMEs, and PFI and PPP contracts, where there has been an identified cost saving greater than 5 per cent. as a result of the services provided by the Office of Government Commerce. [90567]

Mr. Boateng: Information on cost savings in individual Departmental contracts is not held centrally. The total value for money gains in Government procurement reported by central civil government bodies for the years 2000–01 and 2001–02 is £815 million.

Greater London Authority

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has had with the Mayor of London on the GLA proposed budget for 2003–04. [91338]

Mr. Boateng: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by the Chancellor on 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 114–15W.

Hypothecation

Norman Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his policy is on the use of hypothecation to improve environmental performance. [91535]

John Healey: The Government considers on a case by case basis whether the revenues from individual environmental taxes should be targeted at complementary spending measures.

The Government published alongside the recent pre-Budget report its paper "Tax and the Environment—using economic instruments", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. This provides further guidance on how the Government considers the case for revenue recycling of environmental taxes

North Sea Oil

Norman Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much has been received in oil revenues from extraction of oil from the UK section of the North Sea in each year from 1974 in *(a)* gross and *(b)* net terms, allowing for grants and other payments to the oil industry. [90788]

Dawn Primarolo: Government revenues from UK oil and gas production are given in the table. Separate figures for just oil are not available.

£ million

					Corporation tax (CT) Of which:			
Financial year	*Licence fees*[1]	*Royalty*	*SPD*[2]	*PRT*[3]	*Total before ACT set-off*[4]	*ACT set-off*[5]	*Mainstream CT*[6]	*Total revenues*
1974–75	4	15	—	—	5	—	5	24
1975–76	2	20	—	—	5	—	5	27
1976–77	5	71	—	—	10	—	10	86
1977–78	7	228	—	—	10	—	10	245
1978–79	9	289	—	183	93	40	53	574
1979–80	10	628	—	1,435	250	78	172	2,323
1980–81	220	992	—	2,410	341	97	244	3,963
1981–82	14	1,396	2,025	2,390	681	270	411	6,506
1982–83	46	1,632	2,395	3,274	521	202	319	7,868
1983–84	19	1,904	—	6,017	877	430	447	8,817
1984–85	136	2,426	—	7,177	2,432	1,244	1,188	12,171
1985–86	23	2,057	—	6,375	2,916	1,085	1,831	11,371
1986–87	21	919	—	1,188	2,676	1,130	1,546	4,804
1987–88	27	1,024	—	2,296	1,298	681	617	4,645
1988–89	25	602	—	1,371	1,195	685	510	3,193
1989–90	33	575	—	1,050	743	495	248	2,401
1990–91	31	605	—	860	847	363	484	2,343
1991–92	37	557	—	-216	638	370	268	1,016
1992–93	34	554	—	69	682	480	202	1,339
1993–94	43	606	—	359	258	219	39	1,266
1994–95	41	550	—	712	380	299	81	1,683
1995–96	49	555	—	968	766	674	92	2,338
1996–97	48	684	—	1,729	890	460	430	3,351
1997–98	54	535	—	963	1,779	821	958	3,331
1998–99	62	343	—	504	1,605	656	949	2,514
1999–2000	53	389	—	853	1,268	120	1,148	2,563
2000–01	55	552	—	1,517	2,256	—	2,256	4,380
2001–02	59	558	—	1,307	3,347	—	3,347	5,271

Notes:

1. Licence fees include receipts from fees for onshore and offshore petroleum exploration and production licenses, including initial and periodic payments and tender receipts from offshore licensing of £37 million from the 4th round in 1971–72, £33 million the 8th round in 1982–83 and £121 million from the 9th round in 1984–85.
2. Supplementary Petroleum Duty (SPD) was introduced with effect from 1 January 1981 by the 1981 Finance Act and lapsed after 31 December 1982; it was payable at the rate of 20 per cent. on the gross value of oil and gas produced under UK licences less an allowance per field of one million tonnes per year; it did not apply to PRT-exempt sales of gas to the British Gas Corporation.
3. Advance Petroleum Tax (APRT) is included with PRT. The net PRT repayment in 1991–92 and low net receipts in 1992–93 resulted from high tax-relievable expenditure claimed on some fields.
4. The level of Corporation Tax receipts in 1993–94 reflected low liabilities in 1992 (paid in the following financial year) and repayment resulting from lower settlements for earlier years.
5. The ACT (Advance Corporation Tax) Set-off is estimated because the dividends attributable to UK oil and gas cannot be separately identified from other dividends.
6. Mainstream Corporation Tax (CT) equals CT before the ACT Set-off less the estimated ACT Set-of.

There have been no significant grants or other payments to the oil industry and hence the net revenues are the same as the gross revenues.

Office of Government Commerce

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many employees work in the Office of Government Commerce, and what the cost is of their employment, including national insurance. [90563]

Mr. Boateng: At 31 December 2002 OGC had 672 employees, of which 243 were in the OGC trading fund, OGCbuying.solutions. The forecast annual OGC payroll cost for 2002–03, including employers national insurance and pension contributions, is £22.5 million, of which £6.4million is for OGCbuying.solutions.

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the administrative estimate for the Office of Government Commerce was in the year ending *(a)* April 2001, *(b)* April 2002 and *(c)* April 2003. [90564]

Mr. Boateng: Net voted administrative costs are as follows:

Year	*£ million*
2000–01 actual outturn	16.8
2001–02 actual outturn	31.3
2002–03 estimate provision	25.3

The 2002–03 provision does not include any proposed spring Supplementary Estimate changes.

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many times the Chief Executive Advisory Group of the Office of Government Commerce has met in the last year; what allowances from public funds are made to members of the group; and what the cost was in each year since 2000. [90565]

Mr. Boateng: The Chief Executive Advisory Group to the Office of Government Commerce met four times in 2002. No allowances from public funds are made through OGC to members of the group but some members may claim travel expenses from their own departments. Administrative support is provided by OGC staff.

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many times the Supervisory Board to the Chief Executive of the Office of Government Commerce has met in the last year; what allowances from public funds are made to members of the group; and what the cost was in each year since 2000. [90566]

Mr. Boateng: The OGC Supervisory Board has met three times in the calendar year ending December 2002. No allowances are paid to Members but one external Member, who provides invaluable US public sector procurement experience, is reimbursed travel costs through OGC. The cost each year since 2000 is:

Year	*£*
2000–01	12,700
2001–02	16,700

In addition some Members may claim travel costs through their own Departments.

Rebated Gas Oil

John Barrett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on the use of rebated gas oil. [91158]

John Healey: Rebated gas oil, also known as red diesel, is liable for duty at the rate of 3.13 pence per litre and is used in excepted vehicles and as a heating and industrial fuel.

Same-sex Couples

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what taxation benefits would be available to same-sex couples living together as a couple, and what would the cost of those changes be, if such same-sex couples were treated in the same way as normal couples. [89699]

Dawn Primarolo: There are no specific taxation benefits available for couples as such, although some tax allowances and reliefs are available to married couples. The Government intend to consult in the summer about the details of a civil partnership registration scheme for same-sex couples, including the implications of such a scheme for tax.

Sickness Absence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many days were lost due to sickness absence in the Department in 2002. [90550]

Mr. Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many working days were lost due to illness in his Department in *(a)* 2002 and *(b)* each of the preceding five years. [90748]

Ruth Kelly: Figures published by the Cabinet Office on sickness absence are available since 1994. The latest publication is "Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service 2001" published in December 2002. For the Treasury, the figures for working days absence per staff year were:

Year	*Working days per staff year*
1997	4.9
1998	5.3
1999	5.5
2000	3.9
2001	4.7

Figures for 2002 will be announced in due course.

Spend to Save Initiative

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answer of 25 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 62W, on the spend to save initiative, if he will place the evaluation in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [86848]

Dawn Primarolo: The results of the initiative were summarised and published in the Board of Inland Revenue's annual reports. They are set out in the reports for the years ending 31 March 1998 (page 21), 31 March 1999 (page 17) and 31 March 2000 (pages 15 and 16). These reports are available in the Library. They show that the initiative was a success, producing more than £1.8 billion in additional revenue, which was more than forecast, and a yield to cost ratio of 10 to 1. The Comptroller and Auditor General in his Audit of Assumptions for the pre-Budget 2000 report concluded that the monitoring and control systems were sound, and that the savings estimate was reported on a prudent basis.

Tax Administration (Internet)

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the number of *(a)* tax returns filed and *(b)* vehicle excise duty licences applied for via the internet since these services were first made available. [91022]

Dawn Primarolo: As at 14 January 2003, 342,472 tax returns have been received over the internet since the service was first made available.

The DVLA does not, at present, provide an internet service for vehicle excise duty licensing.

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the cost of setting up and administering the provision of *(a)* tax return filing and *(b)* vehicle excise duty licence application via the internet. [91024]

Dawn Primarolo: The cost of providing self-assessment tax returns on the internet is:

Fixed Cost

The estimated cost of implementing the internet service for self-assessment for years one to three is about £17 million.

Marginal Cost

The on-going support costs, including maintenance, help desk support and on-going improvements to the system is between £3 to £4 million per annum.

Future costings for VED licensing via the internet are not currently available.

Taxation

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the income tax receipts foregone, since 1999, as a result of the Government's policy of offering a tax relief on employee-loaned computers. [91021]

Dawn Primarolo: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the income tax receipts foregone, since 1 April 2000, as a result of the tax credits introduced by Her Majesty's Government to encourage corporate venturing in the Budget of that year. [91026]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government introduced the corporate venturing scheme (CVS) in Finance Act 2000, but this is neither a tax credit nor does it give any relief against income tax. The CVS gives relief against corporation tax and the latest estimates are that the scheme has reduced corporation tax liabilities by £5 million for both 2001–02 and 2002–03.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

Mr. Tom Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many anti-social behaviour orders have been issued for crimes against retailers since their introduction. [90262]

Mr. Denham: Anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs) are community-based civil orders which can be applied for by the police, British Transport police, registered social landlords or local authorities against an individual or several individuals whose behaviour is anti-social.

Details on the offending types of behaviour initiating application for an ASBO are not collected centrally, although we are aware of areas where ASBOs have been used against shoplifters.

Further information on the use of ASBOs can be found in Home Office Research Study 236, 'A review of anti-social behaviour orders', published 2002.

Mr. Pope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many antisocial behaviour orders have been taken out in England in each year since their introduction, by local authority area. [90656]

Mr. Denham: Since their introduction, 1 April 1999, up to 31 May 2000 data on the number of Antisocial Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) issued was collected by police force area only. From 1 June 2000 official statistics on the number of ASBOs issued are based on quarterly returns from Magistrates Courts Committees (MCCs) and from copies of the orders received since this date, we are able to identify the local authorities.

I have placed a table showing the number of ASBOs issued within England, as notified to the Home Office, from 1 April 1999 to 30 June 2002 (latest available) in the Library.

We are aware that the numbers of ASBOs made nationally have been consistently under reported in returns made by magistrates courts and are considering how reporting can be improved.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the local authorities in Scotland with whom NASS has a contract for accommodation to be provided for asylum seekers; and how many places there are in each such contract. [90495]

Beverley Hughes: The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) has one contract with Glasgow City Council. Under the terms of the contract the Council is contracted to provide up to 2,500 properties.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children seeking asylum are in detention. [90659]

Beverley Hughes: Information on the age of individual detainees is not available except by examination of individual casefiles at disproportionate cost.

Children are detained in two limited circumstances: either as part of a family group whose detention is considered appropriate; or, exceptionally, as unaccompanied minors while alternative arrangements are made for their care and normally just overnight.

Child Curfew Orders

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many child curfew orders have been issued in England and Wales, broken down by local authority area. [89480]

Mr. Denham: No applications have yet been received to establish a local child curfew scheme under section 14 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. Some local authorities and police forces have considered the possibility, but concluded that other measures should be taken to tackle specific local problems.

Correspondence

David Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Walsall, North of 27 November 2002, regarding a constituent, ref 24789/2. [90260]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 13 January2003]:* I replied to my hon. Friend on 10 January 2003.

Deportation

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his answer of 7 January

2003, *Official Report*, ref 88368, what criteria his Department uses to assess whether it is satisfied that suitable arrangements are in place for reception and care when removing unaccompanied minors to their country of origin. [90448]

Beverley Hughes: Prior to return reception arrangements are considered on a case-by-case basis and possible arrangements are investigated before return is made. The most suitable arrangements are for the unaccompanied minor to be returned to his/her parents or other immediate family members willing to take responsibility for the child.

Door Security Personnel

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures have been put in place to ensure high standards among door security personnel working for nightclubs and other entertainment venues. [89478]

Mr. Denham: The Private Security Industry Act 2001 provides for the establishment of a Security Industry Authority (SIA), which will have responsibility for licensing individuals, employed in designated sectors of the private security industry, including door supervisors. There will be two checks on people applying for licences—the first will be a criminal record check, the second will be a check on professional competencies. It is expected that the licensing of door supervisors will begin at the end of 2003 or early 2004.

The Act also contains provision for the SIA to approve contractors in the industry.

I am confident that the introduction of the SIA will, over time, contribute to the reduction of criminality in the private security industry, and help to raise standards of skills, training and supervision within the industry.

Drug Users Treatment

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the expansion of services to refer drug users to treatment via the criminal justice system will start. [90331]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The Government's Updated Drug Strategy, launched on 3 December 2002, described the introduction, from 2003–04, of a comprehensive new programme of criminal justice interventions aimed at getting drug misusers out of crime into effective treatment. This programme includes, amongst other initiatives, the enhancement of existing arrest referral schemes, doubling the availability of Drug Treatment and Testing Orders, building on the current Drug Testing projects and extending the approach more widely and piloting a presumption against bail for those who refuse to access treatment. The programme will be backed up by improvements in treatment capacity and local delivery.

Some elements of the new programme, such as enhanced arrest referral, will apply across England and Wales from year one; others will be introduced on a phased basis, with the initial focus on those areas with the highest levels of acquisitive crime.

Drugs Crime

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many teenagers he estimates have tried class A drugs in the *(a)* Twickenham constituency, *(b)* London Borough of Richmond upon Thames and *(c)* London; and if he will make a statement. [88825]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 13 January 2003]:* The 2001/02 British Crime Survey estimates that 9 per cent. of 16 to 19 year-olds in London have at some time tried a class A drug. The equivalent estimate for the whole of England and Wales is 11 per cent. The difference between the England and Wales estimate and the London estimate is not statistically significant. These data are not available at constituency or borough level.

The "Drug use, smoking and drinking among young people in England in 2001" survey estimates that 6 per cent. of school children aged between 11 and 15 years old have tried a class A drug. No geographical breakdown is available for this age group.

Drugs Education Campaign

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the new education campaign on the risks of drug misuse will start; and whether it will be standardised throughout the United Kingdom. [90330]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Due to launch spring 2003, the campaign is jointly funded by the Home Office and the Department of Health, working closely with the Department for Education and Skills. The campaign will run in England and it will build on previous awareness raising campaigns. The campaign will comprise a national framework which will be sufficiently flexible to enable it to be supported at a community level in order to respond to local priorities and needs.

European Reception Policies

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the research on the reception policies of Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands and Germany has been published; and if he will make a statement. [90447]

Beverley Hughes: The research on the reception policies and practice of Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands and Germany has not yet been published. Publication was provisionally scheduled for end 2002. The Home Office now anticipates publishing the results of the above research in spring 2003, subject to the usual Research Development and Statistics (RDS) publication procedures, including peer review.

Fireworks

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make the use of fireworks at certain times of the night a criminal offence. [90560]

Mr. Denham: We are aware of the noise and nuisance caused by fireworks. There is already legislative provision through the Noise Act 1996 to deal with noise

nuisance, including fireworks, between 11 pm and 7 am. This legislation is adoptive. We are considering how best to encourage local authorities to make greater use of it.

We are also considering as part of the development of the Anti-Social Behaviour White Paper what more needs to be done to tackle this nuisance which is blighting so many neighbourhoods.

Gun Crime

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* arrests and *(b)* cautions for gun possession were recorded in (i) 2002 and (ii) each of the previous five years in (A) Lancashire, (B) the North West of England and (C) Wales. [90739]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The information contained in the table, which has been placed in the Library, gives the number of defendants proceeded against and cautioned for various offences of possession of firearms, 1997 to 2001.

Arrest data are not collect centrally at the level of detail requested.

Statistics for 2002 will be published in the autumn.

Illegal Immigration

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his policy is in relation to the return of penalties paid by road hauliers for carrying illegal immigrants; what his policy is concerning unpaid penalties; and if he will make a statement. [91110]

Beverley Hughes: The Government's position on the reimbursement of penalties paid under the previous civil penalty regime is clear. We are under no obligation to return any of the money paid against penalties imposed in cases which were not party to the Roth litigation. The previous legislation was not found to be unlawful. Theoretically, unpaid penalties could have been enforced but, in the light of the Court of Appeal's findings in Roth, we considered it appropriate not to take enforcement action in respect of outstanding penalties.

Integrated Casework Directorate

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the visa application of Mrs. Gale of Ringwood of 21 October 2002, acknowledged on 14 November by the Integrated Casework Directorate, will be decided and the original documents returned. [90719]

Beverley Hughes: Mrs. Gale's application was decided on 10 January 2003. The decision and all supporting documents were returned the same day.

Jamaican Visitors

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the number of visitors from Jamaica who have overstayed in each year since 1997. [90699]

Beverley Hughes: Information on the number of persons who have overstayed their conditions of entry to the United Kingdom is not available and no estimate of this number has been made. However, we are aware that large numbers of Jamaican nationals who have been granted temporary admission subsequently abscond.

More than 1,000 did so in the first six months of 2002.

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department under which Common law power the Metropolitan Police have closed Blackburne Mews, London W1; and how many times in the last 12 months Blackburne Mews, London W1 has been closed in accordance with *(a)* section 67 of the Road Traffic Act 1984 and *(b)* section 116 of the Highways Act 1980. [90555]

Mr. Spellar: I have been asked to reply.

The temporary road closure has been authorised by Westminster City Council following an application by the Metropolitan Police for an order under section 14 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 (as amended by the Road Traffic (Temporary Restrictions) Act 1991). The order was put in place on 24 November 2001 and expires on 12 April 2003. Westminster City Council may ask the Secretary of State to extend the duration of the order for a further period of up to six months.

Ministerial Meetings

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what dates Ministers in his Department have held meetings with members and officials of the United States Administration since 8 June 2001; where each meeting took place; which Ministers were involved in each meeting; which United States Administration Departments attended each meeting; and which members and officials from the United States Administration attended each of these meetings. [89465]

Mr. Blunkett: Ministers have held meetings with representatives of the United States Administration on a variety of issues since June 2001. In particular:

The Home Secretary met John Ashcroft (US Attorney General) on 12 December 2001 at the Home Office. William Parish (US Ambassador), Michael Chertoff (Assistant Attorney General), Bruce Swartz (Deputy Assistant Attorney General), David Israelite (Deputy Chief of Staff) and a number of other key members and officials were also in attendance.

The Home Secretary met Tom Ridge (Director of Homeland Security in the US) on 7 November 2002 at 1 Carlton Gardens. A number of other members and officials were in attendance including Minister Glyn Davies and Ambassador McNamara. An evening dinner was held at which my right hon. Friend (John Denham) was also in attendance; and

John Denham met Tommy Thompson, Minister for Health and Human Services, on 8 May 2002 at the UN Secretariat in New York. Mr. Thompson was accompanied by an official who was an expert on children's services.

Notifiable Offences (Bromley)

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many notifiable offences there were in the London borough of Bromley in each year since 1973. [89802]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 14 January 2003]:* Recorded crime figures ('notifiable offences') at Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) level have been collected centrally on a financial year basis for six key offences since April 1999. These statistics are published in Home Office Bulletins Issue 12/01 "Recorded Crime England and Wales, 12 months to March 2001", and Issue 7/02 "Crime in England and Wales 2001–02", which are available in the Library. The figures for Bromley are given in the table. Figures before this date were not collected centrally.

Bromley Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership

Offence	*April 1999 to March 2000*	*April 2000 to March 2001*	*April 2001 to March 2002*
Violence against the person	3,224	3,800	3,843
Sexual offences	166	186	232
Robbery	518	685	917
Burglary in a dwelling	1,989	1,821	1,836
Theft of a motor vehicle	1,895	2,046	2,173
Theft from a vehicle	3,479	2,958	3,552

Parole

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which body is responsible for updating the police national computer when an offender is arrested as a result of an order of recall due to breach of parole. [90731]

Hilary Benn: Responsibility for this would normally rest with the arresting force.

People Smuggling

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to provide protection for vehicles against illegal immigrants at seaports; and whether civil penalties for unknowingly carrying illegal immigrants will be withdrawn. [90325]

Beverley Hughes: The Immigration Service uses a wide range of technology to detect clandestine entrants, including heartbeat detectors, passive millimetric wave imagers and CO_2 detectors. However, responsibility for protecting vehicles in order to prevent the carriage of unauthorised people properly lies with the vehicle operator and not with the Immigration Service. Carriers who comply fully with the Code of Practice for the prevention of clandestine entry, and who have no knowledge or suspicion of the presence of unauthorised people, will not be liable to a penalty. If liability is incurred, the level of penalty set will take into account mitigating factors which will include the extent of any checks, including those using CO_2 or other detection equipment, carried out by third parties immediately prior to embarkation for the UK.

Police Authority Funding

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the Government's recommended projection is for the precept for each police authority in 2003–04. [91103]

Mr. Denham: We have not made any recommendations about precept levels for police authorities in 2003–04. These are local decisions for individual police authorities to determine.

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the Police Authority precept was for each authority in England and Wales in each financial year since 1996–97. [91105]

Mr. Denham: The information is set out in the table.

Council tax—police element (band D)

£

Police authority	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Avon and Somerset	45.73	52.04	55.09	60.62	67.59	72.66	83.4
Bedfordshire	46.46	52.51	55.84	61.36	66.98	70.26	78.69
Cambridgeshire	45.00	51.03	48.24	52.11	62.46	68.04	94.59
Cheshire	45.10	51.16	53.86	56.28	61.06	64.66	73.54
Cleveland	46.02	54.87	48.43	62.55	65.58	69.51	96.13
Cumbria	51.14	58.20	72.35	78.27	84.23	90.60	100.48
Derbyshire	45.18	51.31	57.30	65.85	71.12	75.38	91.96
Devon and Cornwall	45.66	49.79	48.30	53.52	58.87	61.81	73.8
Dorset	57.49	63.59	70.60	77.12	84.42	92.25	103.5
Durham	45.45	52.20	48.60	50.40	52.65	56.43	64.44
Dyfed Powys	46.57	48.42	59.58	72.99	85.41	90.90	98.10
Essex	48.42	54.09	62.28	65.07	67.95	71.01	77.67
Gloucestershire	44.96	51.17	57.74	68.90	77.98	82.05	94.01
Greater Manchester	45.86	54.10	56.28	60.22	62.72	64.66	68.86
Gwent	46.78	49.10	54.36	59.74	74.97	84.03	95.17
Hampshire	45.81	51.75	50.13	53.91	55.08	59.04	75.15
Hertfordshire	46.02	51.51	58.83	63.54	67.99	72.39	81.01
Humberside	45.78	52.47	52.47	54.81	60.30	85.77	95.4
Kent	45.81	51.57	48.45	52.48	55.73	60.26	73.64
Lancashire	45.71	53.25	53.48	57.69	62.60	67.89	73.86
Leicestershire	45.32	52.26	61.21	63.79	67.80	75.52	95.21
Lincolnshire	66.96	69.03	78.93	81.99	86.49	90.36	94.86
Merseyside	57.87	66.87	71.78	77.44	81.31	85.37	94.76
Metropolitan police	49.84	57.00	70.73	77.44	90.95	118.85	130.59
Norfolk	45.18	50.58	53.64	64.35	72.09	83.61	100.35

Council tax—police element (band D)

£

Police authority	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Northamptonshire	64.26	70.56	69.29	76.08	79.65	83.00	105.25
Northumbria	45.95	52.73	47.67	49.82	52.06	55.65	58.15
North Wales	46.21	48.52	58.54	66.33	78.49	82.72	96.53
North Yorkshire	45.40	49.72	48.46	52.20	57.04	62.59	88.59
Nottinghamshire	45.94	49.78	54.32	61.55	65.17	70.17	85.17
South Wales	46.36	49.22	56.25	65.36	80.42	85.57	89.85
South Yorkshire	45.80	53.29	54.28	56.72	59.26	62.79	74.09
Staffordshire	48.15	54.74	72.42	78.86	83.43	94.37	100.93
Suffolk	45.09	51.39	52.38	56.16	61.11	67.14	82.08
Surrey	42.93	44.64	66.06	75.24	79.41	83.08	96.44
Sussex	45.99	51.66	50.94	53.19	55.53	59.13	69.84
Thames Valley	46.96	52.79	50.76	56.53	60.34	64.49	73.49
Warwickshire	46.70	52.24	62.09	71.18	77.57	85.17	101.78
West Mercia	45.34	50.87	53.64	59.00	74.06	78.50	104.5
West Midlands	45.65	53.20	48.99	51.19	54.77	57.21	61.88
West Yorkshire	45.28	53.17	52.41	54.76	58.73	60.82	75.92
Wiltshire	49.44	55.48	62.77	68.98	75.84	83.26	91.54

Police Communication Systems

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what health study his Department proposes to undertake into the Airwave Police Communication System; and if he will make a statement; [89603]

(2) how many police forces use the Airwave Communication System; what representations he has received about the system; and if he will make a statement. [89604]

Mr. Denham: We have taken advice from experts and consider that Airwave is safe. The Stewart report recommended that a precautionary approach should be taken on mobile phones and health. The Home Office is, therefore, setting up a health-monitoring programme for Airwave users in the police service, inconsultation with police organisations, epidemiologists and occupational health experts. Tenders are currently under consideration.

When a force moves to Airwave, the roll out is phased, starting from the point at which forces achieve a ready for service (RFS) date. Once that date has been achieved, the move from the existing system to Airwave begins within the force. Generally, that move takes place over a period of time with the forces migrating, typically, one division at a time.

Currently, there are seven forces in various stages of migration to Airwave: Lancashire, Greater Manchester Police, West Mercia, Suffolk, Leicestershire, North Yorkshire and Northumbria. West Mercia has just become the first force to become fully live with Airwave.

Representations have been received from a range of groups, including the Police Federation, Mast Sanity, Association of National Park Authorities, residents associations and individuals. Topics have included health and safety, mast placement and potential interference with other equipment.

Police Funding (Dorset)

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will meet representatives of the Dorset Police Authority and hon. Members representing Dorset to discuss the provisional funding settlement in Dorset police in 2003–04. [90755]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 14 January 2003]*: We announced the provisional police funding settlement on 5 December. The consultation period for representations ended on 14 January. All representations received by then will be taken into account before the announcement of the final funding settlement on 5 February. I would be very happy to meet members of the Authority and hon. Members, as I have other hon. Members from other areas, but I must respect the closing date for representations on the allocation for next year.

Police Response Times

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his most recent estimate is of the average response time to grade 1 incidents by the Avon and Somerset Constabulary in *(a)* rural areas and *(b)* urban areas; and if he will make a statement. [89696]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 14 January 2003]*: The most recent figures available are those given in Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) annual report, published on 9 December 2002. These show that the response times for attending incidents in *(a)* rural areas were 85.3 per cent. within 20 minutes and *(b)* in urban areas 83.9 per cent. within 1 5 minutes.

Prisoners (Dependent Children)

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* female and *(b)* male prisoners were parents of dependent children in each of the last four years. [89123]

Hilary Benn: There is no routinely collected data on the number of prisoners who have dependent children. However, a Home Office study of a large sample of imprisoned mothers and children, published in 1997, found that 60 per cent. of female prisoners had dependent children under the age of 18. Another

smaller, but more recent, study of women prisoners and their work in custody, published in 2000, found broadly similar results (out of a sample of 567 sentenced women, 66 per cent. had dependent children under the age of 18).

Directly equivalent information for male prisoners is not available. However, the 1991 England and Wales prison survey showed that 32 per cent. of male prisoners had dependent children who had been living with them just before they were imprisoned; the corresponding figure for female prisoners was 47 per cent.

Road Accidents

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many road traffic accidents there were in *(a)* the latest available year and *(b)* each of the preceding five years, broken down by police force area. [90722]

Mr. Jamieson: The following table shows the number of road traffic accidents involving personal injury for the latest year and each of the preceding five years, by police force area:

Injury accidents by police force area: GB 1996–2001

Accidents

Police force area	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Metropolitan Police	40,405	40,715	40,010	40,007	37,708	36,328
Cumbria	1,911	2,090	2,010	2,049	1,901	1,823
Lancashire	6,301	6,407	6,148	5,719	5,501	5,920
Merseyside	6,593	6,658	6,767	6,829	6,835	5,783
Greater Manchester	11,932	12,026	12,093	11,683	12,011	11,249
Cheshire	4,644	4,786	4,919	4,713	4,669	4,523
Northumbria	4,751	4,980	4,858	4,739	4,862	4,746
Durham	2,020	2,055	2,052	1,837	1,934	1,862
North Yorkshire	3,274	3,315	3,278	3,325	3,141	3,142
West Yorkshire	9,090	9,501	9,870	9,526	9,200	8,740
South Yorkshire	4,737	4,689	4,831	4,934	4,877	5,038
Humberside	3,742	3,659	3,612	3,367	3,456	3,408
Cleveland	1,919	1,880	1,790	1,647	1,571	1,532
West Midlands	9,203	9,787	9,766	9,978	10,640	10,462
Staffordshire	4,941	4,915	4,537	4,587	4,688	4,563
West Mercia	4,257	4,391	4,269	4,256	3,789	3,846
Warwickshire	2,395	2,477	2,307	2,278	2,274	2,244
Derbyshire	3,569	3,824	3,831	3,860	3,733	3,681
Nottinghamshire	4,288	4,262	4,348	4,044	4,288	4,103
Lincolnshire	2,548	2,683	2,733	2,626	2,565	2,612
Leicestershire	3,632	3,686	3,854	3,723	3,821	3,764
Northamptonshire	2,086	2,210	2,221	2,299	2,156	1,945
Cambridgeshire	3,426	3,492	3,411	3,161	3,486	3,503
Norfolk	2,644	2,703	2,778	2,769	2,645	2,789
Suffolk	2,141	2,224	2,251	2,298	2,312	2,356
Bedfordshire	2,225	2,198	2,168	2,000	2,035	1,983
Hertfordshire	3,977	4,097	4,132	3,995	4,704	4,518
Essex	6,228	6,439	6,435	6,455	6,985	6,773
Thames Valley	8,234	8,797	8,553	8,622	8,659	8,356
Hampshire	7,752	7,656	7,333	7,187	7,323	6,934
Surrey	4,464	4,338	4,323	4,284	4,647	5,153
Kent	6,263	5,881	5,855	5,780	6,086	6,297
Sussex	6,284	6,034	6,199	6,175	5,974	5,674
City of London	476	461	448	470	417	423
Devon and Cornwall	6,031	6,025	5,830	5,785	5,673	5,976
Avon and Somerset	4,557	4,833	5,393	5,607	5,280	5,286
Gloucestershire	1,876	1,858	1,937	2,078	1,945	2,074
Wiltshire	2,323	2,490	2,392	2,359	2, 393	2,480
Dorset	2,710	2,887	2,843	2,800	2,897	2,950
North Wales	2,621	2,802	2,781	2,766	2,656	2,501
Gwent	1,658	1,662	1,722	1,749	1,626	1,464
South Wales	4,347	4,098	3,840	3,698	3,598	3,799
Dyfed-Powys	1,662	1,688	1,683	1,680	1,669	1,735
Northern	884	891	948	909	802	814
Grampian	1,448	1,521	1,408	1,234	1,219	1,129
Tayside	—	1,282	1,258	1,248	1,175	1,207
Fife	744	806	731	710	784	734
Lothian and Borders	3,487	3,456	3,549	3,188	3,293	3,200
Central	749	870	800	735	672	636
Strathclyde	7,042	7,381	7,362	6,905	6,731	6,521
Dumfries and Galloway	392	421	456	375	423	435
Great Britain	236,193	240,287	238,923	235,048	233,729	229,014

Sangatte

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his negotiations with the French Government to close the Sangatte camp. [90610]

Beverley Hughes: Following my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary's statement on 2 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 611W, I can add that the Red Cross centre at Sangatte was emptied by 14 December 2002 and is now being dismantled by its owners, Eurotunnel.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many statutory instruments have been issued by his Department in each calendar year since 1979. [89851]

Hilary Benn: Details of the statutory instruments (SIs) made by Home Office Ministers each calendar year since 1979 are as follows:

Year	*Number of SIs made*	*Year*	*Number of SIs made*
1979	143	1991	155
1980	150	1992	118
1981	119	1993	99
1982	104	1994	92
1983	112	1995	106
1984	84	1996	110
1985	138	1997	172
1986	134	1998	133
1987	134	1999	108
1988	116	2000	146
1989	114	2001	133
1990	130	2002	129

Theft/Fraud

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his estimate is of the cost of theft and fraud to *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in 2002. [89893]

Mr. Blunkett: The Home Office has an Anti Fraud and Corruption Strategy that is based upon increasing the awareness of staff, use of cost effective methods to inhibit fraud and corruption and establishing procedures to respond effectively to incidents of alleged fraud including the provision of confidential 'hot lines'. The department's overall security arrangements provide the basis for combating theft, supported by reminders to staff about preventative measures available to them. Individual line managers are responsible for combating fraud and corruption in their own areas.

In the 2001–02 annual return, the known cost to the Department of fraud involving employees and contractors was £142,485, of which £121,310 related to the Department's agencies.

Truancy

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent study he has made into the link between truancy and street crime. [90781]

Mr. Denham: The study 'Young People and Street Crime' published by the Youth Justice Board on 9 January shows clearly that young people involved in street crime offences are more likely to have been disruptive in school and to have had a high level of absence through truancy or exclusion. This adds to the existing evidence to show that truancy and exclusion can increase the risk of offending. The 2002 Youth Justice Board Youth Survey showed that 44 per cent. of young people who admitted to offending in the last year had also played truant.

The Government are taking action to reduce levels of truancy. Specific measures include the Behaviour Improvement Programme, covering over 700 schools, to improve pupil behaviour and reduce truancy and exclusions; the police and schools working together to conduct truancy sweeps; the deployment of an additional 100 police officers to work in schools; and increased powers to deal with the parents of persistent truants, including the piloting of new fast-track prosecution procedures.

Visitor Counting

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what latest estimate he has made of the cost of introducing and maintaining a system of counting visitors in and out of the UK; and if he will make a statement. [90697]

Beverley Hughes: A precise figure is not available, but the cost of recording electronically the admissions and departures of all non-EEA nationals is provisionally estimated to be around £20 million a year. This estimate includes the costs of reintroducing fully staffed embarkation controls, which were withdrawn for passengers travelling to European Union destinations from ferry ports and small airports in 1994 and reconfigured at major airports in 1998.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Afghanistan (Heroin)

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his assessment is of the effect of the war in Afghanistan on the supply of heroin to the United Kingdom. [90253]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The disruption of drug production in Afghanistan was not among the aims of the military campaign. However, the fall of the Taliban and consequent appointment of the Afghan Transitional Authority through a Loya Jirga meeting (Grand Council) has created a new opportunity to end Afghan opium production. The UK is co-ordinating international support for Afghanistan's drug control efforts and has produced, in consultation with the Afghan Government, other donors and international agencies, a long-term strategy for building up Afghan drug law enforcement capacity and providing alternative livelihoods to opium poppy farmers. The brutality of the Taliban regime had helped to restrict production of poppies in the final year of their rule. Their replacement by a Government committed to international human rights norms will inevitably see some increase in production. But alternative livelihoods

could encourage growers to cease cultivation particularly if the Afghan Government undertake enforced eradication of crops. The strategy we have negotiated with the Afghan Government aims to achieve the Government's target of contributing to the elimination of drugs from Afghanistan within 10 years.

BAE Systems

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library copies of the reports compiled by the *secondee from* BAE *Systems following* his *secondment* to the British Embassy in Brazil between May and October 2002. [89462]

Mr. Rammell: The report to which the hon. Member refers is currently in draft form.

I will ask for this report to be placed in the Library of the House as soon as it is finalised.

Bahrain

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British nationals made an official confession of a criminal offence in Bahrain between 2000 and 2003 without the presence of a lawyer. [90301]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We are aware of one British national who has stated that he confessed to a crime to the Bahraini authorities without a lawyer present between 2000 and 2003.

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British nationals made an official confession in prison in Bahrain between 2000 and 2003. [90302]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We are aware of one British national who was detained and subsequently confessed to committing a crime between 2000 and 2003.

Beef Ban

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what *(a)* fines and *(b)* compensation have been paid by the French Government for banning British beef; and if he will make a statement. [90462]

Mr. Morley: I have been asked to reply.

The European Commission withdrew its case in the European Court of Justice seeking a daily fine on France after France lifted its ban. Therefore, no fines were payable, but the Commission asked the Court to order that costs of the case be borne by France. The UK Government regrets the decision by the European Commission not to pursue the case for penalties against France. The UK has supported the Commission throughout and believes that pressing this case would have sent a firm message to member states that no one country can avoid its obligations and responsibilities.

Compensation for losses must be sought by those directly affected. The UK Government intervened in the European Court of Justice to support the NFU's current case to rule the ban illegal in the French courts and will support those who wish subsequently to pursue any claims.

British Overseas Territories

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will bring forward plans for the devolved integration of British Overseas Territories into the United Kingdom. [90794]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: There are no plans for the integration of the Overseas Territories into the United Kingdom.

British Trade International

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the name of the committee within British Trade International is which oversees the placement and monitoring of secondments from outside organisations to the Foreign Office. [89532]

Mr. Rammell: British Trade International—the joint DTI/FCO body responsible for Trade Development and promotion of Inward Investment—oversees the placement and monitoring of secondments from outside organisations to Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In doing so BTI respects the Cabinet Office guidelines on Interchange and the Civil Service Commissioners' Recruitment Code.

Diego Garcia

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the United States Government regarding the prisoners held on the British military base in Diego Garcia. [90296]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: None. There is no truth in recent suggestions in the press that the US is holding prisoners on the island of Diego Garcia.

Ethical Banking

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contracts have been concluded as a result of the Government's commitment to support ethical banking. [89941]

Mr. Rammell: The Government believes it is important for consumers to have choice in financial products, including the availability of 'ethical' products. However, it would not be appropriate for the Government to support exclusively the development of one specific group of financial service providers. It is for individual consumers to decide the attributes they most value from their financial services and for financial services firms to be transparent about their use of funds and investments.

Global Partners Agreement

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further steps the Russian Federation has agreed to take to advance the implementation of the Global Partners Agreement, known as ten plus ten plus ten; what further action it is required to take; and if he will make a statement. [91205]

Mr. MacShane: Russia is a committed member of the G8 'Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction'. In December 2002 the Russian Government decided to set up a new interagency committee, which will be chaired by the Russian Prime Minister. On 10 January this year Russia pledged $2 billion over the next 10 years to the Partnership. This includes $204 million on high-priority projects in 2003, focusing on the destruction of chemical weapons and work on decommissioned nuclear submarines.

However, for most of the work to begin Russia has to agree to a legal framework that is satisfactory to donor countries. At present there are problems with liability and taxation provisions and these must be solved before many large projects can go ahead. This delay also affects the UK, which has made strenuous efforts to overcome these final obstacles. Conclusion of an agreement is a prerequisite to the start of much of the project-work. We hope that an agreement can be reached very shortly, as the UK is at an advanced stage of readiness and once the legal framework is in place, projects can quickly begin.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced to Parliament last July the UK's commitment to the Global Partnership of up to $750 million over 10 years (1 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 21). The UK Government believe the importance of the Partnership is clear, and puts a high priority on its contribution, as part of the UK's wider non-proliferation, security and foreign policy strategies.

Iraq

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the Government's voting record for each measure, and amendments thereto, on the agenda of the first committee of *(a)* the UN General Assembly and *(b)* the UN Security Council in 2002. [90181]

Mr. Rammell: Voting records of First Committee resolutions of the UN General Assembly since 1997 may be accessed via the internet at http://disarmament.un.org/vote.nsf. Those for UN Security Council resolutions since 1983 may be found at http://unbisnet.un.org.

North Korea

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement regarding the situation in North Korea. [90290]

Mr. Rammell: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary issued a press statement on North Korea's intention to withdraw from the Non-Proliferation Treaty on 10 January. The text of the statement is as follows:

> "I deplore North Korea's stated intention to withdraw from the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Such a step, if carried through, will only increase North Korea's isolation from the international community. I call on the North Korean leadership to change course. The NPT is the cornerstone of the international nuclear non-proliferation regime, supported by almost every country in the world. North Korea's action is therefore a matter of deep concern for the entire international community."

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with his counterpart in North Korea concerning its *(a)* nuclear power and *(b)* nuclear arms programmes. [90698]

Mr. Rammell: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has not had any direct contact with the DPRK Foreign Minister on the matter of North Korea's nuclear programmes. However, our Ambassador to Pyongyang raised this issue during meetings with the DPRK Foreign Minister, Vice Foreign Minister, and titular Head of State Kim Yong-nam, at the end of December. FCO officials have also been in regular contact with the DPRK Chargé d'affaires in London on this issue since his arrival at the beginning of November. Most recently, FCO officials summoned the Chargé d' Affairs on 10 January to protest against recent actions by the DPRK. We shall continue to use official channels in London and Pyongyang to raise our concerns with North Korea about its nuclear programmes and intention to withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many statutory instruments have been issued by his Department in each calendar year since 1979. [89835]

Mr. Straw: Departmental records show that for each calendar year since 1979 the number of statutory instruments for which the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is the lead Department is as follows:

Year	*Number*
1979	57
1980	41
1981	60
1982	35
1983	33
1984	29
1985	44
1986	34
1987	48
1988	36
1989	35

Year	Number
1990	39
1991	26
1992	44
1993	35
1994	30
1995	28
1996	34
1997	77
1998	30
1999	28
2000	37
2001	38
2002	29

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Congestion Charge

Mr. Gray: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what budget he has set aside for the likely cost of the London congestion charge. [91099]

Mr. Leslie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) on 20 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 125W.

Council Tax

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what changes in council tax in each local authority would be required and possible, assuming spending next year were at FSS level and no change were made to its non-grant income. [90685]

Mr. Raynsford: Council tax is a local tax. Decisions on council tax are for local authorities to take, after consulting with their local electorate and taxpayers. It is not this Government's policy to preannounce spending totals or council tax increases for local authorities.

FSS is not, and should not be used as, a measure of assumed local spending. The spending review identifies how much is available in total grant for local authorities. The FSS distributes the available amount to authorities in a way that reflects local pressures in comparison to other areas. There is an allowance per head with top-ups for local pressures such as deprivation, labour costs and sparsity.

Housing (Rural Areas)

Andrew George: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much revenue was collected in real terms for each council tax band in *(a)* England and *(b)* local authorities defined as rural, by region, in each year since 1992. [90839]

Mr. Leslie: The following table shows the amount of council tax receipts, net of council tax benefit, collected each year in *(a)* England and *(b)* local authorities, by region, since 1993, shown in 2001–02 prices. Authorities are defined as 'rural' on the basis of the Countryside Agency's classification of English Local Authorities.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister collects information on the amount of council tax, net of council tax benefit, collected by each local authority in cash terms. This information is aggregated and can not be reliably broken down by council tax band.

Council Tax Receipts for "Rural" Authorities from 1993–94 to 2001–02 (in 2001–02 prices)

£ million

	1993–94	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
England	8,313	9,095	9,551	9,994	10,545	11,344	11,850	12,531	13,209
Designated rural authorities by region									
East of England	388	428	451	473	504	560	598	641	679
East Midlands	275	318	336	349	382	418	439	468	492
London	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
North East	48	50	55	57	61	67	71	74	77
North West	234	262	271	281	294	324	336	354	368
South East	720	799	848	892	945	1,028	1,081	1,145	1,203
South West	473	541	553	575	614	677	711	763	804
West Midlands	176	193	197	208	220	272	292	307	329
Yorkshire and the Humber	199	224	233	232	241	260	277	292	310

The real terms are calculated using the HM Treasury GDP deflator.

Andrew George: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many households in *(a)* England and *(b)* local authorities defined as rural, by region, were identified as being in each band for council tax purposes in each year since the introduction of the scheme. [90838]

Mr. Leslie: The following table shows the number of chargeable dwellings in *(a)* England and *(b)* local authorities defined as rural, by region, by council tax band since 1993. Chargeable dwellings are dwellings eligible for a council tax charge. This information is taken from the Calculation of Council Tax Base for Revenue Support Grant Purposes Return (CTB1) which is based on information available to the authority in November each year. Authorities are defined as 'rural' on the basis of the Countryside Agency's classification of English Local Authorities.

Number of chargeable dwellings in "rural" local authorities from 1993 to 2001

Thousand

	Band A	*Band B*	*Band C*	*Band D*	*Band E*	*Band F*	*Band G*	*Band H*	*Total*
1993									
England	5,062	3,733	4,280	2,866	1,782	962	729	115	19,529
Designated rural authorities by region									
East of England	131	223	235	142	88	46	30	3	898
East Midlands	174	148	135	76	47	27	19	2	627
London	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
North East	45	16	15	11	8	6	4	0	106
North West	141	105	96	62	41	24	17	2	487
South East	86	201	366	300	215	137	116	17	1,438
South West	151	230	238	174	127	73	51	5	1,048
West Midlands	64	84	88	54	40	24	19	2	375
Yorkshire and the Humber	102	95	98	59	42	24	16	1	437
1994									
England	5,128	3,792	4,298	2,900	1,781	939	698	107	19,643
Designated rural authorities by region									
East of England	135	227	236	143	88	46	29	3	907
East Midlands	180	152	135	77	47	26	18	2	635
London	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
North East	47	16	15	11	8	6	4	0	107
North West	145	106	96	63	41	23	16	1	493
South East	91	207	371	305	215	134	113	15	1,452
South West	157	237	241	178	127	70	46	4	1,061
West Midlands	66	86	88	55	40	24	17	2	378
Yorkshire and the Humber	104	96	99	60	42	22	15	1	440
1995									
England	5,165	3,836	4,327	2,927	1,796	938	683	103	19,777
Designated rural authorities by region									
East of England	139	230	237	145	90	46	29	3	919
East Midlands	183	154	135	78	49	26	17	1	643
London	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
North East	47	17	15	11	8	6	3	0	108
North West	146	108	97	64	42	23	16	1	497
South East	94	211	376	308	217	135	112	15	1,467
South West	162	242	245	181	128	6[illegible]	43	4	1,073
West Midlands	67	87	89	55	41	2[illegible]	16	2	381
Yorkshire and the Humber	106	98	100	62	43	2[illegible]	14	1	446
1996									
England	5,203	3,871	4,351	2,956	1,813	947	688	103	19,934
Designated rural authorities by region									
East of England	142	233	239	147	93	47	29	3	932
East Midlands	187	159	138	81	52	28	18	1	663
London	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
North East	47	17	15	12	8	6	3	0	108
North West	148	108	98	65	43	23	16	1	501
South East	96	214	380	311	218	137	113	15	1,482
South West	164	245	247	183	130	70	43	4	1,086
West Midlands	68	88	89	56	42	24	17	2	385
Yorkshire and the Humber	106	95	89	58	40	21	13	1	422
1997									
England	5,230	3,896	4,380	2,988	1,837	962	697	105	20,093
Designated rural authorities by region									
East of England	143	235	241	149	95	48	30	3	944
East Midlands	188	160	139	83	53	29	18	1	672
London	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
North East	47	17	15	12	8	6	3	0	109
North West	148	110	98	66	43	23	16	1	506
South East	97	216	383	313	220	139	115	15	1,496
South West	167	247	249	185	132	71	43	4	1,099
West Midlands	69	88	90	57	43	25	17	2	390
Yorkshire and the Humber	106	95	90	58	41	2[illegible]	13	1	426
1998									
England	5,242	3,918	4,405	3,017	1,862	976	707	106	20,233
Designated rural authorities by region									
East of England	145	236	243	152	97	50	30	3	956
East Midlands	190	161	141	85	55	30	18	2	681
London	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Number of chargeable dwellings in "rural" local authorities from 1993 to 2001

Thousand

	Band A	*Band B*	*Band C*	*Band D*	*Band E*	*Band F*	*Band G*	*Band H*	*Total*
North East	47	17	15	12	9	6	4	0	110
North West	149	110	99	66	44	24	16	1	510
South East	99	217	385	315	222	141	116	15	1,509
South West	168	249	251	188	135	72	44	4	1,111
West Midlands	79	104	103	68	51	30	19	2	456
Yorkshire and the Humber	107	96	91	59	41	22	13	1	430
1999									
England	5,248	3,942	4,430	3,049	1,888	993	717	108	20,374
Designated rural authorities by region									
East of England	146	238	245	154	99	51	31	3	967
East Midlands	191	163	142	87	56	31	19	2	690
London	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
North East	47	17	16	12	9	6	4	0	110
North West	150	111	99	67	45	24	16	1	514
South East	100	218	386	317	224	143	118	15	1,522
South West	170	251	253	190	137	73	44	4	1,122
West Midlands	80	105	103	69	53	31	20	2	461
Yorkshire and the Humber	107	97	91	60	42	22	14	1	434
2000									
England	5,296	3,972	4,462	3,086	1,918	1,012	729	110	20,586
Designated rural authorities by region									
East of England	149	240	247	157	101	52	32	3	981
East Midlands	193	165	144	90	59	32	19	2	703
London	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
North East	47	17	16	12	9	6	4	0	111
North West	151	111	100	68	46	25	17	1	520
South East	102	220	389	320	226	145	120	15	1,536
South West	172	253	256	192	140	74	45	4	1,137
West Midlands	81	105	104	70	54	31	20	2	467
Yorkshire and the Humber	109	97	92	61	43	23	14	1	440
2001									
England	5,295	3,991	4,487	3,117	1,947	1,028	740	112	20,717
Designated rural authorities by region									
East of England	150	242	248	159	103	53	32	3	990
East Midlands	194	166	145	92	61	33	20	2	713
London	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
North East	47	17	16	13	9	6	4	0	112
North West	152	112	101	69	47	25	17	1	525
South East	102	221	391	321	228	146	121	16	1,546
South West	173	255	258	195	142	76	46	4	1,149
West Midlands	81	106	104	70	54	32	21	2	471
Yorkshire and the Humber	109	98	93	62	44	24	14	1	445

Total figures are subject to rounding.

Local Education Authority Finance

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list for each Local Education Authority the formula spending share, expressed as the amount available for each pupil, in *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools for financial year 2003–04 and subsequent years for which data are available. [88637]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 13 January 2003]*: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 8 January 2003, *Official Report*, columns 231–33W.

London Mayor (Budget)

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what discussions he has had with the Mayor of London regarding his draft budget; and if he will make a statement. [90288]

Mr. Leslie: My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Mr. McNulty) has regular monthly meetings with the Mayor of London at which a wide range of topics are discussed.

Post Office Network

Ms Munn: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assistance he is giving to post offices in low income areas of cities. [90941]

Mr. McNulty: The £15 million Deprived Urban Post Office Fund was launched by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on 30 December 2002. It provides grants of up to £50,000 to sub-postmasters in the most deprived urban areas of England to modernise their branches as part of the Government's long-term drive to regenerate impoverished urban communities.

The grant can be used on new retail facilities, shop alterations or improved security. The aim is to reduce the risk of closure of those branches in deprived urban

areas, which are not closing as part of the Post Office Urban Network Reinvention scheme. In order to secure funding sub-postmasters will need to show that they are at risk of closure and that the grant will significantly reduce this risk.

More than 400 post office branches in the 10 per cent. most deprived wards without an alternative branch for more than a half a mile will be given priority under the fund. Initially only they will be able to apply for funding. After six months other post office branches in the 10 per cent. most deprived wards will be able to apply and after one year branches in the rest of the 20 per cent. will also become eligible.

Separate schemes have been announced for the rural network and the Welsh network, with schemes under development in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Prosecuting Authorities

Mr. Heald: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister in respect of what offences local authorities may act as prosecuting authorities; what decision-making procedures are used by local authorities in respect of charges; and if he will place in the Library the code for prosecutors and charging standards that is used. [88471]

Mr. Leslie: Local authorities may act as prosecuting authorities in respect of a very wide range of regulatory functions, such as trading standards and environmental health, and their own byelaws. In deciding whether to prosecute, authorities should have regard to the Crown Prosecution Service Code of Practice for Crown Prosecutors, which is already available in the Library of the House. In addition the Cabinet Office and the Local Government Association have drawn up an Enforcement Concordat for adoption by authorities and for some functions statutory Codes of Practice are in force.

Refuse Collection

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what proposals to introduce charging regions for refuse collection have been discussed by his Department as part of public service agreement framework negotiations with local authorities. [88707]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

Defra has successfully negotiated with local authorities more than 70 waste targets as part of the Local PSA framework. A number of local authorities have requested either the power to charge householders for refuse collection, or the power to charge for un-segregated waste at Civic Amenity sites. Defra have not been able to grant such powers due to legislative constraints.

The Cabinet Office's Strategy Unit has carried out a wide ranging review of waste policy and has now reported. One of its main recommendations was that local authorities that wished to take forward household incentive schemes to help reduce waste volumes and increase recycling should be allowed to do so. The Government is currently considering its response to that report.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Arson Attacks

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many Chief Constables Dertificates have been issued in the past 12 months in respect of arson attacks on, *(a)* Orange Halls, *(b)* premises owned by the Gaelic Athletic Association clubs, *(c)* Ancient Order of Hibernian's halls, *(d)* Roman Catholic chapels or halls, *(e)* Protestant churches or halls, *(f)* controlled school buildings and *(g)* maintained school buildings. [88380]

Jane Kennedy: The maintenance of records about Chief Constables Certificates was decentralised to the district command units upon their establishment on 1 April 2001. Therefore, an answer to the above question could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Back to School Grants

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the criteria are for application for Back to School grants administered by the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund. [87338]

Mr. Browne: The Back to School Grant was launched by the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund on 1 July this year and finished on 30 September. It was run as a pilot scheme and the directors of the Memorial Fund have not yet decided if it should run again next year.

The Back to School Grant was open to parents who had children aged 18 or under in full-time education living at home with them and who, as a result of the Troubles, had:

(a) lost either a parent, partner or child; or

(b) themselves have been injured; or

(c) become the primary carer for an immediate family member who has been injured;

and who were in receipt of one of the following benefits:

Income Support, Job Seekers Allowance (income based), Working Families Tax Credit, Disabled Persons Tax Credit or Housing Benefit.

Christmas Expenses

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many departmental Christmas cards he and his Ministers intend to send in 2002; how much these cards will cost *(a)* to buy, *(b)* to post and *(c)* in staff time to sign, address and place in envelopes; and if he will place in the Library a sample copy of the official Christmas card he has sent this year. [88104]

Jane Kennedy: The total number of Christmas cards sent by the Secretary of State and his Ministers is 3,480 at a cost of £2,582.56.

Of this total 1,623 were sent by first class post at a cost of £767.00.

1,857 were sent by the internal mail service, no cost incurred.

Approximately 20 hours was spent in staff time in undertaking this work (information previously held on Christmas card lists reduced the time spent on this exercise). The Secretary of State and his Ministers personally signed all cards.

A sample copy of the official 2002 Christmas cards will be placed in the Library.

Discrimination Cases

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discrimination cases involving Government Departments, non-departmental Government bodies and agencies were settled out of court in each of the last three years where confidentiality clauses were invoked. [84126]

Jane Kennedy: The number of discrimination cases involving Government departments, non-departmental government bodies and agencies which were settled out of court in each of the last three years where confidentiality clauses were evoked are shown in the table:

Financial year	*Number of Cases*
December 1999–2000	5
2000–01	14
2001–02	13

Domestic Violence

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on additional measures to tackle domestic violence in Northern Ireland. [84479]

Jane Kennedy: The PSNI have 35 Domestic Violence Liaison Officers who receive comprehensive training in domestic violence procedures. They support the front-line uniform response officers who are required to take decisive action at the scene of a domestic dispute. The PSNI are also working in partnership with other statutory and voluntary organisations undertaking research into a partnership approach to the problem of domestic violence.

Furthermore, the Northern Ireland Office is currently co-ordinating, on behalf of the Northern Ireland Departments, the development of a strategy to tackle violence against women in Northern Ireland. The strategy will look at a range of crimes where women are predominately the victim including domestic violence. Sexual crime and fear of crime will also be dealt with under the strategy. The tackling violence against women strategy will focus on improving prevention, protection and provision of service to women. The strategy is due for publication in spring 2003.

Although it is generally accepted that domestic violence is predominately directed towards women we must remember that men can also be sufferers. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety's Regional Forum on Domestic Violence has commissioned research into the experiences of 50 male sufferers of domestic violence. Discussion is ongoing with Queen's University about publication of the findings. The Forum will then consider whether additional steps need to be taken to help male sufferers specifically.

Elderly People (Services)

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what services each Department provides free of charge to those aged 65 and over in Northern Ireland. [87339]

Jane Kennedy: The Department of Agriculture's Agri-Food Development Service offers a comprehensive lifelong learning provision relevant to the agri-food industry and rural communities. Those working within the local agri-food industry and rural communities, including those aged 65 and over, may participate on a free of charge basis. A free collection service is provided to all farmers irrespective of age for fallen bovines aged over 24 months and fallen sheep to enable Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies (TSE) surveillance testing to be carried out.

Department of Culture Arts and Leisure (DCAL) does not directly deliver services on the ground. However, through its Agencies and NDPBs it does provide services to the public, etc. The following are offered free of charge—24 Museums offer free admission to all, including over 65s. And additionally, four charging museums have occasional days of free entry for senior citizens. The public library service which DCAL funds through the five Education and Library Boards offers Book loans, reference services and access to the internet free of charge for all users of the Public Library Service regardless of age. The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) offer free access to the archives held by PRONI regardless of age.

The Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) provided the following services free of charge to those aged 65 and over in Northern Ireland; Employment Services delivered through JobCentres and Jobs and Benefits offices Access to Work (NI) Employment Support Job Introduction Scheme New Deal ...for Disabled People New Deal 50+ Training for Work Worktrack Essential Skills for Living courses on offer at 34 learndirect Centres throughout Northern Ireland.

In addition to the services provided by the national health service that are free to everybody irrespective of age, Department of Health Social Services and Public Safety people aged 60 years and over are entitled to free prescriptions and eye-tests. The Home Help service is free to people aged 75 and over.

The Department of Environment (DOE) through the DVLNI provide driving licences free to those 70 and over in Northern Ireland.

The Department for Social Development (DSD) administers The Warm Homes and Warm Homes Plus schemes administered by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, and available to homeowners and those in private rented sector housing, are provided free of charge to everyone, regardless of age, in receipt of certain income and disability related benefits.

The Department for Regional Development (DRD) provides resources to enable public transport operators to offer free travel to persons aged 65 years and over.

Roads Services provides free travel for the over 65s on the Strangford to Portaferry ferry service and Air and Sea Ports Division funds such free travel on the Ballycastle to Rathlin ferry.

External Consultants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the total cost to his Department was of the use of external consultants in 2002. [90509]

Mr. Pearson: The total expenditure on use of consultants (including the Northern Ireland Office) for the financial year 2001–02 was £19,846,396.

Fire Authority

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether logbooks on all motor cars owned by the Fire Authority for Northern Ireland are completed in accordance with the undertakings in the Northern Ireland Assembly's Public Accounts Committee report on The Fire Authority for Northern Ireland: Fleet Management and reports on the 1998–99 and 1999–2000 accounts. [90183]

Mr. Browne: The Fire Authority introduced new vehicle logbooks for completion in respect of all Fire Authority cars from May 2002. However, on the advice of the Fire Brigades Union, officers are not fully completing the logbooks for all journeys undertaken. The Acting Chief Fire Officer is attempting to resolve this refusal to implement Fire Authority policy with the Fire Brigades Union.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many lifejackets were purchased by the Fire Authority for Northern Ireland in the six months to 1 January 2002; and how much of this consignment is available for use. [90184]

Mr. Browne: The Fire Authority for Northern Ireland purchased 160 lifejackets in the six months to 1 January 2002. Each of the 67 fire stations has been issued with two lifejackets with the remainder held in reserve until all training in the use of the lifejackets has been completed.

Former Prisoners (Payments)

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many former prisoners with terrorist convictions are receiving payments from Government agencies in remuneration for work carried out by them through legitimate community groups or community programmes. [89438]

Jane Kennedy: There are no centrally monitored records on this matter. Accordingly, this information can be obtained only at disproportionate costs.

Former RUC Officers

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many former RUC officers, who retired under the Patten severance package, have re-entered the Police Service of Northern Ireland. [86436]

Jane Kennedy: The Police Service of Northern Ireland has employed, through open competition, seven people as support staff members who previously retired as police officers under the voluntary severance scheme.

Golden Jubilee Medal

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what arrangements have been made by the Chief Constable for the distribution to his officers of the Golden Jubilee Medal awarded by Her Majesty the Queen. [88381]

Jane Kennedy: A total of 9,917 Police Service of Northern Ireland officers satisfy the qualifying criteria for the Golden Jubilee Medal.

The main distribution of these medals will commence early this year; first on a district command basis and then to officers based regionally and within HQ departments. Arrangements will also be made for the issue of medals to those who were eligible before leaving the Police Service and to the next of kin of eligible officers who have since deceased.

To date 521 medals have been issued. They were allocated in advance of the main distribution to facilitate officers participating in wreath-laying services connected with Remembrance Sunday.

Independent International Commission on Decommissioning

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much expenditure has been incurred by Her Majesty's Government in respect of travel by each member of the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning in each year since its formation. [83101]

Jane Kennedy: The Commission's travel costs are shared equally between the British and Irish Governments. The British Government's share of the costs, since 1998, has been as follows:

£

	Britain's share of costs
1998	81,542
1999	151,624
2000	173,389
2001	187,125
2002[1]	88,721
TOTAL	682,401

[1] Up to 31 October 2002

Memorial Fund

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what public funds have been allocated to the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund since its commencement. [87337]

Mr. Browne: To date the Government have allocated a total of £7,007,288 to the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund.

NHS University

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions he has had with

the Secretary of State for Health regarding the extension of the proposed NHS University to Northern Ireland. [90389]

Mr. Browne: I have been kept fully informed of plans to establish a university for the NHS (the NHSU).

NHSU has initially been developed with the Department of Health for the NHS in England although it is recognised that discussions will have to be held with other administrations on the scope of NHSU outside England. As a first step the NHSU Development Plan is being circulated to HPSS bodies and other interested parties here for comment. This process will inform decisions on how NHSU might be used to support lifelong learning for everyone involved in health and social care in Northern Ireland.

Ambulance Service

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on Northern Ireland ambulance sub-station emergency call out times. [90019]

Mr. Browne: Ambulance Service response times to emergency calls has improved significantly since sub-stations were introduced. For example, in the 12 months since the ambulance sub-station at Carrickfergus was opened in January 2002, the 8-minute response target was met in 45.3 per cent. of cases—against a target of 50 per cent.— while the 21-minute response target was met in 94.7 per cent. of cases—against a target of 95 per cent.

Police Service

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many vacancies exist at present for the post of Chief Inspector in the Police Service of Northern Ireland. [84138]

Jane Kennedy: Currently, the Police Service of Northern Ireland has sufficient officers in the rank of Chief Inspector to cover existing vacancies.

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many officers have been recruited to the PSNI under the 50:50 rule since its introduction; and how many have been recruited in each recruitment phase; [85686]

(2) how many police recruits from *(a)* the Roman Catholic population and *(b)* others have been recruited to the PSNI since its formation. [86444]

Jane Kennedy: As at 6 December 2002, 581 recruits, of whom 297 have declared themselves to be Catholic, and 284 non-Catholic, have been appointed to the PSNI. 305 appointments were made from Competition 1; and to date there have been 192 appointments from Competition 2 and 84 appointments from Competition 3. Further appointments from Competitions 2 and 3 have yet to be made.

While every effort is made to balance the total appointments from each competition on a 50:50 basis, the balance of appointments can be subject to some fluctuation between competitions. The appointments of a number of non-Catholic candidates from Competitions 2 and 3 have been deferred due to personal circumstances, and in some cases at the request of candidates themselves.

Police Widows

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what financial assistance the widow of a police officer who was killed in the line of duty will receive. [86654]

Jane Kennedy: The financial assistance awarded to the widows of police officers killed in the line of duty is governed by the RUC Pensions Regulations 1973 and 1988 and the RUC Injury Benefit Regulations 1988 which provide for the payment of a gratuity and a pension.

Prior to 25 November 1982 the gratuity was two × average pensionable pay (APP). The APP was averaged over three years. From 25 November 1982 the gratuity was five × annual rate of pay or four × total remuneration, whichever is the lower, plus two × maximum pay of a constable in the London Metropolitan less 1¼ APP.

The widow's pension awarded is the rate of pay plus rent allowance less child allowance for the first 13 weeks. Thereafter, the pension is 50 per cent. of APP. Child allowance is 10 per cent. of APP per child up to a maximum of 40 per cent.

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many RUC widows have been widowed as a result of terrorist activity in Northern Ireland since 1973; and how much money has been distributed to RUC widows since 1973. [86652]

Jane Kennedy: Police Service of Northern Ireland records indicate that 224 awards have been paid as a result of officers being killed in the line of duty as a direct result of terrorist activity. The total amount of money distributed in respect of these 224 awards could be calculated only at disproportionate cost.

The above awards would not take into account the £4.2 million paid by Government to those RUC widows whose husbands were killed by terrorists prior to 25 November 1982, or any subsequent payments made to RUC widows by the Police Fund.

Policing Board

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what arrangements are made for publishing the proceedings of the Policing Board; and on what date minutes of proceedings were placed on the Policing Board website in each month since the formation of the board. [84209]

Jane Kennedy: This is a matter for the Policing Board. I have written to the Chief executive and asked that he respond direct to my hon. Friend.

Provisional IRA

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of Provisional IRA activity along the roads of south Armagh; and what action he intends to take. [84458]

Jane Kennedy: The Government do not comment on intelligence assessments. The Secretary of State continues to make judgments on ceasefires, taking account of all the relevant factors, but it has been made plain that there must be an end to all paramilitary activity, including training, targeting and punishment attacks.

Until terrorism has been set aside in favour of totally democratic and peaceful means, Government will maintain an appropriate security response to protect all the people of Northern Ireland.

RUC Officers (Dependants)

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assistance is available to dependants of ex-RUC officers murdered by terrorists. [84518]

Jane Kennedy: The RUC Benevolent Fund, the Police Dependants Trust and the Northern Ireland Police Fund are in a position to provide financial assistance to the families of ex-police officers murdered as a direct result of terrorism. In addition to financial support, PSNI Welfare Services and the Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust can provide emotional and counselling support.

Dependants of ex-officers murdered may also apply to the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund, an independent charity largely funded by Government that provides financial assistance and grants to victims of the Troubles in Northern Ireland.

RUC Officers (Remembrance)

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans there are to ensure that ex-RUC officers murdered by terrorists are recognised *(a)* on police memorials and *(b)* in the Book of Remembrance. [84519]

Jane Kennedy: The majority of memorials erected locally within police stations, and the Book of Remembrance at PSNI HQ Brooklyn, commemorate the death of serving police officers as a result of terrorist activity. There are no plans to include ex-officers in these memorials. Ex-officers will however be named on the planned memorial to be erected within the RUC George Cross Garden of Remembrance at PSNI HQ Brooklyn.

Scheduled Offences

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* juveniles and *(b)* adults have been charged with offences arising out of civil disturbances in (i) north Belfast, (ii) east Belfast and (iii) Northern Ireland in the current year. [86643]

Jane Kennedy: The table provides details of the number of persons charged between 1 January and 30 November 2002 with specific offences relating to disorderly/riotous behaviour/throwing of petrol bombs.

Security situation statistics: Persons charged with specific offences relating to disorderly/riotous behaviour/throwing of petrol bombs—1 January 2002–30 November 2002

Age Group	*Belfast North DCU*	*Belfast East DCU*	*Northern Ireland*
Under 17 years	10	2	13
Age 17 years and over	32	15	82

Notes:

Juveniles are classified as being 16 years and under.

The above figures are provisional and may be subject to minor adjustment.

Secondary Education

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made on the formation of parental consultation bodies to consider the Burns proposals for secondary education. [88788]

Jane Kennedy: I want to hear the views of parents on the responses to the Burns consultation and on the next stages of the post-primary review. A sample of schools, drawn from all sectors and management types across the five education and library boards, (a copy of which has been placed in the Library) have each been asked to nominate a parent to meet with my officials in mid-January to give their views on these issues. This follows the process used by CCEA in its consultation on the Curriculum Review.

Security (North Belfast)

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when steps will be taken to provide increased security measures at the Ardoyne road interface in North Belfast. [86645]

Jane Kennedy: Sectarian violence in North Belfast is constantly monitored by both NIO and PSNI and, in response to this, security measures are kept under continual review. A 3 m high extension has been completed to the security fence that runs along the Alliance avenue/Glenbryn park interface, bringing the total height to 9 m. Also, in addition to the CCTV camera already in place at the junction of Ardoyne road/Alliance avenue, the PSNI are currently installing two new cameras at Berwick road and Etna drive.

I am confident that these measures will not only bring some respite to local residents, who suffer most as a result of sectarian violence, but will also assist police both in terms of efficiently deploying resources and effecting arrests.

SPED Applications

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* police officers and *(b)* prison

officers have applied for the Scheme for the Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings in Northern Ireland in the current year; how many have been successful; and what the total cost was in each case. [86620]

Jane Kennedy: From 1 April 2002 175 prison officers have applied for SPED, and to date 112 have been accepted on to the scheme. Within the Police Service of Northern Ireland. 126 officers have applied for SPED and 107 have been accepted.

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE), operates the SPED scheme. Under the scheme, if the Chief Constable issues a certificate confirming that a threat or intimidation is real, this is sufficient for the NIHE to invoke the scheme. Therefore, the NIHE do not know the background of cases. Up to 12 December the NIHE have had 433 applications at a total cost of £22.213 million.

Voter Identification

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what his estimate is of the number of persons removed from the electoral roll in each constituency following legislation on voter identification; what percentage of the electorate this represents; and what the ratio is between the reduction within each constituency and the size of the electoral majority of the sitting hon. Member. [86018]

Mr. Browne: The Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 requires an application for voter registration in Northern Ireland to be signed by, include the date of birth, and the national insurance number (or a statement that the applicant does not have a national insurance number) of, each of the persons to whom the form or application relates. Applicants are also required to make a statement that they have been resident in Northern Ireland for the requisite three-month period before the date of their application and to state any other address in the United Kingdom in respect of which they are, or have applied to be, registered. The Chief Electoral Officer is required to remove a person's name from the Electoral Register if their application does not contain any of the above information. These changes came into effect at the Annual Canvass conducted on 15 October 2002. The new Electoral Register was published on 29 November 2002.

132,000 fewer names appeared on the 29 November Electoral Register than appeared on the previous register of 15 August. Anyone among that 132,000 who is eligible to be registered will be able to do so via Rolling Registration before the next scheduled Assembly election on 1 May 2003.

The figures in the attached table have been provided by the Chief Electoral Officer and are available on the Electoral Office website: www.electoralofficeni.gov.uk .

Parliamentary constituency	*Number of persons removed from the Electoral Register in each Parliamentary constituency following 2002 annual canvass*	*Percentage of previously registered electors this represents*	*Size of electoral majority at General Election on 7 June 2001*
Belfast East	6,637	11.53	7,117
Belfast North	9,434	15.9	6,387
Belfast South	10,084	16.98	5,399
Belfast West	10,970	18.56	19,342
East Antrim	6,452	10.57	128
East Londonderry	5,564	9.12	1,901
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	5,440	7.95	53
Foyle	9,492	13.13	11,550
Lagan Valley	7,510	10.22	18,342
Mid Ulster	4,606	7.26	9,9[illegible]
North Antrim	6,222	8.19	14,224
North Down	6,968	10.96	7,324
Newry and Armagh	7,647	10.27	3,575
South Antrim	8,427	11.91	1,011
South Down	7,205	9.54	13,858
Strangford	7,248	9.95	1,110
Upper Bann	6,763	9.1	2,058
West Tyrone	5,533	8.92	5,040

Weston Park Commitments

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which political parties gave commitments at Weston Park in respect of the new Northern Ireland policing legislation and on other proposals presented. [86454]

Jane Kennedy: The agreement at Weston Park was that between two Governments. Together with the Irish Government, we published, on 1 August 2001, our joint proposals on four areas—policing, normalisation, the stability of the institutions and decommissioning—together with a draft statement which the parties would issue in the event that the overall package was acceptable. In the event not all the parties accepted those proposals.

All the changes to the policing legislation that the Government had undertaken to consider in the context of the review of policing arrangements were set out in the updated Patten Implementation Plan, published on 17 August 2001.

MINISTER FOR WOMEN

Women Prisoners

23. **Mr. Breed:** To ask the Minister for Women what recent discussions she has had with the Home Secretary regarding the treatment of women prisoners. [91062]

Ms Hewitt: I have had no recent discussions with my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary regarding the treatment of women prisoners.

Equal Pay

24. **Andrew Selous:** To ask the Minister for Women what recent representations she has received about the gender pay gap. [91063]

Ms Hewitt: I have received no representations in the last three months on the gender pay gap.

Julie Morgan: To ask the Minister for Women what plans she has to reduce the pay gap between women and men. [91059]

Ms Hewitt: The causes of the gender pay gap are complex. The Government have set in place a number of measures designed to tackle them. The Employment Act 2002 when it comes into force in April 2003, for example, will introduce an equal pay questionnaire and measures to help mothers stay attached to the labour market.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Manufacturing Productivity

7. **Mr. MacDougall**: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, what plans her Department has to increase the UK's manufacturing productivity levels; and if she will make a statement. [90938]

Alan Johnson: Manufacturing matters hugely to the prosperity of the UK. But we know that our manufacturing productivity levels here in the UK are significantly lower than in some of our competitor nations. That is why this Government have focused the spotlight on manufacturing productivity through the Manufacturing Strategy it published last May, the first by any Government since the 1970s.

Post Office

15. **Mr. Webb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what payment will be made to sub-postmasters who make payments from *(a)* a high street bank account, *(b)* a universal bank account and *(c)* a post office card account. [90947]

Mr. Timms: Remuneration for sub-postmasters is a commercial matter between the Post Office and the sub-postmasters.

16. **Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she last met the chairman of Postwatch to discuss the availability of post office card accounts and the Post Office Reinvention Programme. [90948]

Mr. Timms: DTI Ministers and officials have regular contact with Postwatch to discuss a range of issues concerning postal services.

19. **Mr. Prisk:** To ask to Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the future of the post office network. [90951]

Mr. Timms: The Government remain fully committed to maintaining a nationwide network of post offices and is investing very substantial sums in supporting the modernisation of the network in line with the PIU report's recommendations.

Energy White Paper

17. **Mr. Russell Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she expects to publish the energy White Paper. [90949]

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will publish the energy white paper. [90950]

Mr. Wilson: The Government expects to publish energy White Paper shortly.

Arms Sales

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry What has been the cost to public funds in the last financial year of arms sales financed by ECGD payments. [90946]

Nigel Griffiths: ECGD charges premium for all its business, regardless of sector, at a level which reflects its assessment of the risks involved and is sufficient to meet the financial criteria set by Ministers. For defence business in 2001–02, ECGD paid claims of £125 million which were in respect of guarantees issued before this period. ECGD has paid no claims on defence business underwritten since May 1997.

Belfast City Airport

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will refer to the Competition Commission a bid to take over Belfast City airport. [91342]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Under the Fair Trading Act 1973 a merger qualifies for investigation if it creates or enhances a 25 per cent. share of supply in the UK or a substantial part of the UK, or if the gross value of the worldwide assets being taken over is more than £70 million.

In the first instance it is for the Director General of Fair Trading to advise Ministers on whether or not a qualifying merger should be referred to the Competition Commission.

Child Care Tax Credit

Sir Archy Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) who will conduct the review into the childcare tax credit; what the review's terms of reference are; whether the results of the review will *(a)* be published and *(b)* be made available in the Library; and if she will make a statement; [90770]

(2) whether the review into the childcare tax credit will *(a)* look at extending the scope of the credit and *(b)* examine regional and national differences in the take-up of childcare tax credit; [90771]

(3) if she will make a statement on the difficulties involved in making an estimate of the number of parents eligible but not claiming the childcare tax credit. [90772]

Dawn Primarolo: I have been asked to reply.

As announced in the joint report released by DTI and Treasury on 14 January, "Balancing Work and Family Life: Enhancing Choice and Support for Parents" the Government are committed to keeping under review how well support for child care costs within tax credits is working, in particular, the effect that the increased flexibility has on the ability of parents to adjust their child care requirements to suit their needs. Clearly the new system will need to be in place for a period of time before consideration can be made of the effects of the new more flexible system.

In order to qualify for childcare tax credit, parents have to satisfy two requirements. Firstly they must qualify for WFTC working more than 16 hours per week with a family income below the eligible maximum. Secondly they have to be using registered child care and if you have a partner he or she must also be working more than 16 hours. Because of the difficulties in identifying the people meeting these criteria and the constantly changing profile of recipients, it is difficult to estimate the number of parents eligible but not claiming the childcare tax credit.

Consumer Credit Act

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on what conclusions she has reached as part of her Department's review of the Consumer Credit Act 1974 with respect to the questions of *(a)* how credit card annual percentage rates are calculated and *(b)* whether there is a case for reform of the statutory rules. [90030]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 13 January 2003]:* A review of the Consumer Credit Act was announced in July 2001. To date, consultation papers have been published on the financial limits in the Act and the agreements that are exempt from its control; the early settlement of consumer credit agreements; and the conclusion of agreements by electronic means.

Taking the review forward, I will shortly be consulting on changes to the licensing system and to provisions on extortionate credit.

ELGAR IT

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the *(a)* purchase cost, *(b)* installation cost and *(c)* annual operating costs since its installation were of the ELGAR IT system; and if she will make a statement. [88834]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested cannot be provided as pricing information about the ELGAR contract is Commercial in Confidence and is therefore subject to exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on access to Government Information.

Energy Options

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the latest position on research, demonstration and development expenditure on energy options and institutions. [90238]

Mr. Wilson: The latest available figures (2001–02) for direct Government expenditure on research, demonstration and development are as follows:

	£ million
Renewables	11
Nuclear fusion	14.3
Meteorological Office emergency response arrangements	2.1
Clean coal	4.1
Combined heat and power	2.4

Notes:

1. Of DTI's total spend on nuclear R&D given above, £14.3 million was on fusion research and £2.1 million in support of Meteorological Office emergency response arrangements. Expenditure on nuclear R&D by public sector bodies is set out in their annual reports and accounts and could not be provided in the manner requested without disproportionate cost.
2. The table sets out identified Government spend and excludes, for example, spending by research councils, which could not be separated in the manner requested without disproportionate cost.
3. DTI's New and Renewable Energy R&D programme also includes support for activities which are not technology specific, for example, export, commercialisation, marketing and international activities.
4. In 2001, payment appropriations from EC Budget to Euratom were 209 million euros and to the European Commission's Joint Research Centre 249.7 million euros.
5. UK payments to the International Atomic Energy Agency in 2002 were as follows:

IAEA Regular budget subscription—£6,261,011
IAEA Technical co-operation fund—£2,525,046.

Energy Review

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the involvement of DEFRA in the energy review; and if she will make a statement. [90791]

Mr. Wilson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is a Member of the Cabinet Committee, DA(N), which is overseeing the energy review and the team who are undertaking the detailed work includes a number of officials drawn from DEFRA.

Engineering Construction Industry

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, what measures she proposes to tackle skill shortages in the engineering construction industry. [90945]

Mr. Wilson: DTI is working with the Engineering Construction Industry Training Board (the statutory body for the industry) and other key players in the sector to address skills shortages and other related issues. We have helped:

Establish a working group to help identify and address key skills gaps.

Part-fund and Engineering Construction Industry Training Board (ECITB) study into the feasibility for a national level

competence assessment scheme for the engineering construction industry.

Support an audit of adult basic skills needs in the sector.

Fair Trade

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what fair trade criteria she sets when deciding upon what suppliers to use. [89913]

Ms Hewitt: It is government policy to promote fair trade products, against the background of the need to obtain best value for money, the EC procurement rules and the Department's objectives. Within these guidelines the Department and its Agencies are committed to supporting ethical trading wherever possible. For example, the Department's Catering Contractor to its London Restaurants makes available fair trade tea and coffee to staff.

Foreign Direct Investment

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the United Kingdom's position is in the EU league table of stock of foreign direct investment; and if she will make a statement. [88880]

Nigel Griffiths: Latest UNCTAD figures confirm the UK's ranking as Europe's top investment location in the stock of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) with $496,776 million and that we are second only to the USA in the world. Latest Office for National Statistics (ONS) figures also show that FDI stock in the UK in the third quarter of 2002 was at a record level of £390.6 billion, an increase of £25.1 billion or 7 per cent. over the same quarter in 2001. These figures are a clear vote of confidence in the UK's business conditions.

The Government are determined to see the UK remain the top location in Europe for inward investment and will continue to pursue economic policies which will enhance the UK's attractions including lasting economic stability, open markets and a pro-business environment.

Illegal Working Practices

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the Government are doing to combat illegal working practices and how many companies have been prosecuted since 1997 for such practices. [85385]

Malcolm Wicks: I have been asked to reply.

The Department for Work and Pensions is focusing increasingly on fraud where dishonest employers abuse the system, for example by not paying national insurance contributions or by paying artificially low wages to workers who continue to claim out-of-work benefits.

We have put in place a programme targeting these employers and have specialist teams working together with the Inland Revenue and HM Customs and Excise to tackle employer fraud, including Joint Shadow Economy Teams. In addition we have since 1 May 2002 had powers under the Fraud Act to impose a financial penalty on employers who abuse the system instead of prosecuting them. This new power, together with the work we are doing jointly with the taxation Departments, marks a step change in our approach to those employers who would collude with their employees in cheating the tax or benefit systems.

Information on the number of employers prosecuted specifically for collusion is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Medical Advisers

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many medical advisers are employed in her Department; where they are located; and if she will make a statement. [88835]

Ms Hewitt: My Department does not directly employ any medical advisers. Occupational health advice is provided under contract by an external supplier.

Miners' Compensation

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what criteria are used to determine the payment of compensation to former miners suffering from *(a)* respiratory disease and *(b)* vibration white finger. [90279]

Mr. Wilson: The criteria for eligibility for compensation for respiratory disease and vibration white finger (VWF) are detailed in the High Court judgements handed down against British Coal in 1998 and 1997 respectively. These criteria formed the basis of the Claims Handling Agreement, which were subsequently negotiated with the solicitors acting for the claimants.

Former miners and their families are entitled to compensation if the claimant is found to be suffering from respiratory disease caused by his exposure to mine dust and fumes while employed underground after 4 June 1954, the date of liability. For VWF former miners and their families are entitled to compensation if the claimant is found to be suffering from VWF caused by his being employed in an occupational group whereby exposure to vibratory tools was substantial or significant after 1975.

New Export System

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many annual transactions in *(a)* 2001 and *(b)* 2002 could have been covered by the New Export System procedures; and how many are expected to be covered in (i) 2003 and (ii) 2004. [89131]

John Healey: I have been asked to reply.

The total of export declaration transactions in 2001 was 4.5 million and the total for 2002 was also 4.5 million. All of the export declaration transactions made during 2001–02 could have been handled by the New Export System (NES) had the system been in place

at that time. It is estimated that 4.5 to 5 million export declaration transactions will be processed in 2003 and the same in 2004 providing there are no major changes to current pattern in UK exports.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what regulatory impact assessment has been carried out of the New Export System; and what the estimated annual costs are to business. [89133]

John Healey: I have been asked to reply.

The implementation of the New Export System (NES) has required no new regulations, just new procedures and therefore no regulatory impact assessment has been required. There are, however, compliance rules for exporters who choose to use simplified procedures for export declarations. These procedures have been widely publicised and are documented on HMCE website.

There is no estimate of annual costs to business as a whole as the cost will depend on how each exporter has chosen to implement NES and any savings offset as a result of a reduction in paper handling.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she has taken to co-ordinate the introduction of the New Export System with comparable measures in the EU countries. [89134]

John Healey: I have been asked to reply.

Although regular liaison and exchange of information takes place with other member states on all international trade matters, there is no joint initiative to implement New Export System (NES) across the EU. However, several other member states have or will be implementing electronic export declarations and others have taken an active interest in the UK implementation of NES. NES is also fully compliant with EU regulations.

Nuclear Accident

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her Department's role is in the event of a nuclear accident. [90230]

Mr. Wilson: DTI would be the lead Government Department in the event of an emergency at a civil nuclear site in England or Wales and would be responsible for co-ordinating the response to the emergency at the national level. In Scotland, this responsibility would fall to the Scottish Executive.

As lead Department, DTI would set up its Nuclear Emergency Briefing Room in London to liaise closely with all relevant local and national agencies and departments, and co-ordinate necessary action at national level; be the main source of information from central Government to the public and media; alert the UK's international partners; brief Ministers on the emergency; and appoint a Government Technical Adviser (GTA) from HM Nuclear Installations Inspectorate to advise the police and emergency services on measures to protect the public. DTI would work closely with the Scottish Executive which has parallel arrangements for an emergency in Scotland. DTI Ministers would report to the Houses of Parliament in respect of an emergency at any civil nuclear site in the UK.

DTI participates in the regular programme of off-site nuclear exercises held for all nuclear sites to help maintain constant readiness and, through the lessons of those exercises, seek improvements.

Nuclear Installations (Consequence Management)

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the major programme of activities to reduce vulnerabilities and strengthen the arrangements for consequence management at nuclear installations. [90315]

Mr. Wilson: The Department is working with the Health and Safety Executive's Nuclear Installations Inspectorate and the civil nuclear industry to both identify and reduce vulnerabilities and strengthen arrangements for consequence management. It is not Government policy to discuss details of security arrangements at civil nuclear sites.

Oil Reserves

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what has been the annual global *(a)* production and *(b)* consumption of oil each year since 1997. [90786]

Mr. Wilson: Estimates of global production of crude oil and natural gas liquids together with estimates for global oil demand are produced by the International Energy Agency and are given in the following table.

Million metric tonnes

Year	*World production of crude oil and natural gas liquids*	*World oil demand*
1997	3,464	3,393
1998	3,532	3,419
1999	3,456	3,474
2000	3,585	3,516
2001	3,579	3,519

Source:
International Energy Agency (Oil Information 2002)

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what has been the average *(a)* gross and *(b)* net price received per barrel of oil extracted from the UK section of the North Sea in each year since 1974; and what the average price of oil per barrel was on the world market in each of those years. [90792]

Mr. Wilson: The DTI surveys which collect data giving the average price received per barrel of oil extracted from the UK were begun only in 1976. The prices from these surveys have been converted to $/barrel and are shown in the table against the spot prices of the three major world benchmark crudes. The prices shown are gross; prices net of costs and taxes/royalties cannot be estimated because data restricted to oil production are unavailable.

Crude Oil Prices 1976–2001

	Average UK price received		Spot marker prices			
	£/tonne	$/bbl[1]	Brent $/barrel[2]	Dubai $/barrel[3]	West Texas intermediate $/barrel[4]	Exchange rate $/£
1976	55.0	13.2	12.8	11.6	12.2	1.80
1977	59.4	13.8	13.9	12.4	14.2	1.75
1978	53.2	13.6	14.0	13.0	14.6	1.92
1979	73.7	20.9	31.6	29.8	25.1	2.12
1980	111.9	34.7	36.8	35.7	38.0	2.33
1981	138.3	37.3	35.9	34.3	36.1	2.03
1982	142.0	33.1	33.0	31.8	33.7	1.75
1983	148.3	30.0	29.6	28.8	30.3	1.52
1984	164.9	29.4	28.7	28.1	29.4	1.34
1985	158.3	27.4	27.5	27.5	28.0	1.30
1986	73.3	14.3	14.4	13.0	15.0	1.47
1987	81.7	17.9	18.4	16.9	19.2	1.64
1988	63.4	15.0	15.0	13.2	16.0	1.78
1989	81.0	17.7	18.2	15.7	19.7	1.64
1990	94.6	22.5	23.8	20.5	24.5	1.79
1991	86.0	20.3	20.0	16.6	21.5	1.77
1992	83.4	19.6	19.4	17.2	20.6	1.77
1993	85.8	17.2	17.1	14.9	18.4	1.50
1994	77.0	15.7	16.0	14.8	17.2	1.53
1995	81.1	17.1	17.2	16.1	18.4	1.58
1996	96.9	20.2	20.8	18.6	22.2	1.56
1997	87.4	19.1	19.3	18.1	20.6	1.64
1998	60.0	13.3	13.1	12.2	14.4	1.66
1999	80.0	17.3	18.3	17.3	19.3	1.62
2000	138.0	27.9	29.0	26.2	30.4	1.52
2001	125.6	24.1	24.8	22.8	25.9	1.44

Notes:
1. Assuming 1 tonne = 7.5 barrels
2. 1976–1984 Forties, 1985–2001 Brent
3. 1972–1985 Arabian Light, 1986–2001 Dubai
4. 1976–1983 Posted WTI prices, 1984–2001 Spot WTI prices

Sources:
UK price received: DTI PQ1100 Quarterly Enquiry and preceding surveys.
Spot marker prices: BP Statistical Review of World Energy (2002).
Exchange rate: ONS.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of *(a)* the quantity of oil in the world that remains unextracted and *(b)* how long this will last at present rates of extraction. [90787]

Mr. Wilson: The International Energy Agency (IEA) estimates that proven global reserves of conventional crude oil and natural gas liquids are 959 billion barrels. In addition, the IEA estimates undiscovered resources of conventional crude oil and natural gas liquids to be 939 billion barrels and recoverable non-conventional reserves, such as oil shales, to be 580 billion barrels. In their 2002 publication World Energy Outlook, the IEA commented that resources of conventional crude oil and natural gas liquids are adequate to meet the projected increase in demand to 2030, although new discoveries will be needed to renew reserves.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much oil has been extracted from the UK section of the North Sea in each year since 1974; and what the estimated total left unextracted is. [90789]

Mr. Wilson: Information on offshore UK production of crude oil and natural gas liquids is provided in the table.

Year	Million tonnes
1974	0.3
1975	1.5
1976	12.1
1977	38.2
1978	53.9
1979	77.6
1980	80.2
1981	89.2
1982	103.0
1983	114.6
1984	125.7
1985	127.2
1986	126.6
1987	122.8
1988	113.7
1989	91.0
1990	89.8
1991	87.6
1992	90.3
1993	96.5
1994	121.9
1995	124.8
1996	124.5
1997	123.3
1998	127.3
1999	132.8
2000	123.0
2001	113.8

As at the end of 2001, oil reserves on the United Kingdom Continental Shelf (including onshore and outside the North Sea) were estimated to range between 605 and 1,430 million tonnes for remaining reserves in existing discoveries and between 205 and 1,930 million tonnes in potential future discoveries.

Nuclear Power

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many of the nuclear power stations proposed to be built under the new nuclear programme will be built in Scotland. [90760]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 14 January 2003]*: There is no such programme. Development consent for any new nuclear power station in Scotland would be a matter for Scottish Ministers, if such a proposal should arise.

REPPIR

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much each local council is expected to spend on implementing REPPIR; how much each local council has spent on formulating their latest REPPIR plan; how much each local council has spent on acquiring the necessary equipment; and what stocks of equipment each REPPIR council has. [90231]

Mr. Wilson: Information about the expenditure local authorities have incurred in complying with the Radiation (Emergency Preparedness and Public Information) Regulations 2001 (REPPIR) is not collected by the Health and Safety Executive who enforce the Regulations and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

To date, off-site plans under REPPIR have been identified as necessary for all sites licensed under the Nuclear Installations Act 1965 and certain Ministry of Defence sites. REPPIR allows local authorities to charge site operators for their costs in preparing, reviewing, revising and testing off-site plans and has formalised local arrangements that existed for many nuclear sites prior to the Regulations coming into force. I would not expect the additional costs to local authorities of complying with REPPIR to be significant.

Waste Recycling

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much her Department has allocated for waste recycling projects undertaken by *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* non-profit making organisations and *(c)* industry in financial years (i) 2002–03 and (ii) 2003–04. [90451]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 13 January 2003]*: My Department has allocated £7 million for financial year 2002–03 and £7.7 million for 2003–04. The majority of this is industrially linked R&D support, particularly through the Department's contribution to the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP). DTI has not allocated specific budgets to local authority or non-profit making organisation projects.

HEALTH

Consultants

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many consultants on the register of the General Medical Council are over 60, broken down by nation and region; and what the figures were in each of the last five years. [90758]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 14 January 2003]*: The General Medical Council (GMC) holds limited, but not historical, information. According to the GMC, as of 13 January 2003, there were 43,375 doctors in the United Kingdom on the GMC Register who were also on the specialist register. Of these 4,758 were aged 60 or over.

Diabetes

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are suffering from diabetes in each health authority in the UK. [90038]

Mr. Lammy: I regret that this information is not available in the format requested. However, an estimated 1.3 million people in England have diagnosed diabetes. A population of 100,000 would be expected to include between 2,000 and 3,000 people with diabetes.

Accident and Emergency Departments

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what evidence he has collated on the effect that changing the name of hospital accident and emergency departments will have on the frequency that they are used; and if he will publish it; [91209]

(2) if he will make a statement on the Dott plan to rename accident and emergency departments in hospitals; and to what he proposes to change their name; [91206]

(3) what estimate he has made of the cost of renaming hospital accident and emergency departments. [91208]

Mr. Lammy: The Department of Health has no plans to change the name of accident and emergency departments and has therefore made no estimate of the costs or effect of doing so. We understand the British association of accident and emergency medicine (BAEM) and faculty of accident and emergency medicine (FAEM) are balloting their members on a proposal to change the name of the specialty to emergency medicine. We will consider the views of the BAEM and FAEM when they have reported them to the Department.

Drug Addicts

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many registered drug addicts there were in the *(a)* Twickenham constituency, *(b)* London borough of Richmond upon Thames and *(c)* London in each year since 1995; and if he will make a statement. [88830]

Mr. Hutton: Following the closure of the Home Office Addicts Index in 1997, the regional drug misuse databases were the main source of information on persons presenting to drug treatment services with a

drug problem. Information is available by health authority and regional office area and is shown in the following table:

Number of users reported as presenting for treatment for drug misuse in Kingston and Richmond health authority and the London regional office area, April 1995 to March 2001

Six month period ending	*Kingston and Richmond health authority*	*London regional office area*
September 1995	207	5,727
March 1996	201	5,867
September 1996	235	5,690
March 1997	219	5,684
September 1997	143	4,057
March 1998	137	4,292
September 1998	157	6,564
March 1999	164	5,748
September 1999	195	6,294
March 2000	244	6,713
September 2000	225	6,626
March 2001	247	6,730

Notes:

1. Reporting to the Regional Drug Misuse Databases was voluntary; changes in numbers of users presenting may, at least in part, be due to changes in reporting practice.
2. Following NHS reorganisation in 2002, Kingston and Richmond health authority became part of the South West London Strategic Health Authority.

Source:

The Department of Health series of Statistical Bulletins "Statistics from the Regional Drug Misuse Databases. Bulletins for the six months ending March 1998 onwards are available on the internet at http://www.doh.gov.uk/public/work public health.htm#SDD

Drug Rehabilitation

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many drug rehabilitation places are available to registered drug addicts in the *(a)* Twickenham constituency, *(b)* London Borough of Richmond upon Thames and *(c)* London; how many registered drug addicts in the (i) Twickenham constituency, (ii) London Borough of Richmond upon Thames and (iii) London are receiving (A) rehabilitation and (B) other forms of drug treatment; and if he will make a statement. [88829]

Mr. Hutton: Information is not available in the form requested. In the case of residential rehabilitation, places are often purchased at a residential centre that may be outside the drug misusers area of residence. In practice some local authority social services departments agree to fund long distance placements with the agreement of the drug misusers so he/she can be removed from the area where they are involved in drug using. This means that in theory all of the approximately 3,100 residential rehabilitation places for drug and alcohol misusers in England are available to drug misusers resident in Twickenham and other parts of London. However, purchasing decisions are a matter for agreement between the drug misusers and the local agencies.

A one off exercise was carried out to estimate the number of drug users in England in contact with drug treatment agencies in 2000–01. Around of 27,400 individuals were reported to be in contact with drug treatment agencies in London; of these, 142 were reported as being in treatment at community specialist services in the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames. A statistical bulletin "Statistics from the Regional Drug Misuse Databases on drug misusers in treatment in England, 2000/01" was published in December 2001, and is available on the Department of Health website at, http://www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0133.htm

Foundation Trusts

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how frequently an NHS foundation trust will be required to review its constitution. [91106]

Mr. Hutton: Subject to legislation, the constitution of a national health service foundation trust will be set on establishment. There will be no requirement on NHS foundation trusts to review the constitution.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how representatives from the employee membership will be elected to the board of governors of a foundation trust; whether there will be provision for different grades of staff to be represented; and what role staff trade unions will play in the process. [91107]

Mr. Hutton: It will be up to national health service foundation trusts, and NHS foundation trust applicants, to arrange elections to suite local circumstances and ensure a proper balance on the Board of Governors as set out in paragraphs 2.25–2.28 of "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts".

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received on the possibility of all employees of a foundation trust being given automatic membership of the trust; and for what reasons he has decided that employees must register for membership. [91108]

Mr. Hutton: The Department has not received any representations on this issue. Subject to legislation, all employees, defined as people who have a permanent contract, or a fixed term contract longer than 12 months, will be eligible to become members if they choose as set out in paragraphs 2.6–2.10 of "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts". It will be up to individual national health service foundation trusts to decide whether they want staff membership to be automatic.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether an employee of a foundation trust who is a registered member of the trust will be able to retain membership rights after leaving the trust's employment. [91109]

Mr. Hutton: Subject to legislation, membership will be open to employees after leaving the national health service foundation trust's employment if they meet the eligibility criteria set by the NHS foundation trust in line with paragraphs 2.6–2.9 of "A Guide to NHS Foundation Trusts".

Free Health Checks

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the cost of restoring free *(a)* dental and *(b)* eye examinations to (i) all adults, (ii) those over 65, (iii) those over 60 and (iv) those over 55; and if he will make a statement. [89555]

Mr. Lammy: About a quarter of dental examinations carried out on adults in the general dental service have either no patient charge, or else the patient pays a reduced charge. It is estimated that making dental examinations free to adults would reduce patient charge revenue in England by:

Adults	*Reduction in patient charge revenue at 2002–03 charge rates in £ million*
Age 18 and over	87
Age 65 and over	15
Age 60 and over	22
Age 55 and over	30

Additional costs would arise if there were any associated increase in the overall number of dental examinations and national health service dental treatments.

In April 1999 we made everyone aged 60 and over eligible for a free NHS sight test. Children, people on low incomes and those suffering from or predisposed to eye disease are also eligible. Our estimates of the costs per annum of extending eligibility further are:

Adults	*Additional costs per annum in £ million*
Age 18 and over	80
Age 55 and over	15

Hospital Performance Ratings

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what weighting is given to each of the criteria in performance ratings for hospitals, with particular reference to *(a)* clinical excellence and *(b)* good administration. [82993]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* The national health service published in July 2002 a "Clinical Focus" containing nine indicators reflecting the standard of clinical care provided by NHS hospital trusts. Success against many of the targets and indicators in the ratings would be necessarily underpinned by high quality administrative and managerial work.

Mid-Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the Mid-Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust area were waiting for in-patient treatment on the latest available date. [91207]

Mr. Lammy: There were 9,468 patients waiting for in-patient treatment at Mid Essex Hospital Services National Health Service Trust at the end of November 2002.

Source:
KH07 return

NHS Direct

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much medical training is received by those manning the telephones of NHS Direct before they commence work. [86065]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 10 December 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the response I gave him on 19 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 1053W.

NHS Prescriptions

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will adjust the level of income which allows those on incapacity benefit to receive free NHS prescriptions to compensate for the recent increase in incapacity benefit. [90284]

Mr. Lammy: Calculation of entitlement to help with health costs under the national health service low income scheme is based on income support arrangements. Claims are assessed by a comparison of requirements and resources. Any increase in either will be reflected in the calculation.

Overseas Medical Staff (Recruitment)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has received from foreign governments about recruitment for the NHS of *(a)* nurses and *(b)* doctors in their countries. [84593]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the response I gave him on 25 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 858W.

Since then, no further governments have made representations to the Department concerning the recruitment of doctors and nurses in their countries to the national health service.

We continue to discuss work programmes with New Zealand, Ghana, South Africa, the Caribbean and Poland, which will aid the retention of their health care professionals.

In addition, we have had a further approach from the Italian Government to discuss the possibility of recruiting doctors from their country.

Public-Private Partnerships

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many departmental minutes issued by his Department were outstanding on 30 November, that referred to public private partnerships as included in Table B14 of the Consolidated Fund and National Loans Fund Accounts; and what their value was. [89420]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 13 January 2003]:* There are no departmental minutes outstanding referring to public private partnerships arising from Table B14 of the Consolidated Fund and National Loans Fund Accounts.

Tuberculosis

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 3 December, Ref 83328, which health authorities have levels of tuberculosis higher than the national average. [86803]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 December 2002]:* Information reported to the Public Health Laboratory Service notification of infectious disease system 2001, show that the following health authorities have levels of tuberculosis higher than the national average.

Newcastle and North Tyneside, Liverpool, Bury and Rochdale, Wigan and Bolton, Leeds, Berkshire, East Lancashire, Sheffield, West Pennine, Bexley/Bromley/Greenwich, Merton/Sutton/Wandsworth, Bedfordshire, Walsall, Calderdale and Kirklees, Croydon, Leicestershire, Bradford, Manchester, Kensington/Chelsea/Westminster, Coventry, Birmingham, Redbridge and Waltham Forest, Hillingdon, Barnet/Enfield/Harringey, Lambeth/Southwark/Lewisham, Ealing/Hammersmith/Hounslow, Camden and Islington, Brent and Harrow, East London and City.

Traumatic Brain Injury

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps he is taking to provide support for *(a)* those with a traumatic brain injury, *(b)* their families and *(c)* carers in North Staffordshire; [90241]

(2) what facilities are in place in North Staffordshire to provide effective rehabilitation for those who have suffered a traumatic brain injury; [90242]

(3) what steps he is taking to improve care for those who suffer from traumatic head injuries in North Staffordshire. [90243]

Mr. Lammy: Local commissioners are responsible for providing appropriate healthcare for their local communities, including the provision of brain injury services.

The neuropsychiatry rehabilitation unit at the Haywood Hospital, part of North Staffordshire Hospital National Health Service Trust, provides care for people with some form of brain trauma, requiring supervision, assessment, treatment or rehabilitation. The unit also provides help with emotional or behavioural difficulties relating to brain trauma and has an associated community service.

The neuropsychiatry unit at the Harplands Hospital caters for people with acute neuro-psychiatric problems following brain injury. Users of that facility are likely to require closer supervision or observation initially and may be detained under the Mental Health Act.

A West Midlands regional group made up of service commissioners, including senior clinicians and managers, has been established to look at ways of improving the provision of neurosurgery across the West Midlands, including the North Staffordshire area.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Departmental Expenditure (Newsprint)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the total expenditure of the Department was on newspapers, magazines and periodicals in 2002. [90521]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The total expenditure on newspapers, magazines and periodicals in 2001–02 was £72,700.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the distribution of the Lord Chancellor's Department's whole-time equivalent staff was, including the staff in agencies and other bodies reporting to him, in each Government office region and nation of the UK *(a)* in 1996 and *(b)* at the most recent available period. [90473]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to him by the Minister of State, Cabinet Office, my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Paisley, South (Mr. Alexander) on 15 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 609W.

External Consultants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the total cost to his Department was of the use of external consultants in 2002. [90502]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Lord Chancellor's Department also replies on behalf of its Associated Offices and the Court Service.

The Department does not collect this information on a calendar year basis.

However, I can confirm that the Department's net expenditure with external consultants in the financial year dated 2001–02 was £6.5 million.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

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SESSION 2002–03

7th January—16th January 2003

Printed indexes to Hansard

The volume index is one of three printed indexes to Commons Hansard produced from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Indexing Service (POLIS). It contains references to material in the bound volumes of Hansard. The other indexes produced are:

- The fortnightly index to Hansard. This covers the same date range as the volume index but references are to the column numbering in the daily parts and weekly edition of Hansard.
- The sessional index to Hansard. This contains references to material in the bound volumes for a whole session.

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The indexes include entries covering:

- The content of all material recorded in Hansard, including debates, procedural motions and questions.
- The names of all Members contributing to the Parliamentary business recorded in Hansard.
- The names of some types of Parliamentary business whenever they occur in Hansard. These are 'Ministerial statements', 'Business statements', 'Opposition days' and 'Estimates days'.

ARRANGEMENT

- All headings are in one word-by-word alphabetical sequence, with Members' contribution entries distinguished from other entries by italics.
- Where a Member contributes to Parliamentary business and is the subject of Parliamentary business there are separate contribution and subject entries, the subject entry coming first.
- Entries beginning 'Mac' and 'Mc' are sorted in one sequence as 'Mac'.
- 'St', when abbreviated for Saint, is filed as 'Saint'.
- Numbers are filed as if spelt out, e.g. '10 Downing Street' as if 'Ten Downing Street'.

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- *Specificity*—Entries summarise the overall content of a debate or question as specifically as the various POLIS thesauruses allow. For example, Education, Higher education, Universities or the name of a particular university is used depending on the breadth of the item.
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- *Subject headings*—Subject headings are assumed to refer to the whole of England, Great Britain or the United Kingdom unless otherwise stated.
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Parliamentary material and business

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- *Parliamentary proceedings/procedures*—Material discussing these is indexed under the specific type of proceeding (such as 'Parliamentary questions' or 'Oral questions'), procedure (such as 'Calling of Members') or issue (such as 'Unparliamentary expressions').
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- *Speaker and Chair*—Contributions by the Speaker and deputies are brought together under the heading 'Speaker and deputies'. Contributions from the chair during Committees of the Whole House are brought together under 'Chairman of Committee of the Whole House'. Significant rulings and statements (as opposed to routine comments) are indicated by the sub-heading 'Rulings and statements' in both cases.

Guidance on headings

- *Cross references*—'See' references indicate all the material has been entered under another heading. 'See also' references indicate that additional information may be found under another heading.
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- References in the indexes are to columns rather than pages.
- References to debates, but not questions, are accompanied by the date of the item.
- There are separate sequences in Hansard for the material taken on the floor of the House, Westminster Hall sittings and written questions:
  - References consisting of a number by itself indicate material taken on the floor of the House.
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  - References ending in 'w' indicate written questions.
- References under all headings except the names of Members contributing to Parliamentary business and the titles of legislation are listed in one numerical sequence irrespective of whether the material is taken on the floor of the House, is discussed at a Westminster Hall sitting, is a written statement or is a written question.
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  - *Chamber Debates* (which includes interventions and points of order as well as significant contributions to debates);
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  - *Written Statements* (consisting of ministerial statements issued in writing); and
  - *Questions* (which includes all written, oral and private notice questions).

ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used in connection with the progress of bills:

- 1R=First reading
- 2R=Second reading
- Com=Committee stage
- Rep=Report stage
- 3R=Third reading
- res=resolution
- amendt(s)=amendment(s)
- *=matter taken formally without debate or division
- (HL)=Bill starting in House of Lords
- (SP)=Bill in Scottish Parliament.

Parliamentary background

- The Parliamentary website at http://www.parliament.uk contains a range of information about Parliament and the full text of some Parliamentary papers and proceedings including Hansard.
- Information on current Parliamentary business is provided in the House of Commons Information Office *Weekly Information Bulletin*, available on the website and from The Stationery Office (020 7873 8499).
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